

S. Freud On Narcissism: An Introduction

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Being in love consists in a flowing-over of ego-libido on to the object. It has the power to remove repressions and re-instate perversions. It exalts the sexual object into a sexual ideal. Since, with the object type (or attachment type), being in love occurs in virtue of the fulfilment of infantile conditions for loving, we may say that whatever fulfils that condition is idealized.

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In the former case (where the use made of the libido is ego-syntonic), love is assessed like any other activity of the ego. Loving in itself, in so far as it involves longing and deprivation, lowers self-regard whereas being loved, having one's love returned, and possessing the loved object, raises it once more.

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We can say that the one man has set up an ideal in himself by which he measures his actual ego, while the other has formed no such ideal. For the ego the formation of an ideal would be the conditioning factor of repression. 1/

This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego, which, like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value. As always where the libido is concerned, man has here again shown himself incapable of giving up a satisfaction he had once enjoyed. He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood; and when, as he grows up, he is disturbed by the admonitions of others and by the awakening of his own critical judgement, so that he can no longer retain

~~that perfection, he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal. 2//~~

1// A comment on this sentence will be found in a footnote to Chapter XI of Group Psychology (1921c). Standard ed., 18, 131 n.

2// In the editions previous to 1924 this read '.... is only the substitute...'

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We are naturally led to examine the relation between this forming of an ideal and sublimation. Sublimation is a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct's directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality. Idealization is a process that concerns the object; by it that object, without any alteration in its nature, is aggrandized and exalted in the subject's mind. Idealization is possible in the sphere of ego-libido as well as in that of object-libido. For example, the sexual overvaluation of an object is an idealization of it. In so far as sublimation describes something that has to do with the instinct and idealization something to do with the object, the two concepts are to be distinguished from each other. 1/

1/ Freud recurs to the topic of idealization in Chapter VIII of his Group Psychology (1921c) S.E.18, 112 f.

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For what prompted the subject to form an ego ideal, on whose behalf his conscience acts as watchman, arose from the critical influence of his parents (conveyed to him by the medium of the voice), to whom were added, as time went on, those who trained and taught him and the innumerable and indefinable host of all the other people in his environment--his fellowmen--and public opinion.

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In this way large amounts of libido of an essentially homosexual kind are drawn into the formation of the narcissistic ego ideal and find outlet and satisfaction in maintaining it. The institution of conscience was at bottom an embodiment, first of parental criticism, and subsequently of that of society--a process which is repeated in what takes place when a tendency towards repression develops out of a prohibition or obstacle that came in the first instance from without.

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In the first place self-regard appears to us to be an expression of the size of the ego; what the various elements are which go to determine that size is irrelevant. Everything a person possesses or achieves, every remnant of the primitive feeling of omnipotence which his experience has confirmed, helps to increase his self-regard.



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Applying our distinction between sexual and ego-in-  
stincts, we must recognize that self-regard has a  
specially intimate dependence on narcissistic libido.  
Here we are supported by two fundamental facts: that  
in paraphrenics self-regard is increased, while in the  
transference neuroses it is diminished; and that in  
love-relations not being loved lowers the self-regard-  
ing feelings, while being loved raises them. As we  
have indicated, the aim and the satisfaction in a  
narcissistic object-choice is to be loved. 1/

1/ This subject is enlarged on by Freud in Chapter VIII  
of his Group Psychology (1921c) S.E., 18, 113f.

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The development of the ego consists in a departure  
from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous  
attempt to recover that state. This departure is  
brought about by means of the displacement of libido  
on to an ego ideal imposed from without; and  
satisfaction is brought about from fulfilling this  
ideal.

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The sexual ideal may enter into an interesting auxili-  
ary relation to the ego ideal. It may be used for  
substitutive satisfaction where narcissistic satis-  
faction encounters real hindrances. In that case a  
person will love in conformity with the narcissistic  
type of object-choice, will love what he once was and  
no longer is, or else what possesses the excellences  
which he never had at all (cf. (c) p.90). what he  
himself would like to be. The formula parallel to  
the one there stated runs thus: what possesses the  
excellence which the ego lacks for making it an ideal,  
is loved.

