

Introduction

There are times in our lives, principally when we are young, when we feel particularly bad about something that is extremely emotional and painful to bear. Later, it disappears from our conscious thoughts; it seems that we have forgotten it. In fact, it has just moved from our conscious to our unconscious. For the remainder of our life, every time we are reminded of that something that was so emotional and painful to bear, it acts as a trigger to which we often can't help but react. Whether we react or not, and how aggressively we react, depends on our emotional state at the time.

It is normal for us to compare ourselves against others in all sorts of ways. For example, we may contrast our looks, our size, our intelligence, our qualifications, our possessions, and so on. If we feel superior it may give us a boost. If we feel inferior, it can make us feel a little worse.

When you are born you are inferior to your parents in terms of physical size and knowledge of the world. It takes many years to bridge the size and knowledge gap. If you are unlucky enough to have a parent who uses their superiority to boost their own confidence or self-esteem at your expense through intentional or unintentional emotional abuse – for instance, by mocking you or by imposing their will on you and not respecting your feelings – then you will develop strong feelings of inferiority which return again and again later in life and act as triggers to inform your behaviour. Without us realising it, our past is constantly determining our present actions.

The abuse can take many forms. It is widely acknowledged that severe abuse such as beatings or sexual abuse of a child will later result in a disturbed adult, often with severe emotional problems. But there are other, more subtle forms of abuse that also result in emotional problems in later life, and subtle forms of abuse of children can also frequently result in severe problems when the child becomes an adult. It is extremely difficult to make the connections between these more subtle forms of abuse and the problems experienced later in life, but it is the case that the roots of an adult life are put down during childhood.

From birth through to death, all humans seek to create a pattern for everything they look at, even if it is a completely random one. We are hardwired to find meaning and purpose throughout our lives. When we are unable to find one or the other of these it causes confusion in our mind, so we continually seek a way to understand what is going on. If we want to exercise some control over what is happening, we have to understand the reason behind these events.

A child looks for patterns and therefore meaning from very early on in life. Initially, he or she views the world as a random set of events, some or all of which are emotional. It is the child's carer, usually the mother, who imposes a pattern to these apparently random events. Healthy narcissism starts from a warm and responsive mother who accurately mirrors the child's feelings and reflects them back. The mother is responsive and attuned to the child's emotional needs. The child then develops a secure attachment to his mother and learns to know and accept himself for what he is. Over time, the child develops meaning and purpose.

If the mirroring process is compromised – if, for example, the mother is unresponsive, immersed in her own feelings rather than those of her child – an insecure attachment is formed. By the time the child is one year old it can be diagnosed as showing the characteristic patterns of insecurity – avoidant, confused, clinging and unavailable. This behaviour is a defensive response to parenting where the parent has put her own needs before her child's needs.

Over time, the insecure child develops a strong need to keep his

INTRODUCTION

mother happy and support her feelings. This represents the beginnings of a dysfunctional relationship, leading to an unhealthy emotional state for the child as it grows, with the possibility of it developing into narcissism or codependency by early adulthood.

A human child is totally dependent and at the mercy of other humans. From birth to their teenage years, human beings are almost entirely influenced by and dependent on their environment, which is usually controlled by their parents. So the physical and emotional growth of all newborn humans to the end of adolescence is largely dependent on their parents. Children use their parents as role-models and mimic their behaviour in later life, particularly in relation to emotional issues.

What happens when the parenting goes wrong? It went wrong in the cases of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin; both had abusive fathers who also abused their mothers, so it is highly likely that both Hitler and Stalin were emotionally abused as children, and possibly also physically abused. As adults both were incredibly cunning and ruthlessly exploited people for their own ends, unashamedly enjoying and benefiting from the labour of others. They were malignant narcissists who started life with dysfunctional relationships with their parents and who sustained their dysfunctionality into adulthood.

It is widely accepted that Hitler and Stalin were exceptionally evil malignant narcissists, but the principle that narcissistic dysfunctionality begins early in life and through adolescence holds good. However, this book is not about the exceptional cases, although they often serve as good examples; it's about the large and growing number of narcissistic individuals in society who wreak havoc in the home, at work and socially on innocent and unsuspecting people through their inflated self-esteem, their lack of empathy for others, their feelings of entitlement to special treatment and privileges, their disagreeableness, and their all-consuming need for attention.

The symptoms displayed by narcissists are the means by which we can identify them. But don't think for a minute that such identification is easy. This book identifies all of the symptoms they display

and portrays how many narcissists cause incalculable damage to the lives of their spouses, their children, their work colleagues and others. They often achieve high-powered positions in politics or industry, where their behaviour can have catastrophic effects. But when challenged, they always manage to move the blame onto others, using all of the psychological tactics at their disposal – denial, distortion, lying, and so on.

There is one large group of individuals who suffer at the hands of narcissists, but most of them do not even know it. They are codependents, or co-narcissists. This group of people are also victims of abuse during their childhood, usually being the children of one narcissistic parent and one codependent parent who used their children as repositories for their own emotional pain. These codependents have been groomed by their parents to always take the blame, so when they grow up they are attracted to narcissists as spouses, bosses and friends, as here they feel secure; their relationship with their narcissist mirrors the relationship that their parents had with each other. The narcissist-codependent parent combination is also the ideal combination for producing malignant narcissists.

This book looks at how narcissists and codependents interact, and analyses the words used by narcissists, and by codependents when directly influenced by their narcissistic controller. When a narcissist is disparaging someone he dislikes, if you look deeply enough, and know the narcissist well enough, you can always find the real meaning behind the words, which invariably relate to the narcissist's feelings of paranoia and envy. All malignant narcissists suffer from acute paranoia and pathological envy.

It also asks such questions as whether 'narcissists and codependents can find happiness', and it looks at what happiness is and how family behaviour can be changed to avoid producing the malignant narcissists and their codependent collaborators found in ever-increasing numbers in today's society.

There have been a lot of high-profile narcissists throughout history up to the present day. Hitler and Stalin were only two of the

INTRODUCTION

many narcissistic leaders who were responsible for the deaths of millions in the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, we have already seen how narcissistic leaders such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe can wreak havoc on their own subjects and others. Many will argue that other high-profile figures such as George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden also qualify as narcissists.

It's not just politicians. Narcissistic business leaders have in recent times created spectacular crashes; there's little doubt that self-serving narcissistic behaviour by business leaders was behind the collapse of the giant oil company Enron, and also behind the failure of financial institutions that contributed to the wider 'credit crunch' that has more recently caused turmoil in industry and society across the globe.

These big events affect almost all of us, but we feel there is little or nothing that we can do to change things. Consequently, we just accept the status quo. But at a more personal level, there are many people who suffer havoc in the workplace wreaked upon them by narcissistic bosses; such individuals are caught between the desire to provide for their family and the alternative path of confrontation, which risks unemployment. Then there are the women who suffer in their own home, caught between the desire to escape from a narcissistic husband and the need to provide a home for their children. The vast majority of people, particularly in the western world, are either currently suffering at the hands of narcissists or have suffered at some time in the past, either in the home or in the workplace. But many don't even realise it.

The best way to alleviate this suffering is through disseminating the knowledge required for innocent, decent people to recognise those who are currently causing their suffering, and to recognise those who are likely to cause suffering in the future if given the opportunity. In a democratic society we can vote bad politicians out if we are sufficiently well informed to recognise them; we can change jobs to avoid a bad boss, or we can even ensure that he isn't promoted to a position of authority in the first place; and in the

domestic situation we can avoid making a long-term commitment to a partner who will turn our lives into a nightmare once we are committed and it's too late. But that's only if we can recognise the narcissistic symptoms in the first place.

Success in western society today is often measured by how much money you make. While most people agree that having sufficient money is important, most people agree that money does not bring happiness. There would be less anxiety and stress in the world if people redefined success as being about identifying and achieving their goals and leading a good life, morally and ethically. This form of success would bring with it the very desirable side effect of happiness.

You can only achieve your goals in collaboration with others, so leadership skills and teamwork cannot be ignored. But the whole process will be sabotaged if you don't have the ability to recognise narcissism at work. For example, at the outset, a narcissistic spouse or boss may not – in fact, probably will not – have malevolent intentions towards you, but his (the majority of narcissists are male) personality problems will ultimately result in you giving up on your goals to pander to his emotional needs. Your dream of genuine fulfilment and happiness will just slip away, and you may not even know why.

This book addresses the inseparable topics of narcissism, leadership and teamwork. They are inseparable because narcissists always want to lead, but they are rarely the best leaders, and they are the antithesis of good team workers.

The narcissist will always put himself forward to lead a group or team, as he feels it is his right. If he isn't appointed as leader, he will snipe at the person who is, exaggerating any of his failures, large or small, and diminishing and undermining any of his successes, until the leader gets frustrated through not being recognised for his effort and achievements. No matter how genuine and successful the leader is, eventually he will get tired of the sniping; he will then stand down and let the narcissist take over.

So if you want to achieve your goals, lead a fulfilled life, and

INTRODUCTION

benefit from the very desirable by-product of happiness, a better understanding of these three topics – narcissism, leadership and teamwork – will enable you to avoid being emotionally trapped and to either take control of your life or, if preferred, allow someone who has your best interests at heart to share in the control of your life – an emotionally healthy husband or wife, for example.