

# Jungian Reflections on Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Mirele Faria SILVA<sup>1</sup>

Pricilla BUZZACHERA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná – PUC-PR. Curitiba/PR, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup>Universidade da Região de Joinville – Univille. Joinville/SC, Brazil.

## Abstract

The topic of narcissism has gained significant popularity in recent years, contributing to both the spread of the subject and the dissemination of incorrect information. In response, this study was conducted through a literature review with the aim of understanding the formation of the narcissistic complex and its archetypal representative: the myth of Narcissus. The study covered the fundamental principles of the structure of the psyche, revisited the myth, explored the emergence of consciousness in relation to the myth, and examined the narcissistic manifestations described by Jacoby. According to the topics discussed, individuals with narcissistic manifestations commonly have a psychic wound originated in childhood, highlighting the importance of the existence of appropriate bonds between caregivers and the child, as the roots of such wounds can often be found in the relationship with caregivers. There is also a resemblance between some expressions of the narcissistic complex and the negative maternal complex; however, it is important to note that they are not equivalent. Among the manifestations of the wound are narcissistic rage, aggressiveness, distortion of self-image, and fear of rejection, as well as significant difficulty in maintaining healthy and appropriate relationships with others. These expressions are based on the fact that a person with a narcissistic wound directs their energy investment toward the ego rather than the Self, resulting in a distorted self-image and preventing the energy from being directed toward others, causing the person to remain trapped in this

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The authors state no professional or personal interest that may create a conflict of interests regarding this manuscript.



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cycle as they are unable to recognize reality. The conclusion recognizes the essential need of psychology professionals to deepen their understanding of this topic, given the increasing demand and popularization of the subject. It is emphasized that the diagnostic framework constitutes a grouping of related characteristics and should not limit the individual or professional practice, as each one carries their own subjectivity.

#### **Descriptors**

Mythology, complex, narcissism.

## **Reflexões junguianas acerca do transtorno de personalidade narcisista**

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### **Resumo**

O assunto narcisismo popularizou-se de forma significativa nos últimos anos, o que contribuiu tanto para a disseminação do tema quanto para a divulgação de informações equivocadas. Diante disso, este estudo, elaborado por meio de revisão de literatura, teve como intuito compreender a formação do complexo narcisista e seu representante arquetípico: o mito de Narciso. Foram abordados os princípios fundamentais da estrutura da psique, além de se relembrar o mito, explanar o surgimento da consciência a partir de sua relação com o mito e examinar as manifestações narcísicas apresentadas por Jacoby. De acordo com os tópicos abordados, a pessoa com manifestações narcísicas, comumente, possui uma ferida psíquica que se inseriu desde a infância, denotando a relevância da existência do estabelecimento de vínculos adequados dos cuidadores com a criança, pois os primórdios de tais feridas podem ser encontrados na relação com os cuidadores. Há também uma semelhança entre algumas expressões do complexo narcísico e o complexo materno negativo, todavia é importante ressaltar que não são equivalentes. Dentre as manifestações da ferida é possível encontrar a raiva narcísica, a agressividade, a distorção da imagem e o temor da rejeição, além da significativa dificuldade de manter vínculos saudáveis e adequados com outras pessoas. Tais expressões têm como base o fato de que a pessoa com ferida narcísica direciona seu investimento de energia ao ego e não ao *Self*, o que ocasiona uma visão distorcida de sua imagem, impossibilitando também que a energia seja dirigida aos outros, pois não consegue reconhecer a realidade. Conclui-se o quanto é imprescindível que o profissional de psicologia aprofunde seus conhecimentos referentes a essa temática. Ressalta-se que o quadro diagnóstico constitui um agrupamento de características

afins, sem que se deva, portanto, limitar o sujeito ou a atuação profissional, dado que cada um carrega consigo sua subjetividade.

**Descriptores**

Mitología, complejo, narcisismo.

## Reflexiones junguianas sobre el trastorno de personalidad narcisista

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### Resumen

El tema del narcisismo se ha popularizado de manera significativa en los últimos años, lo que contribuye tanto a la difusión del tema como a la divulgación de información errónea. Ante esto, el estudio se llevó a cabo mediante una revisión de literatura con el objetivo de comprender la formación del complejo narcisista y su representante arquetípico: el mito de Narciso. Se abordaron los principios fundamentales de la estructura de la psique, además de recordar el mito, explicar el surgimiento de la conciencia a partir de su relación con el mito y examinar las manifestaciones narcisistas presentadas por Jacoby. De acuerdo con los temas tratados, la persona con manifestaciones narcisistas comúnmente tiene una herida psíquica que surgió en la infancia, denotando la relevancia de establecer vínculos adecuados entre los cuidadores y el niño, ya que los orígenes de tales heridas pueden encontrarse en esta relación. También hay similitudes entre algunas expresiones del complejo narcisista y el complejo materno negativo; sin embargo, es importante subrayar que no son equivalentes. Entre las manifestaciones de la herida se pueden encontrar la rabia narcisista, la agresividad, la distorsión de la imagen y el temor al rechazo, además de una significativa dificultad para mantener vínculos saludables con otras personas. Estas expresiones se basan en el hecho de que la persona con herida narcisista dirige su energía al ego y no al Self, lo que ocasiona una visión distorsionada de su imagen, imposibilitando que la energía sea dirigida a los demás, ya que no puede reconocer la realidad. Se concluye que es imprescindible que el profesional de psicología profundice sus conocimientos sobre esta temática, ya que el diagnóstico debe ser un agrupamiento de características afines sin limitar al sujeto o la actuación profesional, pues cada uno lleva consigo su subjetividad.

**Descriptores**

Mitología, complejo, narcisismo.

## Introduction

**The theme of narcissism has become exponentially popularized.** Ease of access to this subject contributes to both understanding and the creation of further misunderstandings or superficial insights. It is common to encounter content on social media regarding narcissistic mothers and/or relationships with narcissistic individuals. There is a great danger, however, in the way such content is disseminated, considering it may lack a correct conceptual basis or demonstrate a lack of adequate knowledge.

In light of this, the present study aimed to understand the formation of the narcissistic complex and its archetypal representative: the myth of Narcissus. Conducting this study is highly relevant to increasing the production of scientific knowledge and to providing supporting material for the practice of psychology professionals.

## Methodology

The work was developed through a narrative literature review. This methodology was chosen because it allows for the exploration of essential topics to understand the theme. Fundamental principles of the structure of psyche were addressed, along with recalling the myth, explaining the emergence of consciousness in relation to it, and examining the narcissistic manifestations described by Jacoby (1985/2023). An interest in deepening the subject drove the choice of these topics; furthermore, Jacoby's (1985/2023) text broadly outlines the theme from the perspective of analytical psychology. It is a recent work that involves aspects of the current panorama, as well as presenting important reference points for understanding the person suffering from a narcissistic wound and for clinical diagnosis.

## Results

According to the study's data, the approach developed by Jung identifies that the concept of the unconscious plays a fundamental role in understanding the human psyche, including its components, the personal and collective unconscious, such as complexes and archetypes. In this scenario, myths constitute an extremely relevant symbolic representation.

Although myths refer to processes inherent to the development of the psyche, stagnation at any stage of this process can trigger suffering. Consequently, the narcissistic state is present in this process; however, it may cause damage when development does not occur adequately and healthily, resulting in psychic wounds.

The person with narcissistic manifestations commonly possesses a psychic wound that has been embedded since childhood. Among the manifestations of the wound, one can find narcissistic rage, aggressiveness, image distortion, and fear of rejection, in addition to significant difficulty in maintaining healthy bonds with others. Such expressions are based on the fact that the person with a narcissistic wound directs their energy investment to the ego and not to the *Self*; this causes a distorted view of their image and also prevents energy from being directed toward others.

## Discussion

### Fundamental principles of the structure of the psyche

In analytical psychology—the theory created and developed by Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961)—the psyche is considered a totality in itself, encompassing conscious and unconscious contents, the latter formed by the personal and collective unconscious.

Stein (1998/2009) discusses that, for analytical psychology, consciousness constitutes a field characterized by a state of understanding and knowledge of external and internal events; this also corresponds to remaining attentive and diligent with the intent to grasp surrounding events.

According to Stein (1998/2009), the ego is at the center of the field of consciousness. This complex relates to both conscious and unconscious contents, such that communication with the ego makes any content conscious. Given this, the ego, as the center of consciousness, enables the notion of an "I"; it is the ego that assumes control over conscious aspects during most waking time.

The unconscious, in turn, encompasses all psychic elements that, for whatever reason or duration, are not found in consciousness (Stein, 1998/2009). As Jung (1928/2008, p. 129, author's emphasis) stated:

in its totality, the unconscious comprises not only **repressed** materials but all psychic material that lies below the threshold of consciousness. ( . . . ) We know, moreover, from both abundant experience and theoretical reasons, that the unconscious contains all the material that **has not yet** reached the threshold of consciousness. These are the seeds of future conscious contents. We also have reason to suppose that the unconscious is never at rest, always engaged in grouping and regrouping the so-called unconscious fantasies. Only in pathological cases can such activity become relatively autonomous; in a normal

way, it is coordinated with consciousness in a compensatory relationship.

Jung (1916/1980) understands that "[t]he personal unconscious contains lost, repressed (purposely forgotten) memories, painful evocations, perceptions that, so to speak, have not crossed the threshold of consciousness" (p. 59). Located in the personal unconscious are the complexes, which constitute "a group of images related to each other, which have a common emotional accent and are formed around an archetypal core" (Hall, 1992, p. 39).

It is understood that complexes are formed by experiences lived since birth and can be positive or negative. They are charged with psychic energy and capable of causing disturbances in consciousness—that is, when a complex is triggered, it spends energy. It reaches consciousness, assuming temporary control over it (Stein, 1998/2009).

For a better understanding, it is observed what was presented by Stein (1998/2009, pp. 43-45):

(. . .) When stimulated, this network of associated material—formed by memories, fantasies, images, thoughts—generates a disturbance in consciousness. Complex indicators are the signs of disturbance.

(. . .) The results of his experiments convinced Jung that there are, in fact, psychic entities outside of consciousness that exist as objects, similar to satellites, that gravitate around ego consciousness but can cause disturbances in the ego in surprising and, at times, irresistible ways. They are the inner imps and demons that can take a person by surprise. Disturbances caused by complexes must be differentiated, understandably, from disturbances caused by stressors originating from the external environment, although they can be, and often are, closely related to each other.

When a complex is activated, according to Stein (1998/2009), the person experiences a loss of control over their emotions and behavior; therefore, they act irrationally. Complexes can be triggered by situations, words, and external or internal events, according to Stein (1998/2009, p. 53):

(. . .) the stimulus that triggers the complex can be insignificant or large, of long or short duration. However, its effects on the psyche can continue for extensive periods of time and reach consciousness in waves of emotion or anxiety. (. . .) Nevertheless, it must be recognized that a complex can never be eliminated.

According to Jung (1928/2008), just as the subject is a social being, the human psyche also possesses a collective part, which is perceptible through the similar manifestation of themes and expressions, even across distinct populations and eras:

(. . .) the mental function enabled is collective and universal. This explains why the unconscious processes of the most remote peoples and races present a striking correspondence, which manifests itself, among other things, in autochthonous mythological themes and forms. The universal similarity of brains determines the universal possibility of a similar mental function. This function is the collective psyche (. . .) (Jung, 1928/2008, p. 133).

For Jung (1928/2008), the collective psyche constitutes the established and inherited portion of the psyche, which acts in an impersonal manner. Silveira (1968/1981) corroborates this by explaining that the collective unconscious comprises the deepest levels of the psyche and involves the structural foundations common to all people.

Jung (1959/2014) considers that the elements of the collective unconscious were never in consciousness; thus, their acquisition did not occur individually, but through heredity. The contents of the collective unconscious are the archetypes, which can be verified through archetypal images. The concept of the archetype "indicates the existence of certain forms in the psyche, which are present at all times and in all places" (Jung, 1959/2014, pp. 51-52).

According to Silveira (1968/1981), Jung compares archetypes to the system of crystal formation, which determines the crystalline structure but does not determine their essence, which has no existence of its own. Note the concept addressed by Jung:

I am always coming up against the misunderstanding that archetypes are determined by their content, or that they are a kind of unconscious "idea." It is therefore necessary to emphasize once more that archetypes are determined only by their form, not by their content, and, in the first case, only minimally. A primordial image can only be determined as to its content when it becomes conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience. Its form, as I have explained before, might be compared to the axial system of a crystal, which pre-forms, in a way, its structure in the mother liquor, although it has no material existence of its own. The latter only appears through the specific way in which ions, and then molecules, aggregate. The archetype is an empty and formal element in itself, being nothing more than a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility given *a priori* for the

form of its representation. What is inherited are not the ideas, but the forms, which in this particular aspect correspond to the instincts, likewise determined by their form (Jung, 1959/2014, pp. 86-87, author's emphasis).

The discovery of the collective unconscious was essential for analytical psychology, as it evidenced that the psyche is not only the result of personal experience, but also included this transpersonal field that expresses itself "in universal patterns and images, such as those found in all the mythologies and religions of the world" (Edinger, 1989/2020, p. 19). Furthermore, Jung exposed that the collective unconscious possesses an organizing principle, which corresponds to the central archetype called the *Self*:

The *Self* is the ordering and unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious), just as the ego is the center of the conscious personality. Alternatively, the ego is the seat of subjective identity, while the *Self* is the seat of objective identity. The *Self* constitutes, therefore, the supreme psychic authority, keeping the ego subjected to its domain. ( . . . ) As there are two autonomous centers of the psychic being, the bond between them assumes great importance. The relationship between the ego and the *Self* is highly problematic and closely resembles that between man and his Creator, as described in religious myth. Myth can be seen, in fact, as a symbolic expression of the relationship between the ego and the *Self*. Many vicissitudes of the process of psychological development can be understood in terms of modifications in the relationship between the ego and the *Self* across the various stages of psychic development (Edinger, 1989/2020, pp. 19-20).

It is highly relevant at this point to address the relationship between the ego and the *Self* to understand better the analysis of the myth and its manifestations in the personality. Edinger (1989/2020) states that the stage prior to adulthood serves the function of ego development, which involves the gradual distancing of the ego from the *Self*; however, in adult life, this function narrows the connection between the ego and the *Self*. A circular representation of separation and union between ego and *Self*, however, may more adequately express the connection existing in the ego-*Self* axis: "this cyclic (or rather, spiral) formula seems to express the basic process of psychological development from birth to death" (Edinger, 1989/2020, p. 22).

## The myth of Narcissus

Given the brief introduction to the psyche's structure, it is important to recall the myth of Narcissus at this moment. We present the narrative by Cavalcanti (1992/2003) for its concise approach:

Ovid is considered the oldest narrator of the Narcissus myth ( . . . ). In his Metamorphoses, he tells that Narcissus is the fruit of a forced union by the river-god Cepheus with the nymph Liriope. Narcissus was born with extraordinary beauty, which made Liriope worried about his fate, leading her to consult the seer Tiresias. Liriope asks the "seer" if Narcissus would have a long life, to which he replies: "Yes, only if he does not know himself."

Ovid also links Narcissus's fate to that of the nymph Echo. She falls hopelessly in love with Narcissus and follows him from afar in his hunts, but is unable to express her love. Echo, in Ovid's description, has no voice of her own; she can only repeat the last words spoken by Narcissus. Echo was deprived by Hera, Zeus's wife, as a punishment because Echo distracted her with her chatter while Zeus dedicated himself to his amorous conquests with other nymphs. Discovering Echo's stratagem, Hera punishes her, condemning her to repeat the last syllables of the words she heard. Therefore, Echo could not express her love for Narcissus.

One day, Narcissus notices that someone is repeating his last words and asks why she avoids him, calling her to meet him. However, what he hears back is only the Echo of his own words. Desperate, Echo tries to embrace Narcissus, who repels her, saying: "Away with your arms, I would rather die than let you touch me." Feeling rejected, Echo hides her ashamed face among the foliage, and from that day on, she begins to live alone in caves, until, suffering the tortures of rejected love, she turns to stone, and only the lament of her voice remains.

Other people rejected by Narcissus invoke the justice of the heavens, asking that Narcissus fall in love and also be rejected in his love.

Nemesis hears these pleas and decides to grant these requests. One day, Narcissus is hunting, feels thirsty, and, to quench his thirst, leans over a spring of crystalline waters. He drinks and becomes enchanted by the beautiful reflection he sees. Narcissus falls in love with the image of himself reflected in the water. For a moment, he believes he is in love with someone divinely beautiful. Moreover, he tries to embrace and kiss this image, but he cannot. At another moment, he recognizes that this image is a reflection of himself: "Oh! I am he." He realizes the absurdity of this passion, but this revelation is not

enough to pull him away from the spring. He remains fixed on his own reflection. Narcissus dies in the lake and even today gazes at himself in the waters of the river Styx. Moreover, in place of his body, a flower with white petals and a yellow center is born (Cavalcanti, 1992/2003, pp. 21-22, author's emphasis).

According to Cavalcanti (1992/2003), a contemporary of Ovid named Conon presents a different version of the myth: Narcissus kills himself before the spring, believing that Eros is punishing him for his rejection of those who had fallen in love with him. In this scenario, the narcissus flower blooms from Narcissus's spilled blood.

Pausanias presents two versions of the myth: in the first, Narcissus looked into the waters of the spring and, not knowing it was himself in the reflection, unconsciously fell in love and died of love by the side of the spring; in the second, Narcissus would have a twin sister with whom he fell in love. After his sister's death, every time he saw his reflection in the spring, despite knowing he was seeing himself, he fantasized that it was the image of his sister. Regarding the narcissus flower, Pausanias says that it already existed even before Narcissus (Cavalcanti, 1992/2003).

### **The myth of Narcissus and the emergence of consciousness**

The analysis of myths constitutes a means of access to the human soul. Jung demonstrates in his theory that the archetypal dispositions of developmental processes manifest symbolically in myths (Cavalcanti, 2003).

For Cavalcanti (1992/2003), myths present the processes of psychic development and demonstrate the obstacles and possibilities for the cycle to be completed: "the two polarities of the myth are present, the negative and the positive, with equivalent valences. Every myth carries within itself the potential for healing and for illness" (Cavalcanti, 1992/2003, p. 18). Given this, stagnation at any stage of the myth results in illness, as it is understood as a deformation of the process.

Still, according to Cavalcanti (1992/2003), based on the myth of Narcissus, the related psychic development process involves the birth of consciousness, the emergence of the ego and identity, and the expansion of consciousness throughout individuation. It also concerns the departure from a state of undifferentiation with the *Self*, the construction of consciousness, the conception of the "I" and identity, and the adversities that may arise during the individuation process.

Cavalcanti (1992/2003) further states that when it comes to narcissism, one of the primary aspects involved is the relationship

with the "other." The myth highlights difficulties in relationships with others and the importance of building them for the development of the being. Thus, errors that interfere with this process may contribute to the formation of narcissistic personality disorders.

The myth "explains the symbolic, archetypal, and psychological dimensions of the issue of narcissism and its complementary polarity, echoism" (Rubini, 2020, p. 43). According to Brandão (1987, p. 178), to understand the myth, it is necessary to emphasize that "Narcissus and Echo are in a dialectical relationship of complementary opposites, not only of masculine and feminine but, above all, of subject and object, of something that remains in itself and something that remains in the other."

According to this author, Narcissus's lethal error was the selection of his object of love. Thus, the myth's narrative calls attention to the direction of love impulses, which must be directed toward the other. "In this case, the **libido** ceases to be directed at the object, the 'other,' and retroacts into an endopsychic activity: thus, Narcissus would have committed a kind of intrapsychic incest" (Brandão, 1987, p. 183, author's emphasis). The outcome, therefore, is the elucidation that Narcissus's love corresponds to a love for the ego rather than for another.

Every archetype contains within itself the potential for sanity or illness; thus, the myth of Narcissus includes both the potential for the formation of consciousness and its adversities. The character Narcissus is equivalent to the ego and its struggle to be born and strengthen itself. Narcissus has a superhuman—that is, an archetypal—origin, just as consciousness and the ego also have archetypal origins, since their birth stems from the Self (Cavalcanti, 1992/2003).

According to Lowen (1983/2017, p. 33, author's emphasis), "[c]onfusion or identification of the ego with the Self must be avoided. The ego is not the Self, although it is the part of the personality that perceives it. In reality, the ego represents self-awareness or consciousness of the Self." Lowen (1983/2017) complements this by stating that the ego is not separate from the Self, as there is a connection between both. A healthy condition presupposes "an acceptance and an identification with the body and its sensations" (Lowen, 1983/2017, p. 34); however, this acceptance is absent in people with narcissistic wounds, as the investment of psychic energy is directed toward the ego and not toward the Self.

The individuation process, according to Cavalcanti (1992/2003), demands a differentiation of the ego-Self and the formation of an egoic identity to prevent the ego from being confused with the Self. In this scenario, a mature and well-established ego must maintain a

symbolic link with the Self and the world. The development process entails wounds inherent to progression, and in this context, the separation between the ego and the Self is one of them. Based on narcissistic personalities, it is observed that they possess profound wounds called "narcissistic wounds" (Cavalcanti, 1992/2003, p. 171).

According to Rubini (2020, p. 42), there is a clear connection between:

psychic wounds and the theoretical formulations of narcissism, since the concept refers to a foundational process of the individual's relationship with their inner and outer world that persists throughout life. Any upheaval inscribed in this process can be experienced and physically registered as a wound.

In analytical psychology, psychic wounds are directly related to the formation of complexes that occupy the personal unconscious. "Certain complexes arise after painful or unpleasant experiences in the individual's life. They are personal experiences, emotional in nature, that leave lasting psychic wounds behind them" (Jung, 1947/2000, p. 124).

Rubini (2020) states that when a subject experiences something that causes significant suffering, this experience can result in a psychic wound, which aggregates with other unconscious elements whenever the ego cannot deal with the associated contents. "That which manifests as a symptom, as a nuisance, and which often refers to old pains, events, our psychic wounds, is the insistence of something unknown (unconscious) signaling that 'something is out of order'" (Rubini, 2020, p. 48, author's emphasis).

### Manifestations of narcissism

Following the previous explanation, we proceed to examine the manifestations of narcissism presented in Jacoby's (1985/2023) work. This text was chosen because the author describes narcissistic manifestations in depth from an analytical psychology perspective.

According to Jacoby (1985/2023), myths are living presences in people's psyches and express themselves through experiences and behaviors; therefore, one must question the term "narcissistic person," given that the myth of Narcissus plays a highly relevant role in everyone's psyche.

Jacoby (1985/2023) states that to address narcissistic disorders, three points of reference are necessary: relevant criteria to recognize the diagnosis; empathy to understand the inner world of people with narcissistic wounds; and an understanding of the psychodynamic context of the disorder, as well as its formation in

the subject's psyche. These reference points will be addressed separately.

### The diagnosis of narcissistic disorders

Regarding the first point of reference:

(. . .) in 1912, Jung, who did not resort to the use of the expression "narcissistic disorders or disturbances," nonetheless defined neurosis as a "division of the Self" (CW 7/1, appendix). In his opinion, psychic disorders in general result from a lack of harmony between the conscious ego-centered attitude and the tendencies belonging to the totality of the personality. In other words, for one reason or another, the ego has become alienated from the deeper Self; as a result, we do not live a life that corresponds to our total being (Jacoby, 1985/2023, p. 293, author's emphasis).

Since narcissistic disorders commonly interfere with the perception of identity and self-esteem, it is plausible that they are present in practically all psychic disorders at different levels of severity. It is noted that everyone experiences fluctuations in identity and self-esteem; therefore, for differential diagnosis, it is necessary to assess the severity of narcissistic features and whether they form the basic structure of the personality or are merely part of other manifestations (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

In developing his theory, Jung did not focus on establishing diagnostic criteria, as his primary interest consisted of observing the unconscious. Thus, his concern was to seek answers about how the unconscious psyche functions and manifests, how it changes, develops, and communicates with consciousness. Given these questions, Jung used images transmitted by the unconscious through the symbolic content of myths, fairy tales, fantasies, dreams, and other sources. This characteristic of the theory reinforces the perception of the person as a whole and places less emphasis on analyzing isolated symptoms (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

Narcissistic disorders, according to Jacoby (1985/2023), can manifest in a wide range of forms; for this reason, professional practice and the theoretical approach must not be rigid or inflexible. Many patients with narcissistic disorders experience suffering related to self-esteem, in addition to shyness, significant adaptation, and high self-criticism, which induces them to be "the 'victims' of torments caused by their own 'grandiose self'" (Jacoby, 1985/2023, p. 305, author's emphasis). In light of this, it is emphasized that it is essential for the professional to recognize that they are dealing with people suffering from an imbalance; the diagnosis is

merely a resource that enables investigation for the best adjustment of treatment.

### The inner world of individuals with narcissistic wounds

As addressed in the previous section, the framework of diagnoses constitutes attempts to classify people's pain and conflicts into categorical groups. In this scenario, the psychology professional needs to verify the presence of an implicit pathological pattern.

Likewise, one must proceed to identify the diverse subjective experiences resulting from narcissistic injuries; however, the wounds must be understood through empathy, and the final diagnosis should be placed in the background, given that the primary objective is to grasp the subject's subjective experience. If these objectives are reversed, there is a risk of generalizing suffering into a generic category related to narcissistic disorders and thus losing the understanding of particularities (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

Despite the aforementioned boundaries, it is relevant to address how narcissistic disorders may present themselves. Jacoby (1985/2023) explains that, in accordance with the myth of Narcissus, the central theme of narcissistic injury concerns the mirror and mirroring. In contrast to the myth, however, individuals with significant narcissistic suffering do not experience an obsession with their own image, but rather a tendency to perceive their self-image in an altered way. Furthermore, the distorted understanding they have of their self-image may hinder the emergence of a new perspective before the mirror. This demonstrates an inability to experience the daily mirroring provided by the environment in accordance with a realistic image:

(...) the fact that our self-image is relatively impervious to outside influence may stem from an unconscious defense against its compensatory pole. If, for example, my negative self-image is shaken by someone who unexpectedly expresses love and appreciation for me, I risk being 'swallowed' by the so-called grandiose Self. (..) Any serious doubts cast upon the individual's grandiose self-image can provoke intense fears of a complete collapse of their sense of identity and self-esteem. Although various shades and modulations are frequently observable, the self-image remains relatively fixed around a distorted perspective (Jacoby, 1985/2023, pp. 308-309, author's emphasis).

Narcissistic disorder consists primarily of the subject's inability to experience reciprocal mirroring with others in an appropriate and non-distorted manner; such mirroring is essential for building a sense

of identity. In this context, no relationship with the other appears capable of offering adequate mirroring, since the mirror provided by others is constantly rejected because it does not meet the expectations of individuals with narcissistic injuries (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

Rarely can individuals with narcissistic wounds establish spontaneous relationships, and they often reinterpret interactions according to their distorted conception of self-image. This creates an excessive gap between their self-perception and others' perceptions; consequently, they tend to feel misunderstood and excluded (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

Thus, an oscillation between depression and grandiosity is observed, in which one of the two modes usually predominates:

people suffering from the type of grandiosity commonly called "narcissistic" are compelled to invest vast amounts of energy in defending themselves against anything that might call their grandiosity into question. As a consequence, they become dependent on unfailing "narcissistic gratification" from their environment. In general, a somewhat tragic imbalance will be found in their "psychic economy," insofar as they unconsciously attribute their highest value to a special personality trait or a special talent they seem to possess. They tend, in other words, to project the Self (in the Jungian sense) onto certain personal traits and are unable to distinguish their integrity as human beings from such a special attribute, idealized to the extreme. ( . . . ) The narcissistic vulnerability of grandiose people is, therefore, no joke: the slightest offense can provoke panic, as they experience their entire personality collapse like a house of cards (Jacoby, 1985/2023, pp. 311-312, author's emphasis).

In these cases of narcissistic grandiosity, individuals identify unconsciously with the grandiose Self:

psychodynamically speaking, the grandiose Self can be interpreted in several ways. ( . . . ) In cases of narcissistic grandiosity, people unconsciously identify with the grandiose Self (at least to some extent), while still able to maintain their reality-testing functions. (An absolute and uncritical identification with the grandiose Self would result in psychotic megalomania.) However, most people suffering from narcissistic disorders simultaneously defend themselves against grandiose fantasies. Thus, they find themselves in an unpleasant situation: longing for admiration while simultaneously fearing it. Whenever they become aware that they are receiving admiration, their

discomfort is so great that it prevents the satisfaction of any desires arising from the grandiose Self (Jacoby, 1985/2023, pp. 317-318).

According to Jacoby (1985/2023), there is also hypersensitivity to others' responses, resulting in significant obstacles to developing and maintaining relationships. In this scenario, any decision or attitude can trigger feelings of rejection and frustration, characterizing a type of trigger for intense narcissistic rage.

Narcissistic rage becomes evident in the face of any hint of possible rejection or unsatisfactory mirroring from others. That is, rage manifests whenever the narcissistic person must understand that the world will not be as they wish and that the desires of the grandiose Self are, in fact, powerless (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

In narcissistic rage, there is a totally irrational element, as it stems from a narcissistic perspective of the world, which aligns with the "unitary reality of the child" (Jacoby, 1985/2023, p. 334), where there is no distinction between the psychic and objective worlds. That is, narcissistic rage is entirely self-centered and demonstrates neither logical reasoning nor impartiality. Although this rage is rooted in a narcissistic perspective of the world, individuals gripped by it do not show the capacity for empathy toward the justifications of the other person who triggered the fit of rage. Consequently, they may face further rejection from others, which can intensify their rage (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

According to Jacoby (1985/2023), individuals remain trapped in a vicious cycle in which they demand recognition and admiration from others and feel rejected when those expectations are not met. This rejection further increases the desire for recognition. It is also observed that many people with narcissistic wounds can be excessively captivating and, thus, become excessively demanding. This captivating power may have developed in early childhood to meet the narcissistic demands of their parents.

Furthermore, it is common for individuals with narcissistic injuries to present a defense against demonstrations of empathy, as empathy leads to proximity with others, which, for them, denotes the danger of merging with the other and feeling their identity dissolve. This occurs when, in early childhood, these individuals needed to defend themselves against trauma stemming from non-empathetic parental figures; consequently, the child may have significant difficulty developing a sense of empathy or receiving empathy from others. It is noted that the less stable the sense of identity, the more necessary it is to protect it from external influences (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

There are also individuals with narcissistic wounds who appear to have an infinite capacity to show empathy for others; however, upon deeper examination, it is clear they have significant difficulty delimiting their own ego and focus on expressing empathy for others' suffering while remaining disconnected from their own needs (Jacoby, 1985/2023). In this context, satisfying their own desires and needs may be seen as disapproval, leading to feelings of guilt. People suffering from this type of narcissistic injury commonly had parents who were unable to adjust to the child's needs. Consequently, from a very immature stage of development, the child had to adapt to the parents demands (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

### Psychodynamic Context of the disorder

To address the final point of reference, Jacoby (1985/2023) discusses psychic development and the functions performed by the subject's caregivers during infancy. Healthy development is strictly related to the caregiver's ability to demonstrate empathy for the child's needs, as well as acceptance and nurturance.

The various manifestations of narcissistic disorders usually stem from a lack of support for the child's demands. When the child's spontaneous behaviors are not sufficiently or satisfactorily mirrored, the child feels rejected. Because the child's *Self* is still undifferentiated from the mother, this aversion takes root as intense self-rejection (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

According to Jacoby (1985/2023), most childhood fantasies of omnipotence are repressed due to rejection. Consequently, these fantasies do not mature or integrate into consciousness, failing to contribute to a realistic perspective; instead, they remain in the unconscious, stuck at a primitive level. Often, these impairments occur in situations where the mother herself suffers from a narcissistic disorder; thus, she is only "able to perceive and accept the child as part of her own self and will feel personally wounded by any attempt by the child to resist her ideas and demands" (Jacoby, 1985/2023, p. 343).

For Jacoby (1985/2023), there is a discussion among Jungian psychologists regarding the concept of narcissistic disorder, as it overlaps with the experience of a negative mother complex. Given this, it is important to address complex theory based on the negative mother complex.

As mentioned in previous sections, every complex has an archetypal root. The foundation of the mother complex is the mother archetype, which presents a diversity of manifestations:

all these symbols can have a positive, favorable sense or a negative and nefarious one. ( . . . ) This means that it is

not only from the personal mother that all the influences on the child's psyche described in literature stem, but it is much more the archetype projected onto the mother that grants her a mythological character and thus confers authority and even numinosity upon her (Jung, 1959/2014, pp. 88-89).

While the archetypal core encompasses all maternal possibilities, it is during the development of the complex that negative experiences with the mother are recorded and persist throughout life. Thus, the negative mother complex arises when natural archetypal demands are not met satisfactorily or sufficiently. Over time, the complex tends to strengthen and interfere in many instances of psychic life (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

Jung (1959/2014) states that the repercussions of the mother complex differ between sons and daughters. In the son, this complex is not "pure" due to the sex difference; therefore, it affects sexualization. In the daughter, the complex can either sharpen or inhibit the feminine instinct.

Among the developments of the negative mother complex found in men are an unconscious imprisonment of the heterosexual element in the mother figure or an unconscious search for the mother in every woman with whom the man becomes involved. Since the mother is the first woman a son comes into contact with, she inevitably influences the development of his masculinity and his gradual understanding of feminine aspects (Jung, 1959/2014).

In the daughter, the negative mother complex:

generates a hypertrophy of the feminine or an atrophy of it. The exacerbation of the feminine means an intensification of all feminine instincts, primarily the maternal instinct. The negative aspect of this is represented by a woman whose only goal is to give birth. (...) Her own personality is also of secondary importance; she is often more or less unconscious, as life is lived in others and through others, insofar as, due to the unconsciousness of her own personality, she identifies with them (Jung, 1959/2014, p. 93).

In situations where there is no hypertrophy of the feminine, an exacerbation of Eros may occur, which "causes an abnormal emphasis on the personality of the other" (Jung, 1959/2014, p. 94), or even "an identification with the mother and a blocking of her own feminine initiative" (Jung, 1959/2014, p. 95). According to Jung (1959/2014), these three possibilities are connected through intermediate stages, including another option characterized by the "typical example of the negative mother complex. Its motto is: anything but being like my mother!" (Jung, 1959/2014, p. 97).

As a negative mother complex strengthens and becomes chronic, the subject may live with a feeling of lack of trust, both in themselves and in the external world. Consequently, self-exclusion and self-rejection occur, as these individuals often have difficulty maintaining relationships due to expectations of constant rejection; furthermore, they "are generally hypersensitive to every nuance in the behavior of others, prone to interpreting the slightest dissonance as rejection or offense" (Jacoby, 1985/2023, pp. 347-348).

Thus, others are rarely perceived realistically, as the subject, influenced by the complex, perceives others "as parts of an 'archetype' that rejects or devours a 'Great Mother'" (Jacoby, 1985/2023, p. 347, author's emphasis). Another symptom relates to uncontrolled aggression:

in most people, the trait of aggressiveness, in itself a necessary function of the vital instinct, has not been sufficiently integrated into the personality and placed under conscious control. ( . . ) Later in life, uncontrolled aggression, susceptibility to exploding at the slightest provocation, and intense envy of all those 'who have done so well' are generally symptoms of a mother complex rooted in a disturbed primary relationship (Jacoby, 1985/2023, p. 348).

However, according to Jacoby (1985/2023), it is necessary to understand that the inner image of the mother does not stem solely from an introjection of the personal mother; the child's archetypal fantasies also contribute. That said, one can verify the intensity and severity of a disorder by identifying whether the destructive maternal elements refer to archetypal and impersonal aspects or to characteristics of the personal mother.

According to Jung (1959/2014, p. 89):

the etiological, i.e., traumatic effects of the mother must be divided into two groups: first, those that correspond to the characteristic qualities or attitudes actually existing in the personal mother. Second, those that only apparently possess such characteristics, as they are projections of a fantasy type (i.e., archetype) on the part of the child.

Given the above, it is relevant to return to the discussion regarding narcissistic disorder and its proximity to the negative mother complex. According to Jacoby (1985/2023), although both share similar symptoms and manifestations, they cannot be considered identical, as they were verified from distinct conceptions. At the same time, narcissistic personality disorder refers to the subject's difficulty regarding self-perception and self-image; the negative mother complex concerns how the negative maternal image interferes with the subject's subjectivity. Although narcissistic

disorder may be grounded in a negative mother complex, the same complex can constitute the roots of other disorders and psychic disturbances (Jacoby, 1990/2023).

It is also pertinent to examine the role of the father. In the vast majority of cases, the relationship with the father was inadequate; he either remained in the background or caused fear. Either way, the child finds no support in the father to offset the dominating mother, and consequently, the narcissistically wounded person tends to have a sense of internal disorientation (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

According to Jacoby (1985/2023, pp. 355-356):

the need to merge with an idealized self-object survives in the form of an unconscious longing; it may, for example, find expression in the choice of a romantic partner who is just waiting to be idealized. (...) The desire to merge with an idealized self-object may also manifest in another way, namely, through the individual's association with a group holding a religious or political ideology. At times, this can take on dangerous dimensions, given the fact that the more archaic the individual's intense desire for merger, the less they will be able to exercise their critical capacity. Thus, they may fall victim to fanatical ideologies that promise, in the name of a high ideal, the fulfillment of the most primitive impulses. Based on the above, it is evident that the lack of an adequate relationship—both maternal and paternal—has the potential to trigger narcissistic personality disorders, as it hinders the satisfactory development of the sense of identity. In many cases, the parents themselves also suffer from narcissistic psychic distress and, even if involuntarily, obstruct their children's process of emotional development (Jacoby, 1985/2023).

## Final considerations

The detailed analysis of the explored topics suggested that the subject has depth that is not exhausted by the interpretation used here. This study characterizes a specific segment rather than a comprehensive approach.

In this way, the work facilitated the expansion of knowledge and provided an analysis of essential topics for understanding the manifestations of complexes in individuals with narcissistic wounds, as well as an exploration of the myth from the perspective of analytical psychology.

In light of the above, psychologists need to deepen their knowledge given the field's growing demand and popularity. Theoretical and

scientific foundations must support professional practice to avoid conduct based on non-ethical means. Finally, it is emphasized that a diagnostic framework is a grouping of characteristics and should not limit the subject or professional action, as each individual carries their own particularities.

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### Curriculum:

**Mirela Faria Silva** – Post-graduate degree in Analytical Psychology: Theory and Practice from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná – PUC-PR; Degree in Psychology from PUC-PR. Curitiba/PR, Brasil. E-mail: psicologamirelefariasilva@gmail.com

**Priscilla Buzzachera** – Master's degree in Philosophy from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná – PUC-PR; Specialization in Analytical Psychology and Western and Eastern Religion from the Instituto de Psicologia e Religião de Curitiba, Specialization in Mental Health, Psychopathology, and Psychoanalysis from PUC-PR; Degree in Psychology from the Faculdade de Psicologia de Joinville. Jungian Analyst at the Jungian Institute of Paraná – IJPR. Founder and coordinator of the Specialization Course in Analytical Psychology at the Universidade da Região de Joinville – Univille. Director of the Jungian Institute of Santa Catarina. Joinville/SC, Brasil.