# Freud’s Understanding of Narcissism and Mourning:

Freud introduces the concept of 'narcissism', in his essay (On Narcissism, 1914). He defines it as adoration one gives themselves in light of them being an object of sexual desire and views it as a neurosis. He believes all humans have some level of narcissism throughout their development. Freud differentiates between two types, primary and secondary narcissism.

Primary narcissism pre-exists in all human beings; it is present from birth. He believes this narcissism causes people to give their affection towards an object. Furthermore, he speculates this is the same type of energy evident in young kids, who often believe they are super-beings.

Secondary narcissism develops when individuals turn this object affection back on themselves. The result is that an individual becomes cut off from society and disinterested in others, he/she will have low self-esteem. This is due to their inability to express love to others and have it expressed back to them. Such a person is full of shame, guilt, and often very defensive. Narcissism causes an individual to seek self-preservation.

Freud speculates that narcissism comes from two distinct sources. First, the person is driven by a need to self-preserve; secondly, the individual is driven by the need to procreate. The more affection is projected to others 'object-libido', the less energy there exists for self-love 'ego-libido'. Freud believes object libido emanates from a need to ensure the survival of the species.

He further argues that for the individual and the species to survive, there is a need for maintaining a delicate balance between these two libidos. An imbalance occurs when too much energy is directed inwards to the individual. The result is that the personality of the person becomes infected and they can no longer function properly in society.

Self-esteem is weighed against the satisfaction of this ego ideal. How much self-esteem one has then depends on how much affection and love they are able to derive from the object of their desire. If object-libido is projected outwards without reciprocity, it can lead to low self-esteem. Freud’s work raises interesting issues on the role of family in the development of individuals into caring members of society.

Freud compares mourning after the loss and death of a close loved one to the phenomenon of melancholia /depression. The absorbing nature of the ego and the disinterest in the external world is evident in both, mourning and melancholia equally. Despite their similarities, there are some fundamental differences; mourning is recognized as a healthy and normal process that is necessary for the recovery from the loss and would not be seen as a pathology nor a need for medical intervention.

However, melancholia is an abnormal pathology, and a dangerous illness due to its suicidal tendency. The difficulty and pain of both the mourning and melancholic process is due to the fixation of a sentimental nature on the love-object which is no longer available. The disinterest in the previous love and the past passionate feelings causes internal conflict.

Freud observes, although the negative self-regard and self-reproach that the subject presents can be easily “challenged” and disproven by an observer, this approach would be useless and fruitless from a clinical, therapeutic, and research point of view.

What is vital from a “clinical”, “scientific” and “therapeutic” standpoint is to understand his subjective and psychological statements regarding his-self and his self-accusation. It is important to note, Freud's mourning theory has been criticized for assuming a model of subjectivity based on a strongly bounded form of individuation.

## References:

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