

Transforming Narcissism: Reflections on Empathy, Humor, and Expectations

Frank M. Lachmann

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About the Book

Using Kohut's seminal paper "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism" as a springboard, Frank Lachmann updates Kohut's proposals for contemporary clinicians. *Transforming Narcissism: Reflections on Empathy, Humor, and Expectations* draws on a wide range of contributions from empirical infant research, psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic practice, social psychology, and autobiographies of creative artists to expand and modify Kohut's proposition that archaic narcissism is transformed in the course of development or through treatment into empathy, humor, creativity, an acceptance of transience and wisdom.

He asserts that empathy, humor, and creativity are not the goals or end products of transformations, but are an intrinsic part of the ongoing therapist-patient dialogue throughout treatment. The transformative process is bidirectional, impacting both patient and therapist, and their affect undergoes transformation - for example from detached to intimate - and narcissism or self-states are transformed secondarily as a consequence of the affective interactions. Meeting or violating expectations of emotional responsiveness provides a major pathway for transformation of affect.

For beginning therapists, *Transforming Narcissism* presents an engaging approach to treatment that incorporates the therapeutic action of these transformations, but also leaves room for therapists to develop styles of their own. For more experienced therapists, it fills a conceptual and clinical gap, provides a scaffold for crucial aspects of treatment that are often unacknowledged (because they are not "analytic"), or are dismissed and pejoratively labeled "countertransference." Most importantly, Lachmann offers a balance between therapeutic spontaneity and professional constraint. Focused and engaging, *Transforming Narcissism* provides a bridge from self psychology to a rainbow of relational approaches that beginning and seasoned therapists can profitably traverse in either direction.

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Reviews

"Frank Lachmann's *Transforming Narcissism* is a worldly, wise and witty update of Kohut's revolutionary ideas about the self and its vulnerabilities in development and psychotherapy. It brings a light touch to this often heavy topic, elevating the often heady psychoanalytic writing on narcissism into something of a romp, a paean to the human comedy. Lachmann does what he preaches: he violates our expectations in demonstrating the leavening power of empathy and humor to show how growth occurs in the arms of relationships dedicated to mutuality and transformation. The liveliness of his writing, the accumulation of experience from his more than 50 years in the therapeutic trenches, and his masterful integration of new knowledge all embody his message about the central role of the co-constructed therapeutic relationship. His many vignettes of therapy are models of thoughtfulness and respect that never cease to entertain. I highly recommend this book to clinicians, teachers, and students who seek the wisdom of our most seasoned practitioners."

-David Scharff, M.D., Co-Director, International Psychotherapy Institute, Washington DC

"It's a fair question: Can a new book ever be considered essential reading? I would contend that Frank Lachmann, who fears his new publication *Transforming Narcissism* will be greeted by exclamations of "Oh no! Not another book about narcissism!" has indeed written such an essential book, if, that is, the reader's goal is to learn some essential lessons about understanding Kohut, not to mention some equally essential lessons about how to be a good and effective clinician. Frank successfully completes Kohut's own program, left undone: that is, describing and demonstrating, as Kohut himself never had, how a given patient's archaic narcissism, reflecting the demands of a narcissistic self, might potentially be transformed in the clinical situation into the invaluable attributes of a mature human being. Frank cautions that the treatment itself, to be effective, must entail these selfsame attributes – empathy, humor, creativity, transience, and wisdom – and, moreover, that insights about interaction in the dyad gained from infant research are similarly indispensable to effectual therapy. But as usual, Frank doesn't just tell us; he shows us what he means, how he does it, and, even, how he fails to do it. Moreover, by revealing in his very narrative the empathy, humor, creativity, appreciation of transience, and, ultimately, the wisdom that Frank is deservedly known for, the lessons that I deem essential to be taught and learned by all of us are inherent in the experience of reading the book itself. Needless to say, I loved this book and would virtually guarantee that it will be recognized in the field as essential reading!"

- Estelle Shane, Ph.D., Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles

"This book is written within the tradition of self-psychology. It will be hailed as a valuable extension of Heinz Kohut's contribution, but it would be a pity if the book should remain confined to this school, for it has much that is new to offer us who are not Kohutians. What I found admirable was the way the author described what he actually does directly and without any pretense."

- Prof. Martin S. Bergmann, Freudian faculty, NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

"This book is a major contribution to our understanding of self-pathology. Building on the pioneering studies of Heinz Kohut, Lachmann augments and advances them both by highlighting the roles of nonverbal communication and dyadic interaction in the development and treatment of narcissistic disorders, and by demonstrating just how analytic therapy can transform narcissism into productive channels. This valuable book should be read, and studied, by therapists of all persuasions."

- Theodore Jacobs, M.D., Training and Supervising Analyst, NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

About the Author

Frank M. Lachmann, Ph.D., is a founding faculty member of the Institute for the Psychoanalytic Study of Subjectivity, Training and Supervising Analyst, Postgraduate Center for Mental Health, and Clinical Assistant Professor at the NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. He has contributed over 100 articles to the journal literature, and is author of *Transforming Aggression* (Aronson, 2000), and co-author of *Self and Motivational Systems* (TAP, 1992), *The Clinical Exchange* (TAP, 1996), and *Infant Research and Adult Treatment* (TAP, 2002).