

Sam Vaknin

Shmuel "Sam" Vaknin (Hebrew: שמואל "סם" ואקנין; born April 21, 1961) is an Israeli writer and professor of psychology and business studies.^{[1][2]} He is the author of *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited* (1999), an IMF and World Bank affairs consultant for several nation states,^[3] he also was the last editor-in-chief of the now-defunct political news website *Global Politician*,^[4] and runs a private website with content about psychological themes such as *narcissistic personality disorder* (NPD),^[5] psychopathy, abuse, victimization by stalkers,^[6] as well as other topics such as philosophical^[7] and sociopolitical and economic issues.^[8] He has also postulated a theory on *chronons* and *time asymmetry*.^[9]

Background

Early life

Born in Kiryat Yam,^{[10][11]} Israel, Vaknin is the eldest of five children^[12] born to Sephardi Jewish^[10] immigrants. Vaknin's mother was from Turkey, and his father, a construction worker, was from Morocco. He has described his childhood as difficult, stating that his parents "were ill-equipped to deal with normal children, let alone the gifted".^[12]

He left home to serve in the Israel Defense Forces from 1979 to 1982 in training and education units. Between 1980 and 1983 he founded a chain of computerized information kiosks in Tel Aviv, and in 1982 worked for the Nessim D. Gaon Group in Geneva, Paris, and New York City.^[13]

In the mid-1980s, he became aware of difficulties in his relationship with his fiancée, and that he had mood swings. In 1985 he sought help from a psychiatrist, who diagnosed him with *narcissistic personality disorder* (NPD). Vaknin did not accept the diagnosis.^[14]

From 1986 to 1987, he was the general manager of IPE Ltd. in London. He moved back to Israel, where he became director of an Israeli investment firm, Mikbatz Teshua.^[5] He was also president of the Israeli chapter of the Unification Church's Professors for World Peace Academy.^[15]

Arrest and imprisonment

In Israel, in 1995, he was found guilty on three counts of securities fraud along with two other men, Nissim Avioz and Dov Landau. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment and fined 50,000 shekels (about \$14,000), while the company was fined 100,000 shekels.^{[16][17]} In 1996, as a condition of parole, he agreed to a mental health evaluation, which noted various personality disorders. According to Vaknin: "I was borderline, schizoid, but the most dominant was NPD," and on this occasion he accepted the diagnosis, because, he wrote, "it was a relief to know what I had."^[18]

Later life

In 1996,^{[19][11]} Vaknin moved to Skopje, Republic of Macedonia (now North Macedonia), where he married Macedonian Lidija Rangelovska. In 1997^[20] they established *Narcissus Publications*, which publishes Vaknin's work.^[20] Between 2001 and 2003, Vaknin was a Senior Business Correspondent for *United Press International*.^{[21][22]} He has also written for *Central Europe Review* about political issues in the Balkans,^[23] as well as for the *Middle East Times*.^[24] Until a few weeks before the September 2002 Macedonian parliamentary election, he served as an adviser to Macedonia's Ministry of Finance. He writes regularly for other publications, such as the International Analyst Network,^[25] *Brussels Morning*,^[26] and the online *American Chronicle*.^[27]

Vaknin was a visiting professor at Southern Federal University in Rostov Oblast, Russia in 2017–22^[28] holding a course of lectures there on *personality theory*.^[29] He is also a professor of management and a professor of psychology in the Commonwealth Institute of Advanced and Professional Studies (CIAPS) in Nigeria, Canada and the United Kingdom.^[30] He is a visiting professor of psychology and economics in South East European University in North Macedonia.^[31]

Vaknin served as a founding member of the Steering Committee for the Advancement of Healthcare in North Macedonia between 2009-2011.^[32] Vaknin is a member of the Board of Advisors of CFACT Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow.^[33]

Vaknin and his wife, Lidija Rangelovska, established in 2024 the Vaknin-Rangelovska Foundation which distributes grants to further the study of Vaknin's work in psychology, economics, and physics.^[34]

Work in psychology

Vaknin reconceives of *cluster B personality disorders* as post-traumatic dissociative conditions involving self-states (subpersonalities with pseudoidentities).^[35] According to him, cluster B personality disorders are manifestations of the same underlying single diagnosis and clinical entity with different co-occurrences of traits and behaviors. People with this underlying diagnosis transition between self-states having undergone various forms of collapse, mortification, and decompensation. He proposes that all cluster B personality disorders have overt and covert states which alternate throughout the lifespan.^[36] Vaknin suggests that cluster B personality disorders involve a hereditary predisposition,^[37] brain abnormalities (at least in later life),^[38] and trauma and abuse in early life, especially in childhood and adolescence.^[39]

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סם ואקנין



Vaknin in 2019

Born	Shmuel Vaknin April 21, 1961 (age 64) Kiryat Yam, Israel
Occupation	Writer
Known for	Self-help material on psychology and personality disorders, in particular NPD. Work on chronons.
Spouse	Lidija Rangelovska
Website	samvak.tripod.com (http://samvak.tripod.com/)

Views on narcissism

Etiology and typology

In Vaknin's work, pathological narcissism is a fantasy defense against the reality of early childhood abuse and trauma by a dysfunctional mother in a dead mother complex. He posits two developmental trajectories: idolizing the child results in overt narcissism and neglect or outright maltreatment lead to the formation of covert narcissism. Both types exhibit cognitive distortions and impaired reality testing and all narcissists alternate between overt and covert states throughout the lifespan^[40]. Both these states involve grandiosity, vulnerability, gaps between implicit and explicit self-esteem, compensatory constructs, and self-enhancing behaviors.^[41] According to Vaknin, owing to this resort to fantasy and abandonment of reality, narcissists are unable to tell the difference between external and internal objects (they lack object relations due to impaired reality testing).^[42] Vaknin observes that, having failed to develop affective empathy during the formative years, narcissists possess "cold empathy" (cognitive and reflexive).^{[43][44][45]}

True self and false self

In his view, narcissists have lost their "true self", the core of their personality, which has been replaced by delusions of grandeur, a "false self". Therefore, he believes, they cannot be healed, because they do not exist as real persons, only as reflections: "The False Self replaces the narcissist's True Self and is intended to shield him from hurt and narcissistic injury by self-imputing omnipotence... The narcissist pretends that his False Self is real and demands that others affirm this confabulation."^[46] The false self is, according to him, an unreal facade or cover that a narcissist shows to the world which involves what the narcissist intends to be seen as - powerful, elegant, smart, wealthy, or well-connected. This false self is subsequently projected to elicit a constant stream of attention or narcissistic supply from others, which may consist of reactions to this projected false self.^[47]

Narcissistic supply

Vaknin extends the concept of narcissistic supply and introduces concepts such as primary and secondary narcissistic supply.^{[48][49]} Both positive attention and negative attention ("sadistic supply") can serve as narcissistic supply.^[50] Narcissistic supply is a form of external regulation which compensates for the narcissist's failure to self-regulate and resembles addiction.^[51]

Primary narcissistic supply is based on attention in both its public forms such as recognition, fame, infamy, stardom, and its private, more interpersonal, types of praise, admiration, applause, fear, and repulsion. Primary narcissistic supply represents attention of any kind—positive or negative. Appearances qualify more than the content or real efforts and accomplishments; it is not the truth that matters, but their perception of it. Therefore, as long as they receive the expected reaction or attention that they had projected through their false self, the connotation attached to it is inconsequential.^[47] This entitlement renders narcissist gullible and vulnerable to being manipulated and abused.^[52]

Secondary narcissistic supply refers to the reinforcement a narcissist derives from projecting an image of success, security, and social acceptability. This includes financial stability, upward mobility, and the perception of living a fulfilling life. Sources of secondary narcissistic supply may include having a partner, owning significant property, engaging in creative pursuits, running a business, experiencing a sense of personal freedom, belonging to a community, achieving professional recognition, displaying wealth, or otherwise signaling status.^[47]

Triggers of narcissistic supply are stimuli that provoke sources into providing validation, reinforcing the narcissist's False Self. Publicity—whether through fame, notoriety, or infamy—is a key trigger, as it compels others to pay attention, thereby fueling the narcissist's need for recognition. Other triggers include an air of mystery, sexual validation, and proximity to power, whether political, financial, military, or spiritual. Narcissists actively seek out these triggers through self-promotion, creative endeavors, or provocative actions, ensuring a continuous flow of attention. Since both admiration and hostility serve as validation, they may embrace controversy or infamy as readily as praise, prioritizing perception over reality.^[47]

Cerebral and somatic narcissism

He distinguishes between cerebral and somatic narcissists; the former generate their narcissistic supply by applying their minds, the latter their bodies. According to Vaknin, cerebral narcissists display their intellectual abilities and knowledge ostentatiously, while giving their bodies little importance, often to the point of the body being utterly devalued. Somatic narcissists, on the other hand, focus on areas related to the body, such as appearance and sexual abilities. Attention and sexual conquest are in his view the narcissistic supply which upholds the somatic narcissist's favorable body-image. However, Vaknin claims that narcissists switch between these two modes of acquiring narcissistic supply, particularly as a result of threat or damage to the erstwhile mode. He considers himself a cerebral narcissist.^[53]

Interpersonal relationships

Vaknin suggests that narcissists regard significant others (especially friends, intimate partners, and role models) as introjected, idealized maternal figures ("snapshotting"^[54]) in a shared fantasy.^[55] Narcissists equally act as maternal figures and attempt to re-enact early childhood dynamics in their interpersonal relationships, in what he dubs a "dual motherhood".^[56] Still, according to Vaknin, people respond to the presence of narcissists with acute discomfort (an uncanny valley reaction).^[57]

Narcissistic abuse

In the late 1990s^[58] and early 2000s,^[59] Vaknin popularized the term "narcissistic abuse"^{[60][61]} and expanded its meaning to include any form of maltreatment that aims to deny the victim agency, independence, personal autonomy, core identity, and social support.^{[62][63]} He has suggested that narcissistic abuse is all-pervasive and has long-term, post-traumatic emotional, cognitive, social, and other effects.^{[64][65][66]}

Collective narcissism

Vaknin believes that disproportionate numbers of pathological narcissists are at work in the most influential reaches of society,^[67] such as medicine, finance and politics^[18] as a manifestation of growing collective narcissism.^[68]

Vaknin traces the emergence of pathological narcissism as an organizing and hermeneutic principle in post-modern civilization to the Renaissance and the Reformation. Renaissance thinkers shifted the intellectual emphasis onto the individual and were proponents of authoritarianism and personality cults (example: Machiavelli's "The Prince"). The Reformation equated material success in life with a divine blessing and disintermediated the relationship between the individual and God. Vaknin regards narcissism as a form of private religion with the false self as an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect deity.^[69] Narcissism, suggests Vaknin, would replace the Age of Enlightenment as the ethos and Zeitgeist.^[70]

Other work, views and postulations

He calls narcissistic co-dependents "inverted narcissists."^[71] "[They] provide the narcissist with an obsequious, unthreatening audience... the perfect backdrop."^{[72][73]} He postulated the existence of a type of narcissistic borderline he dubbed covert borderline.^[74]

Vaknin suggests that narcissists are capable only of negative affectivity and repress positive affects because they are associated with past hurt, abuse, abandonment, and trauma. This affective deficit drives dissociation in pathological narcissism and narcissists compensate for the resulting memory gaps by confabulating (creating narrative and scenarios that are counterfactual albeit plausible).^[75] He points out similarities between narcissists and people diagnosed with autism or ADHD.^[76]

Vaknin observes that narcissists harvest narcissistic supply and groom sources of supply in physical "pathological narcissistic spaces" (the neighborhood pub, gym, church, the workplace, a classroom, etc.).^[77]

In 2022, Vaknin proposed a theory of psychodynamics, Intrapsychic Activation Model (IPAM), which involves self-states that trigger constructs and introjects and are reactive to stimuli emanating from both the internal and the external changing environments.^{[78][79]}

Vaknin developed a new treatment modality for narcissism and depression, dubbed "Cold Therapy".^[80] It is based on recasting pathological narcissism as a form of CPTSD (Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) and arrested development, which result in an addictive personality with a dysfunctional attachment style. The therapy uses re-traumatization and a form of reframing.^{[81][82][83]}

Work on chronons and time asymmetry

A model of quantised time was proposed by Vaknin in his 1982 Ph.D. dissertation, titled "Time Asymmetry Revisited".^[84] The dissertation was published by Pacific Western University (California). The dissertation submitted postulates the existence of a particle (chronon). In the proposed theory, time is the result of the interaction of chronons, very much as other forces in nature are the result of other particle interactions. Vaknin postulates the existence of various time quarks (up, down, colors, etc.) whose properties cancel each other and thus the arrow of time is derived (time asymmetry). The postulated particle (chronon) is not only an ideal clock, but also mediates time itself (analogous to the relationship between the Higgs boson and mass). In other words, what we call "time" is the interaction between chronons in a field. Chronons exchange between them a particle and thereby exert a force. "Events" are perturbations in the Time Field and they are distinct from chronon interactions. Chronon interactions (particle exchanges) in the Time Field generate "time" and "time asymmetry" as we observe them.^{[9][84][85][86]} Vaknin's work has been expanded into the Geometric Chronon Field Theory by Eytan H. Suchard.^[87]

Film appearances

- In 2007, Vaknin appeared in the episode "Egomania"^[88] of the British Channel 4 documentary series *Mania*.
- In 2009, he was the subject of an Australian documentary film, *I, Psychopath*, directed by Ian Walker. In the movie, Vaknin underwent a psychological evaluation in which he met the criteria for psychopathy according to the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, but did not meet the criteria for narcissism.^{[89][90]}
- In 2013, Vaknin appeared in the documentary "Moi, narcissique et cruel" produced by RTS Switzerland.^[91]
- In 2016, Vaknin appeared in the documentary *How Narcissists Took Over the World* produced by Vice Media.^[92]
- In 2019, Vaknin appeared in the online documentary *Plugged-in: The True Toxicity of Social Media Revealed* produced by Richard Grannon.^[93]

Selected publications

- *Requesting my Loved One* (Bakasha me-Isha Ahuva) published by Yedioth Aharonot Miskal, Tel-Aviv, 1997^[94] This book won the 1997 Maiden Prose Award of the Literature Section of the Public Council for Culture and Art in Israel^[95]
- (with Nikola Gruevski) *Macedonian Economy on a Crossroads*. Skopje, NIP Noval Literatura, 1998. ISBN 9989-610-01-0^[96]
- *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*. Narcissus Publications, Prague, 1999. ISBN 978-80-238-3384-3
- *After the Rain: How the West Lost the East*. Narcissus Publications, in association with Central Europe Review/CEENMI, 2000. ISBN 80-238-5173-X^[97]

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