



Case of Dawn Nichols

NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER

Dawn Nichols was a tall, attractive married woman in her mid-thirties with three children. A friend of hers helped her to find a therapist. Her chief complaints were feelings of long-term depression and a general feeling of anxiety. Others in her life reported that she could become angry quickly and that these outbursts could occur in businesses and when traveling with others. She grew up in a home in which her father was an extremely successful businessman. Her father was “all business” and too busy for his children. He was also hostile and derogatory toward her. Although her mother provided for Dawn’s basic needs as a child, her mother was emotionally distant and physically absent. Both in childhood and after Dawn grew up, her mother sought to coerce her into doing what she wanted.

Dawn Nichols believed that she had superior intelligence and abilities. However, she also reported difficulty doing well in school and sticking with any of her activities such as horseback riding, acting, and singing. Overall, she blamed her parents for not helping her develop her abilities. Although she was in her thirties, she had little sense of what she wanted to do with her life. She would change her mind and become

angry with others. She once sold a horse since she had not gone horseback riding for years, only to buy another horse a few days later because she admired it.

In addition to feeling depressed and anxious, Dawn reported angry outbursts, significant alcohol and marijuana use, concerns about rapidly shifting interests, and unhappiness with the lack of success in her life. She also reported that her husband was concerned that she was disconnected from her three children and that she would often become angry with them for typical behaviors of children. She experienced this anger in spite of the fact that she had a housekeeper, a gardener, an au pair, and a number of babysitters to help her. She also blamed her husband for not helping her succeed. She was part of local acting workshops and sang with some local bands. She often fantasized about leaving her family and touring Europe with a younger man who would produce her music and help her achieve fame and fortune.

Clinical vignette provided by Kenneth Levy, PhD

Source: Adapted from K. N. Levy (2012).