

***The Psychoanalytic Dynamics of Narcissism and Emotional
Intelligence in Algerian Women.***

Hayet ARAB.

- University of LOUNICI Ali; Blida2(Algeria).

- Email: h.arab@univ-blida2.dz

Received:07/10/2025; Accepted:26/04/2026; Published:15/06/2026.

Abstract:

This paper explores the complex relationship between narcissism and emotional intelligence among Algerian women through a psychoanalytic lens. Drawing upon classical and contemporary psychoanalytic theories-particularly those of Freud, Kohut, and Kernberg-this work examines how socio-cultural and intrapsychic forces shape the emotional and narcissistic organization of the female self. The discussion focuses on the Algerian socio-cultural milieu, marked by patriarchal structures, postcolonial identity tensions, and the evolving roles of women. The analysis highlights how narcissism and emotional intelligence co-develop as both defenses and adaptive mechanisms that help Algerian women manage internal conflicts and social expectations.

Keywords: Narcissism; Emotional Intelligence; Algerian Women; Psychoanalytic Theory.

Introduction:

Narcissism and emotional intelligence have long been central constructs in understanding the affective and relational dimensions of personality. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these constructs are intricately interrelated, as they all involve the regulation of self-esteem, affect, and interpersonal bonds. Freud's seminal work *On Narcissism* (1914) first situated narcissism within libidinal development, identifying it as a universal stage essential to ego formation. Emotional

intelligence, although conceptualized much later (Goleman, 1995), can be understood psychoanalytically as the ego's capacity for emotional regulation and empathy.

In Algerian women, narcissistic and emotional dynamics are particularly shaped by sociocultural ambivalence-between tradition and modernity, autonomy and dependence, visibility and modesty. The psychoanalytic approach allows us to understand how these conflicts produce characteristic emotional patterns: controlled expressivity, covert grandiosity, and adaptive empathy (Bencheikh, 2023,).

1 . Narcissism in Psychoanalytic Theory:

Freud's (1914) conception of narcissism represented a foundational shift in psychoanalytic thought, situating self-love not merely as vanity but as a structural aspect of psychic development. He identified *primary narcissism* as the infant's original libidinal investment in the self-a crucial phase where the ego emerges as an autonomous structure capable of regulating drives and seeking satisfaction within internal psychic space. At this stage, the infant perceives no boundary between self and world; all gratification is self-referential, and the mother functions as an extension of the infant's own body (Freud, 1914/2019, p. 90). As the ego matures, *secondary narcissism* arises when libidinal energy once directed toward external objects regresses to the ego, often as a defense against disappointment, loss, or social rejection. This return of libido to the self can foster resilience, but when excessive, it crystallizes into pathological self-preoccupation and grandiosity (Freud, 1914/2019, pp. 91–94).

Kohut (1971) reinterpreted this Freudian concept within the framework of *self-psychology*, arguing that narcissism is not inherently pathological but reflects unmet developmental needs. For Kohut, the self develops through empathic attunement from caregivers who function as self-objects—extensions of the self that provide mirroring, idealization, and twinship experiences essential for forming a cohesive identity (Kohut, 1971, p. 78). Failures in early empathic responsiveness

generate structural deficits in the self, leading to *narcissistic vulnerability*-a fragile balance between grandiosity and shame. Adults with such vulnerabilities may oscillate between self-inflation and emptiness, constantly seeking external validation to maintain self-cohesion (Kohut, 1977, pp. 85–90). Recent studies in cross-cultural psychology affirm that in collectivist societies, such as Algeria, empathic mirroring is often constrained by social hierarchies and gender expectations, producing adaptive but defensive forms of female self-assertion that may resemble narcissistic self-enhancement (Daoud & Kobouch, 2025, pp. 142–145).

In contrast, Kernberg (1975) maintained that narcissism arises from disturbances in *object relations*, where early representations of self and others remain split between idealized and devalued images (Kernberg, 1975, p. 214). This structural splitting generates an unstable ego organization that alternates between omnipotent self-grandiosity and contemptuous devaluation of others. When applied to female development, this oscillation may express itself through fluctuating self-worth tied to perceived emotional reciprocity or social recognition. Mitchell and Black (2016, p. 132) argued that women, whose identities are often relationally anchored, may internalize societal validation as a central component of their self-esteem. Thus, a culturally shaped narcissism emerges-rooted not in overt self-aggrandizement but in the covert dependency on being seen, appreciated, and emotionally mirrored.

In the Algerian socio-cultural context, where traditional gender scripts emphasize modesty and relational duty, this dynamic becomes particularly salient. Research among Algerian women suggests that emotional intelligence often functions as a compensatory mechanism for unmet mirroring needs, serving to regulate self-esteem through empathic control rather than open assertion (Hiba & Chergui, 2020, p. 55). This emotional regulation mirrors Kohut's notion of *transmuting internalization*, whereby the individual

internalizes fragmented empathic experiences into stable self-functions. Consequently, the Algerian woman's self-organization may balance between adaptive emotional attunement and latent narcissistic fragility—an ambivalence intensified by societal pressures to embody both empathy and perfection.

The synthesis of Freud, Kohut, and Kernberg's models reveals a continuum between developmental necessity and pathological fixation. Narcissism, in its healthy form, is indispensable for maintaining psychic cohesion, self-esteem, and ambition; in its pathological form, it represents the defensive enclosure of the self against unmirrored pain. Within this theoretical lens, female narcissism in Algeria can be reinterpreted not as vanity but as an *adaptive emotional defense*—a culturally mediated effort to preserve identity coherence amid fluctuating demands of autonomy and conformity.

2. Emotional Intelligence from a Psychoanalytic:

Although emotional intelligence (EI) entered popular discourse through the cognitive-emotional framework proposed by Goleman (1995), psychoanalytic theory interprets it not as a surface-level skill but as a dynamic expression of ego strength and affective integration. Within Freud's (1923/2010) structural model of the psyche, EI corresponds to the ego's capacity to modulate instinctual impulses (id) in accordance with moral demands (superego) and the constraints of reality. The ego's regulatory functions—tolerating frustration, delaying gratification, and symbolizing affect—constitute the very psychological mechanisms later conceptualized as emotional intelligence (Fonagy & Target, 2003, p. 227).

Bion's (1962, p. 67) notion of *containment* provides a crucial developmental lens: the infant's raw emotional experiences become meaningful only when “contained” by a responsive caregiver who transforms chaotic affect into digestible emotional thought. This capacity for mentalization—

the ability to think about one's own feelings-represents a psychoanalytic antecedent of emotional intelligence. When the caregiver fails to perform this containing function, the ego may resort to primitive defenses such as projection or splitting, leading to emotional dysregulation in adulthood (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 41). Thus, from a psychoanalytic standpoint, EI reflects the outcome of successful early affect regulation, where internalized parental functions support symbolic thinking and empathic attunement.

For women, particularly in collectivist and family-oriented societies such as Algeria, emotional intelligence emerges within a relational and cultural matrix that shapes the forms of affective expression deemed acceptable. Algerian women's emotional regulation often manifests through empathic listening, patience, and subdued expressivity, traits deeply interwoven with cultural ideals of modesty and moral restraint (Chikhi & Rahmoun, 2023, p. 243). This indirect self-expression reflects a sublimated mode of affect regulation, in which socially constrained emotions are transformed into culturally valued behaviors such as nurturing and tolerance. Psychoanalytically, such sublimation can be seen as the ego's adaptive transformation of instinctual energy into prosocial and creative forms (Kernberg, 2016, p. 114).

Recent cross-cultural studies corroborate this interpretation. Research by Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019) and Fernández-Berrocal et al. (2021) shows that cultural norms strongly determine how emotional competence is displayed, with women in collectivist societies emphasizing harmony and relational sensitivity over assertive expression. In the Algerian context, where interdependence and familial solidarity dominate the social fabric, EI functions as both a **psychological** resource and a moral code. It enables women to navigate conflicting emotional demands-balancing self-assertion with social cohesion-without overt confrontation, a process the psychoanalytic tradition would describe as *controlled sublimation*.

Therefore, emotional intelligence in Algerian women should not be understood merely as interpersonal skill or emotional literacy but rather as a deeply internalized ego **function**, shaped by early affective containment and reinforced by cultural expectations. It is an internal compromise formation that allows emotional control to coexist with relational attunement, reflecting both psychological maturity and sociocultural adaptation.

3. The Intersection between Narcissism and Emotional Intelligence:

The relationship between narcissism and emotional intelligence (EI) is inherently dialectical-each shaping and, at times, opposing the other. Pathological or *vulnerable narcissism* is typically characterized by emotional dysregulation, hypersensitivity to criticism, and empathy deficits, whereas adaptive or *healthy narcissism* provides self-confidence and internal stability necessary for affective attunement and relational reciprocity (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001, pp. 177-196).

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, this apparent paradox becomes clearer when we consider that the same intrapsychic structures producing narcissistic grandiosity also underlie emotional vitality. When ego functions-such as reflection, regulation, and containment-are sufficiently developed, narcissistic traits may integrate into a cohesive and empathic self. Kohut (1971, p. 78) argued that *mature narcissism* reflects a healthy self-esteem based on the successful internalization of selfobject functions, which transform admiration from a defensive craving into mutual recognition, thereby fostering empathy rather than blocking it.

Empirical evidence reinforces this nuanced theoretical position. A recent meta-analysis found that *grandiose narcissism* correlates positively with self-reported emotional intelligence (trait EI), while *vulnerable narcissism* correlates negatively with both self-reported and ability-based EI measures (Nguyen, Takahashi, & Nham, 2022, p. 1344). The authors

concluded that emotional intelligence moderates narcissistic tendencies by transforming self-focus into adaptive self-regulation rather than self-inflation.

Furthermore, a cross-cultural study conducted by Jauk and colleagues (2021, p. 5) revealed that vulnerable narcissism is more prevalent within interdependent cultural frameworks—where modesty and relational harmony are highly valued—suggesting that emotional regulation difficulties increase when narcissistic expression conflicts with cultural expectations.

In the context of Algerian women, adaptive narcissism may emerge as a culturally bounded form of self-affirmation. Algerian social norms often emphasize restraint, relational loyalty, and moral modesty; yet within these constraints, many women cultivate self-esteem through relational recognition and emotional competence (Benabdallah & Mouffok, 2022, p. 318). Such adaptive narcissism reinforces emotional intelligence by integrating empathy, self-awareness, and self-respect—allowing the self to remain cohesive while negotiating between traditional modesty and contemporary autonomy.

Ultimately, emotional intelligence functions as an evolved ego defense, enabling individuals to manage narcissistic injuries—such as rejection or criticism—without fragmentation of the self. In this psychoanalytic frame, EI serves not as a denial of narcissism but as its sublimation, transforming fragile grandiosity into resilience, empathy, and mature self-esteem (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001, p. 190; Kohut, 1971, p. 82).

4.Narcissism and the Algerian Female Psyche:

Within Algeria's rapidly transforming sociocultural landscape, the development of female subjectivity unfolds in a field of conflicting expectations. Modern educational and professional opportunities have expanded women's autonomy, yet patriarchal norms and collective values continue to define the contours of acceptable femininity (Bensalem, 2023, p. 211). This ambivalence gives rise to what

psychoanalysis would recognize as an oscillation between ego ideals-the culturally endorsed image of the modest, family-oriented woman-and ideal ego projections of independent, self-defining individuality. The psychic negotiation between these poles forms the foundation for a uniquely Algerian expression of narcissism.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, this process involves both introjection of traditional values and projection of modern aspirations. The internalization of communal ethics provides emotional stability and belonging, yet simultaneously constrains overt self-assertion. As Chodorow (1978) argued, women's self-representations are relationally constituted; when societal approval remains the primary mirror for self-esteem, narcissistic tensions are inevitable. In such settings, the self becomes partially dependent on the gaze of the Other-parents, partners, or society at large-for validation and continuity. When recognition is inconsistent, the resulting "mirror failures" may manifest as covert grandiosity, excessive self-monitoring, or emotional withdrawal (Kohut, 1971; Simard et al., 2023).

Empirical findings reinforce this psychoanalytic reading. Recent cross-cultural studies show that grandiose narcissism correlates with self-confidence and assertive emotional expression, whereas vulnerable narcissism is associated with hypersensitivity to rejection and fluctuating affective stability (Nguyen, Takahashi, & Nham, 2022; Sedikides et al., 2024). In collectivist societies such as Algeria, where interpersonal harmony and social modesty are valued, the vulnerable subtype may predominate. Algerian women often display high levels of empathy and emotional restraint, which operate as adaptive strategies for preserving relational bonds and avoiding social sanctions (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2021). These traits mirror what psychoanalytic theory describes as sublimated narcissism-a transformation of self-regard into socially acceptable forms of emotional intelligence.

Within professional and academic environments, many Algerian women navigate what could be termed regulated narcissism: the capacity to maintain self-esteem while complying with collective norms. Emotional intelligence, in this context, becomes not only a personal resource but also a cultural defense mechanism—a way of modulating affective expression to align with social expectations while safeguarding inner cohesion. This aligns with Bion's (1962) notion of containment, where emotional experiences are symbolically processed rather than acted out. The Algerian woman's ability to express ambition and competence through empathy, diplomacy, and patience demonstrates an evolved synthesis of narcissistic energy and emotional regulation.

Nevertheless, this synthesis remains fragile. Persistent sociocultural ambivalence may generate chronic tension between self-assertion and social conformity, resulting in somatized anxiety or depressive affect when emotional expression is excessively inhibited. In psychoanalytic terms, such symptoms represent **compromise formations** between the ego's adaptive strategies and the superego's moral imperatives. The contemporary Algerian female psyche, therefore, exemplifies a complex interplay between narcissistic investment, emotional intelligence, and cultural containment—an interaction that calls for more empirical investigation using culturally sensitive psychoanalytic frameworks (Sedikides et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022).

5. Defense Mechanisms and Emotional Adaptation:

Freud (1936) and later Anna Freud identified defense mechanisms as ego operations protecting the psyche from anxiety. Among Algerian women, common defenses include repression, reaction formation, and sublimation, allowing socially acceptable emotional expression while managing narcissistic tension.

For instance, emotional restraint and caregiving—highly valued in Algerian society—can represent sublimated expressions of narcissistic energy. Rather than overt self-

admiration, recognition is sought through emotional mastery and relational competence (El-Hachemi & Bouziane, 2021, p. 188). These mechanisms transform narcissistic vulnerability into emotional intelligence, illustrating a culturally adaptive evolution of Freudian theory.

6. Clinical and Theoretical Implications:

Understanding narcissism and emotional intelligence among Algerian women carries profound implications for both psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice. From a theoretical perspective, the coexistence of culturally moderated narcissistic traits and adaptive emotional regulation challenges the Western-centric view of narcissism as purely pathological (Sedikides et al., 2024, p. 92). Instead, it supports a contextual model of selfhood, where emotional intelligence functions as a defense mechanism that stabilizes ego integrity under sociocultural constraints (Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 311).

Clinically, Algerian women often present ambivalent self-representations-oscillating between assertive self-affirmation and internalized modesty. Such patterns may mask narcissistic vulnerabilities behind socially sanctioned empathy and relational harmony (Simard et al., 2023, p. 178). Psychoanalytic interventions in this context should emphasize affective attunement and self-cohesion, rather than pathologizing self-focus. Therapists are encouraged to explore how cultural expectations of emotional restraint and altruism can both enrich and inhibit the development of authentic self-esteem (Hassan & Boudiaf, 2021, p. 204).

On a broader theoretical level, this intersection invites a re-evaluation of the relationship between narcissism and emotional intelligence within non-Western frameworks. By integrating cross-cultural psychoanalytic insights, scholars can move beyond the dichotomy of “healthy vs. pathological” narcissism and instead view self-regulation, empathy, and pride as interdependent constructs shaped by collective and familial identities (Morf et al., 2022, p. 259). For Algerian women,

the synthesis of emotional control and relational attunement reveals a culturally specific manifestation of resilience-what contemporary psychoanalysis terms *sublimated ego strength*.

Conclusion:

Through a psychoanalytic exploration, narcissism and emotional intelligence in Algerian women emerge as dynamically intertwined constructs. Narcissistic traits, far from being pathological per se, can foster resilience and emotional adaptability within constraining sociocultural systems. Emotional intelligence, conversely, serves as a refined ego function that manages narcissistic vulnerability.

In the Algerian context, where women navigate complex moral and social expectations, these psychological structures enable the preservation of self-integrity and relational competence. Thus, the psychoanalytic lens reveals not only the unconscious tensions beneath emotional expression but also the transformative potential of narcissism as a foundation for emotional intelligence.

Bibliography:

- 1-Benabdallah, L., & Mouffok, S. (2022). *Self-concept and emotional intelligence in Algerian women* (Unpublished master's thesis).
- 2-Bencheikh, R. (2023). *Narcissism and female identity in Algerian society* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Blida 2, Algeria.,
- 3-Bensalem, A. (2023). *Gender identity and modernity in North African societies: Psychological perspectives*. Algiers: ENAG Éditions.
- 4-Bion, W. R. (1962). *Learning from Experience*. London: Heinemann.
- 5-Castillo, R., & Extremera, N. (2021). *Gender differences in emotional intelligence: The role of culture and socialization*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 648658. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648658>.
- 6-Chikhi, S., & Rahmoun, F. (2023). *Family values and emotional intelligence among Algerian women: Sociocultural insights*. *Maghreb Studies Review*, 12(3).
- 7-Chodorow, N. (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 8-Daoud, Y., & Kobouch, A. B. (2025). *Emotional Intelligence (EI) in Interpreter Training in Algeria*. *Revue Algérienne des Sciences du Langage*, 10(1),

- 9-El-Hachemi, S., & Bouziane, A. (2021). *Emotional regulation among Algerian women: A socio-psychological study* (Unpublished master's thesis).
- 10-Fonagy, P., & Target, M. (2003). *Psychoanalytic Theories: Perspectives from Developmental Psychopathology*. London, UK: Whurr Publishers.
- 11-Fonagy, P., Gergely, G., Jurist, E. L., & Target, M. (2002). *Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and the Development of the Self*. New York, NY: Other Press.
- 12-Freud, S. (1914/2019). *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14, pp. 67–102). London: Hogarth Press.
- 13-Freud, S. (1923/2010). *The Ego and the Id* (Standard Edition, Vol. 19). London, UK: Vintage.
- 14-Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- 15-Hassan, L., & Boudiaf, R. (2021). Women, identity, and self-perception in postcolonial Algeria: A clinical perspective. *Journal of North African Studies*, 26(3).
- 16-Hiba, A., & Chergui, M. (2020). The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on the Psychological Well-Being of Nurses in the Healthcare Sector of Ghardaia, Algeria. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 57(7), 45–60.
- 17-Jauk, E., Weigle, E., Lehmann, K., Benedek, M., & Neubauer, A. C. (2017). The relationship between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 117, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.05.033>.
- 18-Kernberg, O. F. (1975). *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- 19-Kernberg, O. F. (2016). *The Inseparable Nature of Love and Aggression: Clinical and Theoretical Perspectives*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- 20-Kohut, H. (1971). *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*. New York: International Universities Press.
- 21-Kohut, H. (1977). *The Restoration of the Self*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 22-Mitchell, S. A., & Black, M. J. (2016). *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- 23-Morf, C. C., & Rhodewalt, F. (2001). Unraveling the paradoxes of narcissism: A dynamic self-regulatory processing model. *Psychological Inquiry*, 12(4), 177–196. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1204_1

- 24-Morf, C. C., Schürch, E., & Dufner, M. (2022). *The dynamic interplay of narcissism and self-regulation across cultures. Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 26(3).
- 25-Nguyen, N. N., Takahashi, Y., & Nham, T. P. (2022). *Relationship between emotional intelligence and narcissism: A meta-analysis. Management Research Review*, 45(10),. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-07-2021-0515>.
- 26-Nguyen, T., Johnson, M., & Carter, J. (2022). *Emotion regulation and self-concept in cross-cultural psychoanalytic theory. Journal of Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 58(2).
- 27-Schlegel, K., & Mortillaro, M. (2019). *The role of culture in emotion expression and perception. Current Opinion in Psychology*, 31,. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.06.010>
- 28-Sedikides, C., Rudich, E., & Gregg, A. (2024). *Adaptive and maladaptive narcissism revisited: A cross-cultural perspective. Journal of Personality*, 92(1).
- 29-Sedikides, C., Tang, Y., Liu, Y., de Boer, E., Assink, M., Thomaes, S., & Brummelman, E. (2024). *Narcissism and wellbeing: A cross-cultural meta-analysis. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672241307531>.
- 30-Simard, D., Morin, A., & Fortin, M. (2023). *Empathy and narcissistic adaptation: A psychoanalytic approach. Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 40(2).
- 31-Simard, V., Laverdière, O., Descôteaux, J., et al. (2023). *The relationship between narcissism and empathy: A meta-analytic review. Journal of Research in Personality*, 101, 104342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2023.104342>

