Shrink Rap Radio #561: Narcissism and Love
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David Van Nuys, PhD, aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Kenneth Kimmel
(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by James Stake)

Introduction: Today, my guest is Kenneth A. Kimmel, Jungian analyst, author, teacher, and consultant, with thirty years of clinical practice. We'll be discussing his 2011 book *Eros and the Shattering Gaze: Transcending Narcissism*. For more information about Kenneth A. Kimmel, please see our show notes on ShrinkRapRadio.com.

Dr. Dave: Ken Kimmel, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio!

Kenneth: Good to be with you.

Dr. Dave: Well it's good to have you here, all the way from Seattle.

Kenneth: Right.

Dr. Dave: Right. Well it's great to have you on the show. One of my listeners – Lisa Flatiger (sp?) I believe is her name – she wrote me multiple times suggesting you as a guest to talk about narcissism. So that's how we got here. Before we get into that, what can you tell us about your own personal journey that led you to become a Jungian analyst?

Kenneth: Oh boy, that's a really long story.

Dr. Dave: Well, give us the highlights of it.

Kenneth: So, to begin with, I have always felt like Jung has been stalking me. When I was about eight years old I joined a synagogue on Pico Boulevard in west LA.

Dr. Dave: I know that. I mean I know that area, I grew up in LA.

Kenneth: And across the street from the synagogue was this place, which I thought was a Chinese dentist at eight years old and it was called the Jung Institute.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, wow.

Kenneth: And it was only much later that I realized that it was in fact this area of study that I was so deeply drawn to, since late high school/early college, where a friend of mine, Tom Stone, he and I went to San Francisco State together and his uncle was Hal Stone who was the past president of the Jung Institute and he's the one who developed voice dialogue – for the old timers among your listeners that remember voice dialogue –

and we used to go over to Uncle Hal's house and just chat in high school and first years of college, and so it just felt like Jung was close by throughout my early life.

Dr. Dave: The name Max Zeller comes to mind. Was he the founder of that institute?

Kenneth: He was, and his wife for years and years and years ran the bookstore at the Jung Institute. I would go in there often. The book *Puer Aeternus* literally jumped off the bookshelf when I went in there, by Marie-Louise von Franz, which is of course I think the earliest narcissistic relation to the self, through the puer aeternus. So that was a very disturbing book for me, and the most enlightening book I'd read, in my early twenties. So my friend Tom, when we got to San Francisco State, he gave me a book to read and it was called *Demian* and it was by Hermann Hesse. He kind of initiated me in many respects to the world of Jung. *Demian* of course was written in a fortnight by Hesse, who was up in the Swiss Alps in a sanatorium, kind of a retreat really, and he was in intensive Jungian analysis over a couple months with this analyst there and it was during that time that he wrote *Demian*.

Dr. Dave: I didn't know that background on Hesse. That's very interesting.

Kenneth: So that's my early life. I call that my former life with classical Jungian analysis and now currently I'm more contemporary and I see Jung as an important light in the world of psychoanalysis, philosophy. I mean he was so steeped in so many different areas – anthropology, archeology, and so forth – but I see him as one of many important luminaries in the field of psychoanalysis and philosophy and theology, which I am interested in.

Dr. Dave: You mentioned in a conversation that we had before this that – you let me know – that you are drawn to other psychodynamic and philosophical approaches as well. And you mentioned Lacan and I've not read Lacan at all.

Kenneth: Well, I know enough Lacan to be dangerous.

Dr. Dave: Well, you know the tagline for this show is "enough psychology to make you… just a little bit dangerous," so…

Kenneth: Well you know, Lacan, I really begin my book with an idea that Lacan developed, which basically alienated him from particularly the American Psychoanalytic Association because he blew holes through the whole notion of ego psychology: that we're born with this undeveloped ego and it's our path in life to try to develop our ego, to strengthen our capacity to adapt to life and so forth and so on. Whereas Lacan saw the ego, similar to Winnicott in some ways, the object-relations British psychoanalyst, as a "false self," in a sense. So, when the baby is six months old, we're basically discombobulated, we're fragmented, we have no sense of self, there's no psychic structures that we have in time. And then mother comes to us and shows us our

reflection in the mirror and mother says, "that's you baby, that's you." And from that moment on, there's kind of a split between our disorganized, disjointed sense of our own inner being from that image of that perfected, whole view of who we appear to be. And we get this affirmation and this recognition from the mother and from the world that that's who we are. And we go through life, and we develop this false self that split off from our core, which is fragmented and uncertainty and psychotic. When we're a baby, we don't have any motor skills, none of that. As we grow up, we continue to extend that into life. Whereas we develop personas: we have to be the psychologist, we have to be the judge, we have to be the lawyer, we have to be whatever it is so that people see us, we're invested with this symbolic power by the sovereign authority out there in the world that sort of validates who we are. And we have to fight to the death to maintain that notion of perfection to the world. And that's so pervasive in our society and culture. It's sort of the way of things. So part of the notion behind the "shattering gaze," which is part of the title of the book…

Dr. Dave: Just for our viewers, I'm holding up the book right now.

Kenneth: …this notion of the shattering, it's the shattering of this illusion that can create distortions in perception in relationships where we have to maintain control over the world, over the relationships. Because of that basic fragmented self, we're terrified of venturing into on the one hand – you know, we're living at a time and culture where we're predisposed toward life at the surface of things: caring about eternal beauty and the perfect relationship and if that one doesn't work out, then easily disposable, we go on to the next one and so forth and so on. So I think that part of the shattering speaks to, often something traumatic that occurs in a narcissistic man's life – or a woman, but I focus more on the male perspective – that basically deconstructs our view of ourselves, our need for that false self to control our lives and our relationships.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I like the way that you presented that part where you touch on Lacan's theory of the very beginning of our self-awareness. And I struggled with that quote a little bit. I kind of wasn't sure that I could grab on to that but I think the context that you've given it right now, it's good for now. Now you wrote this book in 2011. It's a very scholarly book that looks to me like it would have taken a long time to write. How many years did you work on this book?

Kenneth: Let's see, I'm 67 now, probably I've been working on it for about 63 years I'd say, but the actual thinking of it and unconsciously living it in some ways but in terms of serious writing, ten years but I'd say a total of about fifteen in formulating a lot of the ideas but by about 2010 it was pretty much together. So we're talking about eight years ago.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. So it's almost, kind of, well it's an important part of your life's work, it sounds like it took a chunk out of your life and that it got started way back when you discovered that book on the puer aeternus in your teens!

Kenneth: Yes.

Dr. Dave: Wow. That's amazing and rare. The book addresses two levels of narcissism, really, which you just kind of alluded to. One level is a certain sort of male journey and the other level is about our culture here in the United States, which you characterize as narcissistic. So let's start with that part a little bit more. You made some reference to it. What leads you to characterize the US as narcissistic, as living on the surface, etc.? And is it just the US or is it the west?

Kenneth: I think it's western civilization. Yeah. Well, boy that is such a broad question and there's historical precedents for our culture. You go back to Plato and Plato's notion of the ideal, that his saying that the good and the beautiful go together, so there's this sense of this idealistic foundational truth that beauty and the good are privileged over the ugliness of nature and the senses and the human condition because the human condition changes and goes through deaths and rebirths whereas the ideal image of beauty, those forms are eternal. And I think that can be looked at as a dangerous precedent because it devalues the human, the common, the things that change, the things that are imperfect. So narcissism tends to maintain a sense of above time, that transcendent of the human condition, this kind of perfection. And so that carries forward. We have… I could go through various points of time but at the turn of the century, from the 1800s to the 1900s a great book, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*…

Dr. Dave: Oh yeah, you mentioned that book in your book…

Kenneth: Right. It's a classic example of the narcissistic character in our society, where there's this sense of maintaining eternal life and eternal beauty at the cost of the capacity to love. So Dorian Gray, it's sort of a gothic horror story on the one hand because the longer Dorian Gray stays young and youthful and beautiful, the more his reflection in this painting that was done by this artist starts to grow older and meaner and grotesque. So he falls in love with this beautiful actress who plays all the great roles in life and he's in love with love, so to speak. They have a love affair. And she naturally assumes, back then in the Victorian age, that they're going to marry and she'll of course stop her work as an actress and she'll have his babies, and he starts to pull away in this cold withdrawal like she's no longer the ideal object any longer, and she's come down to earth. He breaks it off with her in this cold way and then he finds out the next day that she's committed suicide. And he talks about how he feels this strange feeling like he's somehow in this romantic play but he's somewhat removed from it and he should be feeling remorse, he should be feeling terrible, but he kind of feels nothing. That in a nutshell is an aspect of what the object-relations folks describe as destructive narcissism: it's the destruction of links when people start to get too close, when things cease to be that idyllic, wondrous oneness that we all seek in romantic love, which is really… narcissism is underneath the process of romantic love.

Dr. Dave: And so we have plenty of contemporary examples, like selfies. What could be more obviously narcissistic than this obsession with selfies or the reality TV shows that we see and how people long to be famous for being famous, like the Kardashians and so on.

Kenneth: Well you're forgetting our president.

Dr. Dave: I was just going there! I'm not forgetting our president because you were saying "precedence," the word precedence and I was hearing that as, "yes, and there's a president too," so they say that we get the politicians we deserve and our current president is widely characterized as narcissistic. People who didn't even know the word narcissism now probably know it because he is so frequently characterized that way. Do you see his ascension to that office as somehow symptomatic of our national narcissistic psyche?

Kenneth: Well, I would go deeper than that. I think he has strong sociopathic qualities. So the extremes of destructive narcissism turn into sociopathic ones. Like in the Dorian Gray story, he has to destroy links. You know, there's this sense that he can't really feel empathy. That's an aspect of the sociopathic quality. I mean in all fairness, if we look at the other side of the political fence, Bill Clinton, with his affairs could be considered more defensively narcissistic, which is different than the destructive narcissism. Defensive narcissism is the looking for the one to feel complete. Let's back up a little bit. I know I'm getting off the track of the cultural icon but I'll circle back to the cultural. So, my contention is that of Neville Symington, who is an Australian-British object-relations psychoanalyst. He wrote a book on narcissism, which was a series of lectures that he gave that he taped – they're seminars really – that he taped with a small group. Very profound book. He talked about the notion of defensive narcissism as an early wounding in life, where the infant either through maternal deprivation or some sort of traumatic experience or some sort of experience of abandonment, some profound trauma where the infant turns in and develops a, Kalsched would call it a "self-care system," whereby in order to protect against the possibility of another wounding later in life that reminds them of the initial wounding with the mother or what have you, or that maternal container, and so the self-care system creates a kind of encapsulation of the ego so that whenever things start to get too close then there is the terror of the inner life and there is a terror of the outer life, of relationships becoming dangerous. And so, circling back to relationships, from what I heard, the scuttlebutt in Washington, D.C. at the time of Clinton's presidencies, whenever Hillary and Clinton had an argument and Hillary would storm off, he'd feel fragmented and he'd look to be restored through sexual liaisons. And this wouldn't have been necessarily only in the Oval Office or in the White House rather, but when he was governor, when he was younger, that he looked to restore himself through sexual fusion and then of course once it's lived out, then they're debased, then they're devalued objects, the one he looks to restore himself. You can look at that in a very broad way where many men will seek that type of, again, this notion of oneness, this attempt to be restored. I talk about the split feminine, which is

the notion of the man wants the safe, nurturing, stable, mothering-type wife and he gets bored and so he looks to be enlivened by the ingénue, by the femme inspiratrice, the inspirational woman, or the seductress, and he sort of swings between these two. When he gets too far out on a limb with this one who brings uncertainty and a threat to his stability, he swings back again to be restored by that mothering woman again, and he's sort of, he's always floating above life, never quite committed to either one, and destructive to both, ultimately.

Dr. Dave: Let me ask you about Jung himself, since we know that he had at least one long-term extra-marital relationship. Is he somehow part of that same dynamic and process that you're talking about? Somehow he mostly gets a pass from Jungians, you know, that he was special. So what's your take on that in the context of your book and all your work and thinking about this?

Kenneth: Well, in the same chapter about Clinton I talk about Jung. I primarily focus on his first experience, while I don't any longer believe that it was a sexual relationship but it was a deeply romantic relationship with Sabina Spielrein, who was his first psychoanalytic case. He was trying the new method, the talking cure, with her, and she was a patient originally and later assisted in the association experiments, she went to medical school, and she tried to repair things between Freud and Jung, unsuccessfully, and then she actually went and studied with Freud in Vienna and became really the first child psychoanalyst and went to Russia and taught and worked with children, traumatized children, and then was murdered by the Nazis when they invaded Russia. But absolutely, that dynamic between Freud and Spielrein and Emma, who was busy having babies while he had this profound transference-countertransference relationship. Back then, they didn't know what countertransference and transference was about, they really hadn't defined it. They basically defined it through this relationship. She basically was cured of her problems, and there's a lot of debate now as to what her diagnosis truly was, but basically they had a romantic love affair – probably kissing, holding, she talked about it as poetry – but most people assumed that it was a sexualized one but they were in Victorian era and there's pretty good research now by Dr. Lafane (sp?), who went and spoke to the living descendant of Spielrein. Jung was head over heels for her. She left him and he was despairing. So I think that desire for oneness, they were very romantic, they loved Wagner and all of his operas, and they fantasized the birth of their own psychological son Siegfried who is of course the character, and very important in Wagner's Ring Cycle as the Norse god, and very important to Jung in his dreams about Siegfried and the death of Siegfried in the Red Book and so forth and so on. But anyway, so very much so this split feminine dynamic going on between the two of them.

Dr. Dave: And I can really buy the idea of that intense romanticized relationship that was not sexual, or was not acted out sexually. I go back to my own adolescence where I was in a kind of religious environment and where there was this really passionate feeling for the girlfriend, you know, and it wasn't sexual. And jeez, just holding hands

would transport you to another realm. So I can identify a lot with this kind of man you are describing in the book, this eternal child man. Are we talking about a specific kind of male journey, I guess in extremes we are. Is there a more generalized way in which it's kind of true of most men, or not?

Kenneth: Well I think there's the understanding that the first love of our lives is mother, for all intents and purposes, and so we grow up idealizing that relationship to some extent, unless it's so horrific that we look to some other object to project that ideal onto. But certainly in adolescence, it's normal to have that idealization, but then I've had patients that have told me that once the ideal is broken, like they've kissed or she's done something that's broken the spell, then in the narcissistic male it's not a journey as much as kind of a repetition compulsion where that girl or woman becomes devalued, becomes imperfect, no longer the ideal, the idyllic one, and so you go on to the next one and then the next one and the next one, and then you learn to just be sexual, just lust, and to have those types of women, you keep them there in that place and then you can idealize the wife or the mother or what have you, but there's no kind of integrating process of finding the both in one person. It's like learning to accept the limitations. Again, I'm going to run back to Lacan for a moment here, and he has a lovely concept, and other people have talked about it in different ways, and Jung talked about it in different ways still, but he talks about "das ding," which is, which means, "the thing," and he describes it as some kind of fragment, some sort of remainder in the primal unconscious that can never be known, that we're always longing for, we're always longing to realize, whether it's in love or it's in art or it's in religion or what have you. But it always remains behind. In some ways, you can think of it as this maternal container, this idealized fantasy that we have no way of knowing but it's a fantasy because we're too young to conceptualize it, that we keep longing to realize but we can never quite find it. That lack, that basic lack, is always with us, that we're always longing to find and never fulfill. And on a basic level, it's what perhaps drives artists to create, or those of us who have a mystical bent, to seek and to search for that mystical oneness that can never quite be found. It's there, we touch, and then it flitters away, and we only get a glimpse, we can only see a glimpse. And in a sense, if we can accept that limitation as human beings, that we'll never know, there's always a level of uncertainty in life, we can accept limitations, the profound humanness, brokenness in our human being, we can learn to accept the limitations in the human other along with the moments, the glimpses of brilliance and beauty. So, relationships are not about oneness. Those are just fragmentary moments in time. It's really about accepting our sense of "twoness." Because otherwise, a person with a narcissistic predisposition, the moment that one starts to feel that oneness, they start to feel dependency, they start to feel vulnerability, and vulnerability has translated in the past to being hurt, or harmed, or fragmented in some kind way or controlled or entrapped, the terror of those things, then they're going to destroy that relationship and move away either through some kind of narcissistic wounding of the other person or withdrawal, deadness, turning away. But if, rather, if one can accept through the process of kind of developing one's own sense of themselves, or their own limitations, their own capacity to tolerate vulnerability and

dependency as an aspect of intimacy and then recognize that that other isn't looking to entrap you, vice versa you're not looking to try to control the other but they're whole unto themselves and I'm whole unto myself and I'm not needing them to fill me or to control me, then intimacy can come through dependency and vulnerability as natural things, because it's about twoness not about oneness. Does that make any sense?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, yeah! I really am getting off on what you're saying. I was interested in that, when you were talking about "the thing," that there was this sort of a positive aspect of this dynamic: that it can either go off the rails as a fixation, as a repetitive fixation as you pointed out but that there's also a variant of it that's a kind of channeling in the direction of reaching for the… reaching for the transcendent isn't always bad.

Kenneth: Yeah, knowing that you'll never truly, wholly, fully grasp it. It's a… there's an uncertainty factor. There's always gaps in our knowing. It kind of keeps us humble.

Dr. Dave: In the book you talk about psychotherapy as an important tool, or path, for getting out of that loop, that destructive loop, but you remark "among others," you said, "among others," and I wondered what are the "others," the other ways that people, that men who are trapped in some kind of a mother complex that gets them into this pattern, what are some of the other ways they get out?

Kenneth: Well, umm…

Dr. Dave: Maybe you don't see those people, because they don't come to you.

Kenneth: Well, no, I certainly have a sense of it. I mean some people are really deeply involved in recovery work. You know, the 12 Step stuff, whichever way it shows up, through sexual addiction or through alcohol or drug addiction, they find that way, that can be a way of working through some of this behavior. Often it helps people to learn how to behave as opposed to changing people at the core of things. But sometimes that's ok. Not everybody is cut out for psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic psychotherapy, you know deeper work. Some people find faith-based approaches that again, gives people a community, and through moral development if you will, they develop a sense of discipline, a capacity for truth-telling in their own communities, confessionals… I mean, that can help some people that aren't interested in kind of going the more lonely, individual route of a depth psychology of some kind, ongoing hard work. Nothing short term, but think ongoing. People I know that have studied for 20, 25 years Buddhism and those practices, you find that type of mature psyche rather than the more immature psyche that keeps looking to that romantic, narcissistic fantasy that something else, someone else is going to restore them. It's about maturation I think.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, interesting that you say maturation because certainly as I was reading the book, I was identifying with, you know to a large extent, it was tough going at times

– "jeez, it seems like he's kind of describing me to some extent here" – and I feel like I have aged out of that.

Kenneth: Yes, Jung used to say that. Jung used to say we don't overcome complexes; we outgrow them.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, interesting. And I'm thinking back to when I was a young man and I went to Spain and prostitution was an accepted institution there. Just for the record, I did not go to any prostitutes. I was a young man and I met a waiter at a bar and he talked me into coming and living with his family instead of paying money at the hotel, that was great. And I hung out with him at his bar and a lot of prostitutes hung out there as well and it was fun joking around with them and so on. But it seemed like at that time, in that culture, prostitution was kind of accepted, that men would go off on a bender periodically. And that's true, you know, to some degree in our own culture and other countries. Where does that fit, and it also raises, and I know these are big questions, issues that I'm raising here, we also should maybe talk about the psychology of the woman, because those men who are being the eternal boy, there's some eternal girl or something –

Kenneth: The puera.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that they're finding.

Kenneth: Yeah. Well they'll more often times than not find the mother because the puer you're speaking of, the eternal boy's often looking for the mother who is going to contain him and control him and that's going to set in motion issues of rebellion and all that. So we're talking about youth. I mean, Spain is a very religious country and so there's that sense of the compensatory at work: you don't marry out of wedlock, [I mean] you don't have sex out of wedlock, that sort of stuff… And so, the compensation for prostitution is understandable. And a young man, if that's an acceptable avenue in society then it's the norm; it's sort of regulated in a sense. But the problem arises when prostitution is in lieu of one's capacity to tolerate rejections when you're actually pursuing a real human relationship with all of its difficulties and problems. How does one tolerate the terrors of too much closeness or abandonment or being dropped, without resorting to swinging to the other side and trying to restore one's self through some sort of sexual fusion for a moment and then in turn, after the sexual act is over with, the loss of all feeling and you kind of drop that prostitute because it's a business arrangement and you can go on, you feel restored again. If that's a repetitious process then you're falling into that kind of defensive-destructive narcissistic patterning, and it goes on into one's twenties and one's thirties and one's forties, that's when it becomes pathological. But I mean, young men sowing their wild oats in various ways or women for that matter, sowing their wild oats. You know, that's something that young people do. The hormones are a lot different than they are for you and I now.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I'll say. You know in your book, your book is loaded with references to mythology and to contemporary films, which I really like because I'm a big movie-goer, and also to case histories. So feel free to sprinkle any of those in as we go along here. You've already mentioned *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Kenneth: Yes, yes. Well, one that comes to mind is one of the Arthurian romances, of Lancelot and Guinevere. Of course, Lancelot and Guinevere are the classic star-crossed lovers. She's married to the good King Arthur and yet she represents – those tales, those fables at the time were reenacting a lot of the Greek mysteries – where she's really, as the queen, she's nature's life-force and Lancelot as the knight, as the first knight, is sworn to serve her and the king. And he'll die for her and so in a sense he's in service to the Great Mother, from a mythological standpoint. And they're both terribly in love as well. So in one of these stories, it's called the Knight and the Cart, she's captured by this bad knight, this evil knight, who turns out to be the Lord of Death. So he takes her to the land, his realm of death, and Lancelot goes in search for her. He goes through all kinds of trials, temptations, like initiation steps in a sense where he has to find her at all costs and the last test is he's told he has to climb aboard this pillory cart. Pillory carts were meant to parade people around who were guilty of crime. So he would have to climb off his charger and climb onto the pillory cart. And he hesitates for just one moment before climbing aboard. It's like it's his pride or he doesn't want to be associated with that kind of lesser man. But he climbs aboard and then he finds her, he overcomes death, and he brings her back. And instead of being happy to see him, she turns away from him. She rejects him. And he goes insane. And he tries to kill himself. And he's just mad, he's gone mad. And several of these stories show, when she rejects him he goes mad. There's one other story where he goes into the woods and lives as a wild man and grows his hair long for years. Finally he comes out and she forgives him. So finally she relents in this story and she explains why she turned away from him and it's because of that one moment of hesitation, that his love for her wasn't certain, that he wasn't thinking of her above all else and that's why she turned away from him. So there's that sense of madness, the inability, because of this fusion, this desperate need to complete that sense of, of finding that missing piece, that "das ding" that their fusion represents, that drove him mad because he couldn't tolerate the sense of being a separate self, a separate being. I find that a very important metaphor for these types of romantic fusions, which Jung and Edinger described as the "death coniunctio." The coniunctio is that Latin word for the sacred union. It's a death coniunctio that ultimately leads into this, where one or both; it's like a sadomasochistic kind of relationship where it doesn't end well. It never ends well for these kinds of relationships, especially when they're younger. So that's one example that comes to mind. One more promising story is, which is probably one of my most favorite movies; it's the Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind with Kate Winslet and Jim Carrey.

Dr. Dave: I have to see it again because I saw it, I saw that you made reference to it, but I don't really – I need to see it again because clearly I didn't take away as much as there was there. So yeah, give us your version.

Kenneth: Well again, the longer version is in the book but basically, these two come together and, like many postmodern relationships, she's vibrant and crazy, she changes her hair color every month, he's introverted and studious and intellectual, and they're kind of opposites attract. She's wild and crazy and takes risks and he's very cautious, yet they make it work. And they're together over a few years and then finally they decide to break up just because they cease… he starts to sort of regress into kind of a critical judgmental side and she eggs him on and anyway… and the film goes back and forth in time so you never quite know; you have to see it several times before you understand the time changes in It. The temporality switches back and forth, so I'm giving you a linear version. So they split up and she goes to this place called Lacuna and "lacuna" is a Greek word but it has to do with those blank compartments in the mind where there's no knowing, there's no remembering, it's just an empty space. It's more than repression; it's literally where things are erased. So it's this medical facility that's able to erase memories of bad relationships. And so they spend a night using these tests on the brain and their computers and all this fantastical stuff, which thank God hasn't been created yet. It's to erase people's memory of a relationship that's gone bad so that they don't have to feel the pain of it. And that's a hallmark of narcissism, is the desire to destroy links to the other so that you don't have the previous lives – because somehow, they come back together again, through some sort of hypnotic suggestion in the eraser process. They find each other again on Valentine's Day and it's like they see each other for the first time, as strangers. And yet they begin to like each other and then the awareness of their previous life comes to light and they're listening to tape recordings of why they broke up with each other in the first place and you can see that they just die inside when they see, "oh my god, I'm attracted to this person but god, this is what we were like!" So they're going to break up and then he stops her in the hallway and she says, "why? Why are you doing this? We're only going to hate each other again. I'm going to be critical of you and you're going to be judgmental of me and we're never going to accept each other." And he says, "ok. Ok." It's sort of this recognition that our flaws are always with us, you know, our imperfections are always with us. And we will project our own hatred of our own inferiorities onto the other person if we're feeling insecure and insufficient in ourselves. And if we can kind of get that and that profound step of maturation, we can recognize the other is just a human being and yet despite that, can we accept their imperfections and our own? Then there's a possibility of finding a deeper kind of love, a love that's not based on this projection process of being the perfect one or the best sex or what have you, which, you know, goes away over time. So it's just, for me, probably one of the most profound stories. And the title, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, is based on a story, actually a historical story from two lovers from medieval times, Evelyn and Abelard. He was a scholar but of lowly origin and Evelyn was his pupil, who came from a very lofty family. And they fell in love and they wanted to be together. And her family found out about it and castrated him. And he went off to a monastery and he told her to do the same, their love could never be. And so she goes away and she becomes a nun and the two of them live separately. Then many many years later they correspond in writing. And she's written these poems,

which have to do with, “take this pain away from me. May my mind have eternal sunshine of the spotless mind.” It’s this desire to not have to feel the pain of the human relationship, where the two of them could kind of be together in this spiritualized place, above the human dimension and that’s where the name of the film comes from. It’s quite profound.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Wow, you’re such a good storyteller. Take us through one more film that everyone will have seen, which is The Graduate.

Kenneth: You’re dating your audience!

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I’m saying everybody will have seen it – I realized as I said that, that’s exactly what I’m doing.

Kenneth: Oh, my goodness…

Dr. Dave: A lot of people will have seen it.

Kenneth: Yeah, that’s right. Well basically, it’s another cultural, iconic story about this guy who’s depressed because he’s been invested by the sovereign authority that he’s a graduate now and the society, the culture’s going to say he’s going to go on and do great things in this world, and he ought to go into plastics, that’s where the real money is. Right?

Dr. Dave: Right.

Kenneth: And he’s terribly depressed because, like the child of the 60s, he’s lost and doesn’t know what to really do. So there’s these famous scenes of being down at the bottom of the swimming pool in his scuba mask looking up. And that’s a perfect example of sort of this narcissistic, depressive encapsulation where he just wants to be cut off from life, until he’s awakened by this older woman who is the wife of his father’s business partner: Mrs. Robinson. Right? Anne Bancroft. And Dustin Hoffman is of course the graduate. And you know, Song of Silence is broken by this lusty, sexual relationship, which brings him into life again, albeit it’s a sexual, physical life, but it’s embodied. And in a sense, Mrs. Robinson is the most real character in the film. She’s married to this guy she doesn’t love, she’s an alcoholic, she basically bides her time through affairs that she keeps discreet and all that. But anyway, he’s talked in… the families want to get the Robinsons’ daughter, Katherine Ross, Elaine is her name in the film, they want to fix up the two kids. And Mrs. Robinson of course is furious and she doesn’t want him, you know, he’s not good enough for her daughter, who she’s trying to protect for something else, you know, someone better than him. And anyway, they of course fall in love, Elaine and Ben, and then they’re torn apart and then he fights to redeem… he steals her away in this very romantic fashion from this wedding that she’s at. And the film ends where

the two of them are sitting, in her wedding dress, at the back of the bus and they're sort of looking at each other kind of like, "well what do we do now?"

Dr. Dave: Now that we've rebelled, what's next?

Kenneth: Yes, right. And so, I sort of fantasize about a kind of a more post-modern ending to this story where, what happens if the two in three months, she kind of comes to her senses and goes back to her pristinely manicured, safe life. Because she doesn't show that she has much of her own… she's sort of a two-dimensional figure, Elaine in the film… what if she just goes back to that safe world, this unliberated feminine woman? What does he do, then? And my fantasy is, maybe the loss of that ideal will drive him to such a narcissistic despair of not being able to tolerate the loss of "das ding," this ideal romantic other, that he goes down to the bottom of the pool this time lifeless… and dead. That he can't tolerate that and he suicides. So, that's my own fantasy about that.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's actually a whole bunch of other movies that more or less have that kind of a scenario. And maybe even temporally, culturally, a whole batch of movies, that kind of movie, came into being.

Kenneth: Yes.

Dr. Dave: Now, I'm wondering about your analytic practice given you spent so much time on this eternal child.

Kenneth: Yes, I've been typecast, in line with films. I work with a lot of men now.

Dr. Dave: That's what I was wondering.

Kenneth: And I work with a lot of women who have gone through very painful, horrific relationships, sometimes multiple relationships with men who are destructively narcissistic and they need some way of understanding the loss… sometimes ex-wives, sometimes girlfriends, sometimes in homosexual relationships, men who are with a man that is sort of acting out in a similar way. So it's not gender-specific, certainly.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Well, you've been generous with your time. Speaking of your practice, I know you have a client hour coming up in just a few minutes. Is there anything that you'd like to say to kind of close this off that maybe you were thinking that you would have a chance to say but you didn't get to?

Kenneth: Not really. It feels like a very lively conversation. You're really a good interviewer and you give the interviewee lots of space to kind of riff and go off. But you led me into areas that I have a lot of feeling and passion about. So you gave me an opportunity to say, I think, a lot of important things that men… it would be important

for men to know and to have a better understanding of, particularly for their relationships – the spouses, the people in their lives, or exes that have been deeply impacted by them.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Thank you. Well that's a wonderful place for us to close. So Kenneth Kimmel, I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Kenneth: You're very welcome.