



Removing the Mask of Kindness: Diagnosis and Treatment of the Caretaker Personality Disorder

By Les Barbanell

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Character traits may be used as defenses, or, 'coping mechanisms' that may be developed by individuals in an exaggerated fashion in order to conceal psychological conflicts. When these mechanisms break down, previously repressed trauma erupts into consciousness. One such trait is selflessness. Les Barbanell examines the transformation of selflessness into the Caretaker Personality Disorder and how it is not always better to give than receive, that being good can go bad, and that the 'disease to please' can even be fatal.

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- Sales Rank: #2058287 in Books
- Published on: 2006-10-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.76" h x .69" w x 6.02" l, .73 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 212 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

In his strikingly accessible language, Dr. Barbanell uncovers and elegantly elaborates what lies at the base of many individuals' relentless quest to help, to give, to empathize, and to heal. His investigation of the caretaking personality, particularly in light of its historical and traumatic antecedents, substantially deepens our understanding of the dynamics of human accommodation and its intent to preclude rejection and abandonment. Dr. Barbanell creatively explores and describes the developmental implications of the caretaking personality, who, with help, may strive to reach beyond the mandates and strictures of being-for-others and to restore instead a sense of self in relation to others that is centered on a balance of give-and-receive, eventuating in a more authentic connection with others. Especially compelling is Dr. Barbanell's practical elucidation of the vicissitudes of and necessity for our continuing search for human relatedness and authenticity. (William J. Coburn, Ph.D., Psy.D.)

Les Barbanell reveals a new and shocking defense mechanism that individuals use to hide psychological conflicts. The care taker personality disorder helps explain why an accommodating, sacrificing individual, who is always concerned with others, can end up miserable and feeling incomplete. A must read for anyone in the helping professions. (*United States Association For Body Psychotherapy Newsletter*)

At the risk of appearing too nice, I recommend this book as a potential source of intriguing ideas about selfishness, selflessness, and understanding the true self. (Michael Jaffe, Ph.D. *Nj Psychologist*)

Barbanell delineates the pathological side of selflessness and argues, as the title suggests, excessive kindness can serve as a psychological mechanism for concealing emotional problems. Working from a psychoanalytic framework, and supporting his arguments with abundant clinical case material, the author effectively charts the defining characteristics of a heretofore-unrecognized diagnostic category: caretaker personality disorder (CPD). Barbanell acknowledges that aspects of this personality pattern have been noted before, though they have not been thought of as a distinct psychiatric syndrome. The book is organized into three sections: the first deals with the etiology and psychodynamics of CPD; the second offers an extensive presentation of differential diagnosis (one very interesting chapter discusses psychotherapists who manifest CPD); the third looks at treatment. In an appendix, Barbanell offers his Selflessness Personality Scale, which he draws on in his discussion of diagnosis and treatment. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students, researchers, faculty, and professionals. (*Choice Magazine*)

Utilizing traditional work on sublimation, the later focus on childhood trauma, considerable clinical experience and contemporary relational paradigms, Dr. Barbanell has formulated a provocative and compelling new personality configuration and disorder. *Removing the Mask of Kindness* is of general relevance for psychotherapeutic work and has specific usefulness for those who provide psychological care. (Richard L. Munich)

About the Author

Les Barbanell, Ph.D. received his doctoral degree from Columbia University and trained in psychoanalysis at the New Jersey Institute for Training in Psychoanalysis where he is a faculty member, supervisor and control analyst. He is currently in private practice in Fort Lee, New Jersey and is a member of the New Jersey Psychological Association.

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