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### A Psychological Analysis Of Stalin

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These starred papers submitted by Brian A. Junkermeier in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University are hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF STALIN

by  
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B.S., St. Cloud State University, 1982

  
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St. Cloud State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

St. Cloud, Minnesota

January, 2011

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A Starred Paper

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

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Historians have argued that the motives for Joseph Stalin's behavior, with theories that span the personal, political and pathological, cannot be precisely determined. However, it appears that most agree it was not mental illness, but aspects of his personality, that motivated Stalin to kill millions of people in the Soviet Union. Over the decades, several books have suggested that Stalin was a psychopath, which was a logical explanation based on his outrageous behavior. In recent years, several psychological professionals have concluded that Stalin had a personality disorder and not a mental illness. While Stalin may not have been mentally ill, he exhibited psychopathic traits, and has been diagnosed with a malignant narcissistic personality disorder.

This paper will evaluate and discuss the important events in Joseph Stalin's life from childhood to the Russian Revolution of 1917, with concluding comments on the results of his destructive behavior. The goal is to analyze certain traumatic episodes in Stalin's life and attempt to explain his often controversial behavior using available psychological theories. A number of books and articles have been published that explore several possible psychological explanations for Stalin's actions throughout his lifetime. Actually, many historians have incorporated the conclusions of noted psychologists and psychiatrists in their work, which is labeled psychohistory. This area of history delves into the linkage or interaction of personality with the existing social and political situation, resulting in the personal factor becoming

historically important. This paper will weave some of the findings by psychological professionals and other secondary sources into a narrative on Stalin's formative years and into adulthood.

Some historians dismiss psychology as a tool in understanding Stalin and instead adapt a kind of demonology, with the theory that Stalin was completely inhuman and cannot be rationally analyzed. However, a negative consequence of demonizing is that it sets Stalin apart from humanity, which diminishes his own responsibility for his behavior. Additionally, demonizing potentially establishes unacceptable limits to the range of inquiry into problems of history and human psychology. Therefore, historians should be careful not to conclude that, if a person cannot be understood by traditional methods, he cannot be understood at all.

Many historians agree that Stalin could be labeled a sociopath, beginning as a young man, and that his personality appeared to be a bundle of contradictions through his entire lifetime. After all, he has been described as a womanizer, political fanatic, bank robber, intellectual, cynical pragmatist, counter-intelligence expert and a man of action. Unfortunately, for many individuals, Stalin's outlandish behavior and reactions to events in his life were consistent for friend or foe with no prejudice. For instance, Stalin's son Yakov shot himself supposedly because of resentment over Stalin's abusive behavior toward him. Yakov survived his wound and Stalin's response to the event was quite bizarre when he stated: "He can't even shoot straight."<sup>1</sup> Eventually, Yakov committed suicide by running into an electric fence in a German concentration camp after his father refused to trade captured German soldiers for his release.

It is important to analyze Stalin's personality against the background of the revolutionary movement and explain how Djugashvili became known as Stalin. This paper will briefly discuss Stalin's personality in his middle years, focusing on the discrepancies between reality and his ideal as a revolutionary hero. There are indications that Stalin required unlimited adulation to reassure himself and it has been suggested that he was fundamentally uncertain about his own worth. Another important aspect of Stalin's psychological makeup was his rejection of his ethnic background based on his birthplace of Gori, Georgia. It could be argued that Stalin's self-image demanded that he be associated with a revolutionary movement in a region with world importance, which would explain his disassociation from Georgia.

Stalin was born to a cobbler in the small town of Gori to a family with severe material poverty and continual parental conflict. Evidence indicates that Stalin was a gifted and unusually sensitive child who suffered early traumatic psychological experiences because of his father's brutality toward him. His father was a violent man who drank heavily and had a hard time making a living, which apparently contributed to his highly volatile personality. As a young man, Stalin and his mother received frequent and undeserved violent beatings from his father.

These traumatic occurrences had a profound influence on Stalin and eventually made him as heartless as his father. Stalin's father was so violent, that on more than one occasion, he physically abused Stalin to the point where he would have blood in his urine for several days. Eventually, Stalin began to retaliate and on one occasion threw a knife at his father, narrowly missing his head. It is quite apparent,

that the violent behavior that became such an important part of Stalin's adult life started at home and unfortunately his mother frequently participated in the violence directed toward her son.

In addition to his drunken father, the street fighting culture of Gori contributed to the formation of Stalin's personality. Gori was one of the last towns in Georgia to practice the custom of free-for-all town brawls with drunken priests acting as referees. Also, the Gori saloons and bars were well known for their violence and crime. In addition, Gori was a village where children were daily getting into skirmishes either as the perpetrator or the recipient of violent behavior. Within this environment of early childhood violence and turmoil, Stalin learned to fight for himself and developed the attributes and skills of a survivor. The town offered Stalin a ready made hostile environment and a simplified division of people into either friends or enemies, which is how he categorized individuals for the rest of his life.

Stalin's father failed as an artisan and left the family to work in a factory in Tiflis when Stalin was five years old. For the rest of his childhood, Stalin and his mother lived in the house of a priest without his father. Stalin's mother Yekaterina, enrolled him in the Gori Church School in 1888 and Stalin graduated in 1894 near the top of his class. While at the school, he had a reputation for being callous toward his fellow students and was in trouble with the school authorities for being insubordinate on several occasions.

At his mother's urging, Stalin applied for and won a small scholarship to the Tiflis Theological Seminary, where he enrolled in September 1894. Stalin's mother



wanted him to be a priest and she worked hard to help him afford the tuition. The Tiflis Seminary had a repressive atmosphere that was a cross between a monastery and a barracks. However, while at the seminary, Stalin was exposed to subversive ideas much like the freer atmosphere of a traditional university.

The Tiflis Seminary, although a religious institution, did not limit its instruction to church teachings. It was also Georgia's principle center of higher learning, drawing upper class students from across the region. This set the scene for conflict between the strict Russian Orthodox priests who administered the school and the secular Georgian student body. Ironically, the liberal church education helped to form the mind of a man who eventually became known for his dogmatism. Later in life, Stalin would make the observation that the seminary had made him a rebel out of protest against the humiliating regime and its hypocritical methods.

While at the seminary, Stalin was exposed to Marxism and found a natural attraction to the inevitability of class war and the potential overthrow of any unjust or corrupt social order. The attraction was psychological and intellectual since it appealed to the powerful but destructive emotions of hatred and resentment, which were important parts of Stalin's character as a consequence of his violent early childhood. Marxism provided him with a fixed intellectual framework of ideas, which perfectly fit his need for a substitute to the system of dogmatic theology in which he had been trained and could not accept. By the time he was twenty, Stalin had determined that he was going to become a professional agitator whose mission was the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order.

The seminary was an oppressive and joyless place intended to turn unruly Georgians into loyal Russian subjects. Stalin was not happy at the seminary and he became withdrawn, choosing to spend much of his time alone with a book. His fellow students observed that he was quick to take offense, even when none was intended. Eventually, Stalin became adept at concealing the majority of his feelings and nursed his hatred for authority when it was exercised over him by others. Likewise, he was scornful of those who upheld authority and those stupid enough to submit to it.

Stalin learned to survive in the seminary and observed firsthand a closed society in which conformity was enforced by a system of spying, denunciation and fear. He was expelled in 1899 from the seminary after missing his final exams. In addition, the seminary records suggest Stalin was unable to pay his tuition fees and was in trouble with the school authorities after being caught reading prohibited books for the thirteenth time. Stalin's mother wanted him to attend the seminary to become a priest and to be well educated enough to escape the drudgery of a lower class existence. Later, when Stalin ruled all of Russia, his mother told an interviewer that she would have preferred for him to have entered the priesthood.

Between 1899 and 1917, Stalin lived the life of a revolutionary agitator frequently subject to the risk of arrest and he was regularly in prison or exiled. He kept busy while engaging in propaganda and agitation activities along with armed robbery to survive economically. Stalin spent these early revolutionary years living on the edge of ordinary society and very close to the criminal world. He liked and respected the criminal mind which was ruthless and realistic in its recognition of self-interest as the

only motive to guide a person's actions. In 1903, Stalin joined Lenin's Bolsheviks and was eventually marked by the tsar's secret police for his activities as a full-time revolutionary outlaw. Stalin became one of the Bolshevik's chief operatives in the Caucasus region organizing paramilitary action, inciting strikes, spreading propaganda and raising money through robbery or extortion.

During this period, Stalin lived from hand to mouth and relied on comrades for a place to sleep or hide. Through experience, Stalin learned how to effectively explain the Marxist message in very simple terms to the workers at the strikes he helped to organize. While engaging in these activities, Stalin was captured and sent to Siberia seven times and escaped five times resulting in liberty for only a year and a half from 1908 to 1917. Most of those who knew Stalin in prison, recollect a man who subjected himself to discipline and was a confident debater with an argumentative personality.

In 1917, after returning to St. Petersburg from exile, Stalin ousted the editors of Pravda and began to actively support Alexander Kerensky's provisional government. Stalin had created Pravda several years before out of an existing party newspaper. However, after Lenin prevailed at the April 1917 Party conference, Stalin and Pravda supported overthrowing the provisional government, which Kerensky was still leading. At the Party conference, Stalin was elected to the Bolshevik Central Committee, which was an important event for his political career.

After Lenin participated in an attempted revolution, Stalin helped Lenin evade capture and ordered besieged Bolsheviks to surrender in order to avoid a bloodbath.

Eventually, Stalin smuggled Lenin to Finland and assumed leadership of the Bolsheviks in his absence. After the jailed Bolsheviks were released to help defend St. Petersburg in October 1917, the Bolshevik Central Committee voted in favor of insurrection. On November 7, Stalin, Lenin and the rest of the Central Committee, from the Smolny Institute, coordinated the coup against the Kerensky government. Kerensky left the capital to rally troops at the German front and by the next day the Winter Palace had been stormed and Kerensky's cabinet arrested.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 aided Stalin in gaining influence in the party. However, he was not a great revolutionary leader and did not demonstrate quick thinking or decisiveness when given the opportunity. Stalin's failure to play the leading role in the revolution inflicted a deep and lasting trauma to him psychologically because it did not measure up to his vision of personal glory. However, after four blank years of exile, Stalin was able to learn from the experience of being at the center of one of the great episodes of revolutionary history. Stalin had an inquiring mind and this was one of the advantages he had over Trotsky in future power struggles. Ultimately, Stalin came to power as the result of a genuine revolution. However, Stalin did not make the revolution any more than he created the party that carried it out, since the central figure in both cases was Lenin.

In reality, Stalin's role in 1917 was neither as prominent, as portrayed by altered official accounts, nor was it as insignificant as Trotsky and Stalin's other enemies claimed. Apparently, Stalin was highly regarded by Lenin as an able administrator but not as a theoretician or leader. Nonetheless, Stalin did play a major

role in devising the state structure which formed the basis of the constitutions of the Russian Republic in 1918 and the Soviet Union in 1924. Eventually, Lenin was exposed to Stalin's rumored unsettling behavior which had been a concern of several other members in the party. As a result, before Lenin's death in 1924, his "Testament" suggested that Stalin be removed from his post because of his rudeness and extremely violent behavior. Unfortunately for many people, Lenin's wishes were never realized and the "rest is history."

Historical documents substantiate that when the opportunity occurred, Stalin modified the official record and information was withheld to show him playing a more important role in the revolution. As an example, Trotsky was replaced by Stalin as Lenin's second in command during the revolution. Additionally, although Lenin remained the great leader who "returned to Russia," Stalin was placed on the same level with the claim that he was the leader who "never left Russia." Clearly, Stalin saw Lenin as his lifetime hero figure while his mental and emotional image of himself was that of being Lenin's most loyal disciple.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, some historians have used professionals in the area of psychiatry as a source in their biographical sketches of historical individuals. In reference to Stalin, historian Robert Tucker has suggested that Stalin developed a neurotic personality as a result of his childhood beatings from his father. Tucker references psychologist Karen Horney's work on neurosis for his conclusions on Stalin's personality which he incorporates in his book—*Stalin as Revolutionary: A Study in History and Personality*. Horney's research demonstrates that a child

traumatized experiences anxiety and searches for firm ground on which to build an inner security. According to Horney, Stalin's search for security probably caused him to form an idealized image of himself and he eventually adapted it as his true identity.<sup>2</sup>

As a youth, Stalin had an interest in Georgian literature with his favorite being *The Patricide* by Alexander Kazbegi. The book is a story about Koba, a Caucasian Robin Hood, who defies the Cossacks while defending the rights of the peasants and avenging his friends. Stalin took the name Koba and continued to use it for many years until he began to adapt the pseudonym of Stalin. He wanted to be another Koba and, like the character in the book, strived to become a famous fighter and hero.

Another psychiatrist, Erich Fromm concluded that the cause of conflict between Stalin and his father was due to an increasing withdrawal into a world of fantasy to avoid the terrible reality of his violent home.<sup>3</sup>

Psychiatrist Erik Erikson developed a theory that the physical abuse endured by Stalin resulted in an identity crisis in adolescence. According to Erikson, if a young person fails to overcome the "crisis in adolescence," which constitutes establishing an identity for themselves, serious psychological damage will certainly follow. Erikson formulated eight stages of psychological development through which a healthy individual should pass from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage, the person confronts and hopefully masters new challenges, with each stage building on the previous one. Erikson concludes that the challenges of stages not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as problems in the future.<sup>4</sup>

Erikson has been described as an “ego psychologist” and he studied the stages of development spanning an entire lifetime. Each of Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development are marked by a conflict, for which successful resolution will result in a favorable outcome. Erikson’s research suggests that each individual must learn how to hold both extremes of each specific life stage challenge in tension with one another, not rejecting one end of the tension or the other. Eventually, when both extremes in a life stage challenge are understood and accepted as both required and useful, the optimal virtue for that stage surfaces. For instance, trust and mistrust must both be understood and accepted, in order for realistic hope to emerge as a viable solution at the first stage.<sup>5</sup>

The first stage of Erikson’s theory centers upon the infant’s basic needs being met by the parents. The infant depends on the parent, especially the mother, for food and sustenance. According to Erikson, the child’s relative understanding of the world and society comes from the parents and their interaction with the child. Consequently, if caregivers are consistent sources of comfort and affection a child trusts that others are dependable or reliable. Conversely, if they are neglectful, or more importantly abusive, the child instead learns mistrust. As a result, the world is seen as an unpredictable, undependable and possibly a dangerous place. Erikson has discovered, with empirical evidence, that people who resolve the crisis of early adolescence are best equipped to handle the problems of early adulthood and beyond.

Dr. Daniel Siegel has discovered that traumatic experiences often involve a threat to the physical or psychological integrity of the victim. According to Siegel, if

the traumatizing individual is someone in a position of trust, such as a parent, relative, friend or teacher, the sense of betrayal can play an important role in the meaning of the experience. In Stalin's case, his father's abusive behavior could have been viewed as rejection by both parents, since his mother allowed the behavior and even participated in the violence. Actually, Stalin's reaction to his parent's behavior could have included a behavior impulse to flee accompanied with bodily sensations of tension and perhaps pain. Ultimately, according to Siegel, an individual's memory of abuse can cause them to be overwhelmed with a sense of rejection, fear, anger, despair and shame.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Daniel Alkon has committed his professional life to diagnosing the secret of how to reverse the effect of early child abuse and has concluded that it is an impossible task. According to Alkon, the actual biology of experiences which influence our brain activity is not the same in most of adulthood as it is in early childhood. The adult brain is to a significant degree hard-wired and cannot be retrained because experiences are ingrained and built into a permanent template. Therefore, the networks will not change with learning in adulthood as they potentially can when we are growing up because the chemistry of personality has been determined. Unfortunately, a person traumatized by abuse cannot dissolve the hard-wired networks of increasingly thick myelin built up over months and years of emotional trauma, which prevents a reversal of the early abuse.<sup>7</sup>

After extensive study of his background and behavior, psychologists Erik Erikson and Erich Fromm both have diagnosed Stalin as having a malignant



narcissistic personality disorder. As a malignant narcissist, Stalin invented and projected a false and fictitious self for the world to fear or admire. He maintained a tenuous grasp on reality to start with and it was further exacerbated by all the trappings of power. Stalin had grandiose self-delusions and fantasies of omnipotence which were supported by real life authority. In addition, Stalin fostered and encouraged a personality cult, with all the hallmarks of any institutional religion.

Dr. Sam Vaknin, an acknowledged authority on narcissism, agrees with the diagnosis of Stalin as a malignant narcissist. He concludes that Stalin is an example of a narcissist who believes that no subject is as important as himself. Also, Stalin had a callous and ruthless personality which fits the narcissistic norm. Vaknin argues that people generally underestimate the manipulative genius of pathological narcissists which was the case in Stalin's world. According to Vaknin, narcissists project such an imposing personality that it overwhelms those around them, while they shape their world and ultimately reduce others to their own inverted image. Vaknin believes that narcissists selfishly have no interest in things that do not help them to reach their personal objective. Instead, they are focused on one thing alone and that is power as their obsessive goal. All other issues are meaningless to them and they do not want to waste their precious time on trivialities. Finally, Vaknin is convinced that one major determining factor in the development of a narcissistic personality is childhood abuse.<sup>8</sup>

Narcissism is a concept originally formulated by Freud in relation to early infancy. However, it is now accepted more broadly to describe a personality disorder in which the natural development of relationships to the external world has failed to

take place. In such a state, only the narcissist himself, with his or her needs, feelings and thoughts are important. Consequently, everything and everybody pertaining to the narcissist's world are experienced as fully real with everything else lacking reality or interest.

In the field of psychology, a narcissistic personality disorder is defined as a condition with the following characteristics:

(a) a long-standing pattern of grandiose self-importance and an exaggerated sense of talent or achievements; (b) an exhibitionistic need for attention and admiration; (c) either cool indifference or feelings of rage, humiliation and emptiness as a response to criticism or defeat; (d) various interpersonal disturbances, such as feelings of entitlement to special favors, taking advantage of others along with an inability to empathize with the feelings of others.<sup>9</sup>

Malignant narcissism, a term first coined in a book by Erich Fromm in 1964, is a syndrome consisting of a crossbreed with the narcissistic personality disorder, the antisocial personality disorder as well as paranoid traits. The malignant narcissist differs from a narcissistic personality disorder in that the malignant narcissist derives higher levels of psychological gratification from accomplishments over time (thus worsening the disorder). Because malignant narcissists become more involved in this psychological gratification, they are apt to develop the antisocial, paranoid and schizoid personality disorders. The term malignant is added to the term narcissist to indicate that individuals with this disorder tend to worsen in their impulse controls and desires over time.<sup>10</sup>

Psychologist Sandy Hotchkiss has identified the seven deadly sins of narcissism:

1. Shamelessness—Shame is the feeling that lurks beneath all unhealthy narcissism and the inability to process shame in healthy ways.

2. Magical thinking–Narcissists see themselves as perfect by using distortion and illusion known as magical thinking. They also use projection to dump shame onto others.
3. Envy–A narcissist may secure a sense of superiority in the face of another person's ability by using contempt to minimize the other person.
4. Arrogance–A narcissist who is feeling deflated may inflate by diminishing, debasing or degrading somebody else.
5. Entitlement–Narcissists hold unreasonable expectations of particularly favorable treatment and automatic compliance because they consider themselves special.
6. Exploitation–can take many forms but always involves the exploitation of others without regard for their feelings or interests.
7. Bad Boundaries–Narcissists do not recognize that they have boundaries and that others are separate and are not extensions of themselves.<sup>11</sup>

According to Freud, healthy narcissism exists in all individuals and he believed that it is an essential part in normal development. The love of the parents for their child and their attitude toward their child could be seen as a revival and reproduction of their own narcissism. The child has an omnipotence of thought and the parents stimulate that feeling because, in their child, they see the things that they never reached themselves. As a result, the parents tend to overvalue the qualities of their child. However, when parents act in an extreme opposite style and the child is rejected or inconsistently reinforced, depending on the mood of the parent, the needs of the child are not met.<sup>12</sup>

Healthy narcissism has to do with a strong feeling of “own love” which protects a human being against illness. Eventually, an individual must love the other in order to not become psychologically ill. According to Freud, a person becomes ill as a result of the frustration which occurs when he or she is unable to love the object. Healthy narcissism is a structural truthfulness of the self, achievement of self and a synchronizing between the self and the superego while balancing the libido with

aggressive drives. Ultimately, healthy narcissism forms a constant, realistic self-interest and mature goals resulting in an ability to develop deep relationships. Finally, healthy narcissism represents the functioning of narcissism as an emotional immune system for safeguarding the familiarity and the well-being of the individual against invasion by foreign sensations. Conversely, in pathological narcissism, such as the narcissistic personality disorder and schizophrenia, the person's libido has been withdrawn from objects in the world and produces megalomania.<sup>13</sup>

In Stalin's case, his narcissistic personality traits and his paranoid tendencies played an extremely important role in his behavior. Stalin was convinced that he was a genius and was picked to play a unique historical role. His paranoia led him to believe that the world was a hostile place peopled with jealous and treacherous enemies engaged in a conspiracy to pull him down and they had to be destroyed. Unfortunately for many, the systematic nature of Stalin's obsessive delusions, typical of the paranoid's mental world, caused Stalin to continually be preoccupied with the collection of evidence against others which resulted in terrible consequences for perceived enemies. The earliest diagnosis of Stalin as paranoid appears to have been made in December 1927, when a leading Russian neuropathologist, Professor Vladimir Bekhterev from Leningrad, met Stalin at a conference and had a private meeting with him. After the visit, Bekhterev told his assistant Mnukhin, that Stalin was a typical case of severe paranoia and that a dangerous man was now at the head of the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup>

Research indicates that individuals with narcissistic personalities are more likely to emerge as leaders. However, studies suggest that once in power they do not perform any better than others in the same leadership role. Additionally, there is evidence that narcissistic leaders tend to engage in risky decision making and can potentially be destructive leaders in many ways. Finally, group studies indicate that narcissistic individuals not only rated themselves as leaders, but other group members also saw them as the people to lead.

Obviously, all individuals with a narcissistic personality do not become world leaders or important historical figures. Like all human behavior, the large number of variables and intangibles make it difficult to accurately predict human action. After all, character and motivation are not static qualities, as they continually undergo growth or change. Also, individuals do not come to power without the support of the populace unless there is an authoritarian form of government in place. Additionally, the social, economic and political climate, in any country, is an important factor in determining a potential leader's role in history.

The nineteenth century philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle formulated the Great Man theory in history. Its premise was that the history of the world was basically a story of great men and their actions. This theory is usually contrasted with the theory that events occur in the fullness of time or when overwhelming smaller events result in certain developments occurring.<sup>15</sup> The Great Man theory is out of vogue in historical study at the present, with historians not agreeing with its premise for understanding human history.

Herbert Spencer was extremely critical of Carlyle's formulation of the Great Man theory for explaining historical events. Spencer believed that attributing historical activity to the decisions of individuals was a hopelessly primitive, childish and unscientific position and his approach fits Stalin.<sup>16</sup>

Most historians believe that economic, social and technological factors are far more important in explaining history than the decisions made by any one individual. As an example, it was not inevitable that Stalin would come to power in Russia based on his personal attributes, talent and ambition. Like other leaders, Stalin was a product of his environment and the time period in which he lived. Consequently, the historical events that occurred around him, during his lifetime, were not all a direct result of his initiative.

In addition to Stalin's malignant narcissistic disorder, another important aspect of Stalin's personality was his continual employment of the internal security operations of repression, projection and rationalization. Psychological professionals define all three of these behaviors as defense mechanisms, which are an unconscious reaction pattern employed by the ego to protect itself from the anxiety that arises from psychic conflict.<sup>17</sup> Psychiatrists acknowledge that the use of defense mechanisms are a normal means of coping with everyday problems, but when used in excess it becomes pathological behavior. Throughout his life, Stalin's failure to measure up to his lofty standards and grandiose expectations of himself was unbearably painful. As a result, a violation of his norms of achievement, which were implicit in his revolutionary self-concept, aroused shame and hatred toward himself. Stalin had established a pattern of

behavior which utilized these three defense mechanisms regularly to avoid these unpleasant feelings.

The use of repression allowed Stalin to ignore, deny or forget a potentially disturbing fact by thrusting it out of his conscious awareness. This helped Stalin to hold on to his pride system and preserve his rigid self-righteous posture in spite of everything. In Stalin's world, repression operated as a defense mechanism in tandem with projection. For instance, facts thrust out of awareness because of their inconsistency with the self-concept tended to reappear in Stalin's perception of others. Consequently, Stalin would give vent to the self-incriminating feelings that this discordance aroused in him as recriminating feelings. The defense mechanism of projection performed the cathartic service of preventing painful or embarrassing facts to enter Stalin's consciousness. In addition, it gave Stalin the opportunity to give uninhibited expression to the emotions associated with them.

The defense mechanism of rationalization gave Stalin the option of subjecting facts to an interpretation that made them consistent with his self-image. His self-consciousness was focused upon the attributes and exploits of genius that made up the lofty paragon of self. Stalin had to be internally aware of the negative personality traits of underhandedness, rudeness, duplicity and cruelty which were important parts of his demeanor. However, Stalin attempted to reconcile these traits with the idealized image of himself by rationalization. Therefore, Stalin did not scale down his personal assessment in the face of clear evidence of a disparity between the man he had aspired to be and the actual man that existed.

Stalin needed a cult of personality as a prop for his psyche as well as for his power. Many people have viewed Stalin as a power seeker, which is an extreme oversimplification of the motivation behind this complicated person's behavior. Without question, Stalin was a formidable master of the techniques of accumulating power. He had an amazing ability to plan ahead, to conspire, to dissimulate and to size up others as potential assets or obstacles in his path. Stalin disclosed to associates, that his greatest pleasure came from planning the demise of perceived enemies and carrying the plan to fruition. According to Stalin, he experienced the greatest sense of satisfaction and the best sleep upon the successful completion of a plan to eliminate a perceived adversary.

As the leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin preferred the glamour and well orchestrated illusions over the reality of actual accomplishments. Clearly, in many ways, his reign was a combination of smoke and mirrors, especially in reference to the fictitious allegations utilized to eliminate innocent people. When Stalin felt threatened in any way, he would lash out or erupt against the proposed perpetrator with violence and virulence without hesitation. Ruthlessness, in Stalin's eyes, was a sovereign virtue to be curbed only for the sake of expediency. Stalin had a sense of mission that provided an automatic justification for his behavior and armed him against any feelings of compassion or guilt for the millions of lives he destroyed as the agent of historical necessity. After all, the Russian revolutionary tradition made it a virtue to show complete indifference toward human life in the pursuit of a more just and equal society.



The key to understanding Stalin is recognizing that he was entirely serious about his historic role. He saw himself, not as a tyrant or evil man, but as a leader prepared to devote his entire life to a higher cause. Outwardly, Stalin gave the impression of being completely in control of himself, but beneath the surface passions ran deep. He had a passion for autocratic power which relieved him of the need to consult or listen to anyone. Without exception, those who opposed Stalin were exposed to revengeful behavior that in many cases ended their lives.

It has been well documented that Stalin was directly involved in the butchery which took place for many years in Russia. He personally issued hundreds of thousands of death warrants with his signature on them and was present at the capital show trials of many former comrades. Some of the warrants were prompted by a "KGB" quota, which Stalin agreed to have enforced. Under Stalin, an estimated ten percent of the Russian population was at one time imprisoned. The torture and mutilation of people was a common practice in the operations of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), which was often carried out in front of the victim's family. Apparently, Stalin took a personal delight in inflicting pain and gained some psychological pleasure from personally supervising the elimination of his enemies.

Stalin implemented his collectivist schemes and used terror, mass murder, forced resettlement, prison camps and the seizure of households to achieve his goals. The coercion needed to carry out the state's policies caused a huge increase in the size and the power of the secret police. Under Stalin's rule, there was a complete suppression of free opinion in the arts and literature. In addition, during the 1930s, the

government continually persecuted the Russian Orthodox Church and eventually a countless number of churches were leveled with tens of thousands of priests, monks and nuns either harassed or killed. It is impossible to comprehend the pain and suffering endured by the Russian people as a result of Stalin's actions.

In conclusion, it is apparent that Stalin was an intelligent man with above average problem solving skills and a never ending drive to control his destiny. Stalin had a childhood in which he was regularly physically abused and lived close to a poverty level existence. Many individuals that have experienced violent psychological trauma, in their developmental years, strive to control their current and future environment in response to those experiences. Stalin had personality characteristics like his mother as he was strict, firm, stubborn, unbending and highly demanding of himself. Stalin's raw intelligence and drive, together with cunningness and adaptability, made it possible for him to survive a tumultuous childhood.

However, Stalin psychologically carried the remnants of his experiences to his grave, spreading pain and suffering to all on his path to power. Unfortunately, for millions of people, Stalin drove himself off the psychological "map" and became one of the greatest mass murderers of all time. Stalin displayed the characteristics of an individual driven by the desire for power with no forethought of the repercussions for him personally or for the general population. For Stalin, the distinction between personal and political relationships was a foreign concept throughout his life. He could never exclude the play of personal passion from his relations with political associates, especially party members.

Stalin's contemporaries often observed that he devoted his whole being to politics and the struggle for power. Consequently, people who weren't personally close were always more important to him than those who were, such as his immediate family members. Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva Stalin, observed that "he was a bad and neglectful son, as he was a father and husband."<sup>18</sup> It is incomprehensible that Stalin had no remorse or guilt concerning his activities toward his fellow Russians, which resulted in such enormous human suffering and loss of life. Clearly, Stalin was guilty of having "bad boundaries," which is one of the characteristics of his malignant narcissistic personality disorder. It becomes quite apparent that Stalin's psychological diagnosis is extremely accurate when his abhorrent behavior is carefully considered.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Alex De Jonge, *Stalin and the Shaping of the Soviet Union* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 386-387.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879-1929* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1973), XIV.
- <sup>3</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 6-9.
- <sup>4</sup> Erik Erikson, *Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton and Company, 1968), 211-213.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.
- <sup>6</sup> Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Shape Who We Are* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 382-383.
- <sup>7</sup> Pierce Howard, *The Owner's Manual for the Brain-Everyday Applications from Mind-Brain Research* (Austin, TX: Bard Press, 2006), 255.
- <sup>8</sup> Sam Vaknin, *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited* (Czech Republic: Narcissism Publications, 2001), 180-184.
- <sup>9</sup> American Psychological Association, *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007), 608.
- <sup>10</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1964), 108-110.
- <sup>11</sup> Sandy Hotchkiss, *Why Is It Always About You: The Seven Deadly Sins of Narcissism* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 2003), 203-206.
- <sup>12</sup> Peter Fonagy, *Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 89-91.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 360-362.

<sup>15</sup> American Psychological Association, 262.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes and Brother, 1888), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 34.

<sup>18</sup> De Jonge, 351.

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