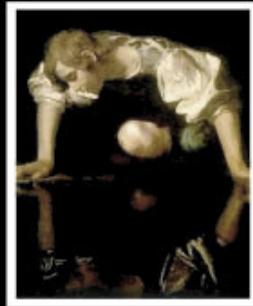


Malignant Self Love

Narcissism Revisited



Sam Vaknin, Ph. D.

Malignant Self Love

Narcissism Revisited

1st EDITION
8th Revised Impression

EXCERPTS - NOT the full Book!

Sam Vaknin, Ph.D.

The Author is NOT a Mental Health Professional.
The Author is certified in Counselling Techniques.

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FOREWORD

Hello. Recognize me? No? Well, you see me all the time. You read my books, watch me on the big screen, feast on my art, cheer at my games, use my inventions, vote me into office, follow me into battle, take notes at my lectures, laugh at my jokes, marvel at my successes, admire my appearance, listen to my stories, discuss my politics, enjoy my music, excuse my faults, envy me my blessings. No? Still doesn't ring a bell? Well, you have seen me. Of that I am positive. In fact, if there is one thing I am absolutely sure of, it is that. You have seen me.

Perhaps our paths crossed more privately. Perhaps I am the one who came along and built you up when you were down, employed you when you needed a job, showed the way when you were lost, offered confidence when you were doubting, made you laugh when you were blue, sparked your interest when you were bored, listened to you and understood, saw you for what you really are, felt your pain and found the answers, made you want to be alive. Of course you recognize me. I am your inspiration, your role model, your saviour, your leader, your best friend, the one you aspire to emulate, the one whose favour makes you glow.

But I can also be your worst nightmare. First I build you up because that's what you need. Your skies are blue. Then, out of the blue, I start tearing you down. You let me do it because that's what you are used to. You are dumfounded. But I was wrong to take pity on you. You really *are* incompetent, disrespectful, untrustworthy, immoral, ignorant, inept, egotistical, constrained, disgusting. You are a social embarrassment, an unappreciative partner, an inadequate parent, a disappointment, a sexual flop, a financial liability. I tell you this to your face. I must. It is my right, because it is. I behave, at home and away, in any way I want to, with total disregard for conventions, mores, or the feelings of others. It is my right, because it is. I lie to your face, without a twitch or a twitter, and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it. In fact, my lies are not lies at all. They are the truth, my truth. And you believe them, because you do, because they do not

sound or feel like lies, because to do otherwise would make you question your own sanity, which you have a tendency to do anyway, because from the very beginning of our relationship you placed your trust and hopes in me, derived your energy, direction, stability, and confidence from me and from your association with me. So what's the problem if the safe haven I provide comes with a price? Surely I am worth it and then some.

Run to our friends. Go. See what that will get you. Ridicule. People believe what they see and what they see is the same wonderful me that you also saw and still do. What they also see is the very mixed up person that you have obviously become. The more you plead for understanding, the more convinced they are that the crazy one is you, the more isolated you feel, and the harder you try to make things right again, not by changing me but by accepting my criticisms and by striving to improve yourself. Could it be that you were wrong about me in the beginning? So wrong as that? How do you think our friends will react if you insist that they are also wrong about me? After all, they know that it really is you who have thwarted my progress, tainted my reputation, and thrown me off course.

I disappoint you? Outrageous! It is you who have disappointed me. Look at all the frustrations you cause me. Lucky for you, I have an escape from all this, and fortunately my reputation provides enough insulation from the outside world so I can indulge in this escape with impunity. What escape? Why, those eruptions of rage you dread and fear. Ah, it feels so good to rage. It is the expression of and the confirmation of my power over you, my absolute superiority. Lying feels good too, for the same reason, but nothing compares to the pleasure of exploding for no material reason and venting my anger with total abandon, all the time a spectator at my own show and at your helplessness, pain, fear, frustration, and dependence. In fact my raging is precisely what allows me to stay with you. Go ahead. Tell our friends about it. See if they can imagine what it's like, let alone believe it. The more outrageous the things you say about me, the more convinced they are that it is you who have taken a turn for the worse. And don't expect much more from your therapist either. You may tell him this or that, but what he sees when I visit him is something quite different. So what's the therapist to believe? After all, it was you who came for help. No! That's what this is all about. No! That simple two-letter word that, regardless of how bad I am, you simply cannot say. Who knows? You might even acquire some of my behaviour yourself.

But you know what? This may come as a shock, but I can also be my own worst nightmare. I can and I am. You see, at heart my life is nothing more than illusion-clad confusion. I have no idea why I do what I do, nor do I care to find out. In fact, the mere notion of asking the question is so repulsive to me that I employ all of my resources to repel it. I reconstruct facts, fabricate illusions, act them out, and thus create my own reality. It is a precarious state of existence indeed, so I am careful to include enough demonstrable truth in my illusions to ensure their credibility. And I am forever testing that credibility on you and on the reactions of others. Fortunately my real attributes and accomplishments are in sufficient abundance to fuel my illusions seemingly forever. And modern society, blessed/cursed modern society, values most what I do best and thus serves as my accomplice. Even I get lost in my own illusions, swept away by my own magic.

So, not to worry if you still do not recognize me. I don't recognize me either. In fact, I am not really sure who I am. That's probably a question you never ask of yourself. Yet I wonder about it all the time. Perhaps I am not too different from everyone else, just better. After all, that's the feedback I get. My admirers certainly wish they were me. They just don't have the gifts I have, nor the courage I have to express them. That's what the universe is telling me.

Then again, *the* universe or *my* universe? As long as the magic of my illusions works on me too, there really is no need for distinction. All I need is an abundant fan club to stay on top of it all. So I am constantly taking fan club inventory, testing the loyalty of present members with challenges of abuse, writing off defectors with total indifference, and scouting the landscape for new recruits. Do you see my dilemma? I use people who are dependent on me to keep my illusions alive. So really it is I who am dependent on them. I need them to tell me that I don't need them. Sound crazy? It is. And at times it throws me into a rage. But even the rage, that orgasmic release of pain and anger, works better with an audience. On some level I am aware of my illusions, but to admit that would spoil the magic. And that I couldn't bear. So I proclaim that what I do is of no consequence and no different from what others do, and thus I create an illusion about my creating illusions. So, no, I don't recognize me any better than you do. I wouldn't dare. Like my fans, I marvel at my own being. Then again, sometimes I wish that I were not the person I am. You find that confusing? How do you think it makes me feel? I need my own magic to stay afloat. Sometimes others like me recruit me into

their magic. But that's ok. As long as we feed off of each other, who's the worse for wear? It only confirms my illusion about my illusions: that I am no different from most other people, just a bit better.

But I *am* different and we both know it, although neither one of us dares to admit it. Therein lies the root of my hostility. I tear you down because in reality I am envious of you *because* I am different. At some haunting level, I see my magic for what it is and realize that people around me function just fine *without* any "magic". This terrifies me. Panic stricken, I try all my old tricks: displays of my talents, unnecessary deceptions, self-serving distortions, skilful seductions, ludicrous projections, frightening rages, whatever. Normally, that works. But if it fails, watch out. Like a solar-powered battery in darkness, my fire goes out and I cease to exist. Destruction sets in.

That is the key to understanding me. Most people strive for goals and feel good when they approach them. They move toward something positive. If they get there, or even close, receive recognition, enjoy the moment, and show their enjoyment, it is the genuine celebration of genuine self-worth. Even though it may invoke envy or criticism of self-aggrandizement, it is still a real expression of what they really appreciate in who they are and what they do. It is, in a word, real.

Not so for me. I move in the same direction but my movement is not toward something positive but away from something negative, something unreal. That's why I never stop, am never content, no matter what I achieve. I never get "there" because there is no "there" for me to get. That negative thing seems to follow me around like a shadow. I douse myself in the light of praise and the light fades, but that's all it does. Like a moth, I renew the chase, again and again, and each time I succumb to it, again and again.

Can you tell the difference between the real thing and me, between people who genuinely enjoy celebrating themselves and someone like me who merely pretends to? Usually not. The difference, you see, is not in the behaviour you observe. It's in the motivation. Sure, I look like them and they look like me. But we are not the same. Not at all.

If by chance you are witness to one of my inexplicable Jeekyll-and-Hyde personality changes, you might suspect that something is amiss. But you quickly pass it off as an exception to the rule, for I am quick to revert to "normal". Witnessing several changes might make you pause a little longer. But it takes an awful lot before you truly entertain the frightening possibility that these abrupt

changes might not be the exception, rather the rule. But then what? You - a self-doubter by nature - might be the only one to see behind the mask. Alone with your secret, it will drive you mad.

Where did it come from, this negativity? Probably from before I learned to talk. When you were exploring your world for the first time, with the usual little toddler mishaps, your mother kept a careful eye on you, intervened when she saw you heading for danger, and comforted you when you made a mistake, even if you cried. Well, that's not how it was for me. My mother's expectations of me were much higher. Mistakes were mistakes and crying was not the way to get her approval. That required being perfect, so that's exactly what I became. Not the little awkward toddler that I was, but my mother's model child. Not the brave and curious little person that I really was, but the fearful personification of my mother's ideal.

What you were experiencing through your little mishaps and mistakes were small doses of shame. What you were learning from your quick recoveries was shame repair. At first your mother did most of the repairing. Through repetition, you gradually learned how to do it by yourself. Shame repair brain circuitry was being laid down that would carry you for the rest of your life. I had no such luck. I simply did not acquire that skill when nature had intended my brain to acquire it.

Instead I acquired something else: a sense of needlessness. That's right, needlessness. Since Mother wouldn't help me where I needed it most, I learned to pretend that I did not need her. I became tough, self-assured, a know-it-all, a do-it-all, an achiever, a leader. And you know what? It worked. By pretending not to need Mother, I got what I needed from her, her love. Well, at least a semblance of love, in the form of approval and encouragement. Naturally, I tried this out on the rest of the world, and it worked again. All I needed to do was show others that I did not need them. How? By pretending, of course. Pretending that I knew more and could do more than they did, that I was above the rules of accepted behaviour, that I was special, that I, like Peter Pan, could do and get away with anything I wanted to.

And they played along, perfectly, with all the affirmations needed to sustain the show. It didn't work on everybody, of course. It was usually the neediest who were drawn to my needlessness, so I became an expert at sniffing them out within seconds. An illusion? Sure. But by then that's what I had become. Exploitation? Right again. But they were exploiting me too. I gave

them what they needed and they followed behind me like obedient sheep. Just as you do to this day! Little did they know that I needed them every bit as much as they needed me. But there was no way I could ever admit that. For most people, to need others is normal, an accepted part of who they are, of being human. For me, to need anything is to accept that my needlessness is all a sham. If that dissolves, there is nothing left. At least that's what I fear. The sense of needlessness is my addiction. Am I ashamed of that? Yes, I am. But even greater is my fear of the shame I might experience in facing life without it. No one enjoys shame. But most people can deal with it. Not me. I fear it the way you fear snakes. You will go to great lengths to avoid stepping on a snake. I go to great lengths to avoid stepping on shame.

How many others like me are there? More than you might think, and our numbers are increasing. Take twenty people off the street and you might well find one whose mind ticks so much like mine that you could consider us clones. Impossible, you say. It is simply not possible for that many people - highly accomplished, respected, and visible people - to be out there replacing reality with illusions, each in the same way and for reasons they know not why. It is simply not possible for so many shame-phobic robots of havoc and chaos, all fitting the same description, to function daily midst other educated, intelligent, and experienced individuals, and pass for normal. It is simply not possible for such an aberration of human cognition and behaviour to infiltrate and infect the population in such numbers and such similarity, virtually undetected by the radar of mental health professionals. It is simply not possible for so much similar visible positive to contain so much concealed similar negative. It is simply not possible.

But it is. That is the enlightenment of *Narcissism Revisited* by Sam Vaknin. Sam is himself one such clone. What distinguishes him is his uncharacteristic courage to confront, and his uncanny understanding of, that which makes us tick, himself included. Not only does Sam dare ask and then answer the question we clones avoid like the plague, he does so with relentless, laser-like precision. Read his book. Take your seat at the double-headed microscope and let Sam guide you through the dissection. Like a brain surgeon operating on himself, Sam explores and exposes the alien among us, hoping beyond hope for a resectable tumour but finding instead each and every cell teeming with the same resistant virus. The operation is long and tedious, and at times frightening and hard to believe. Read on. The parts exposed are as

they are, despite what may seem hyperbolic or farfetched. Their validity might not hit home until later, when coupled with memories of past events and experiences.

I am, as I said, my own worst nightmare. True, the world is replete with my contributions, and I am lots of fun to be around. And true, most contributions like mine are not the result of troubled souls. But many more than you might want to believe are. And if by chance you get caught in my web, I can make your life a living hell. But remember this. I am in that web too. The difference between you and me is that you can get out.

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This article appears in my book, "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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INTRODUCTION

The Habit of Identity

Warning and Disclaimer

The contents of this book are not meant to substitute for professional help and counselling. The readers are discouraged from using it for diagnostic or therapeutic ends. The diagnosis and treatment of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder can only be done by professionals specifically trained and qualified to do so - which the author is not. The author is NOT a mental health professional, though he is certified by Brainbench in Mental Health Counselling Techniques.

In a famous experiment, students were asked to take a lemon home and to get used to it. Three days later, they were able to single out "their" lemon from a pile of rather similar ones. They seemed to have bonded. Is this the true meaning of [love](#), bonding, coupling? Do we simply get used to other human beings, pets, or objects?

Habit forming in humans is reflexive. We change ourselves and our environment in order to attain maximum comfort and well being. It is the effort that goes into these adaptive processes that forms a habit. The habit is intended to prevent us from constant experimenting and risk taking. The greater our well being, the better we function and the longer we survive.

Actually, when we get used to something or to someone - we get used to ourselves. In the object of the habit we see a part of our history, all the time and effort we had put into it. It is an encapsulated version of our acts, intentions, emotions and reactions. It is a mirror reflecting that part in us which formed the habit in the first place. Hence, the feeling of comfort: we really

feel comfortable with our own selves through the agency of our habitual objects.

Because of this, we tend to confuse habits with identity. When asked WHO they are, most people resort to communicating their habits. They describe their work, their loved ones, their pets, their hobbies, or their material possessions. Yet, surely, all of these do not constitute identity! Removing them does not change who we are. They are habits and they make people comfortable and relaxed. But they are not part of one's identity in the truest, deepest sense.

Still, it is this simple mechanism of deception that binds people together. A mother feels that her offspring are part of her identity because she is so used to them that her well-being depends on their existence and availability. Thus, any threat to her children is perceived by her as a threat to her own Self. Her reaction is, therefore, strong and enduring and can be recurrently elicited.

The truth, of course, is that her children ARE a part of her identity in a superficial manner. Removing them will make her a different person, but only in the shallow, phenomenological sense of the word. Her deep-set, true identity will not change as a result. Children do die at times and the mother does go on living, essentially unchanged.

But what is this kernel of identity that I am referring to? This immutable entity which is who we are and what we are and which, ostensibly, is not influenced by the death of our loved ones? What can resist the breakdown of habits that die hard?

It is our personality. This elusive, loosely interconnected, interacting, pattern of reactions to our changing environment. Like the [Brain](#), it is difficult to define or to capture. Like the Soul, many believe that it does not exist, that it is a fictitious convention.

Yet, we know that we do have a personality. We feel it, we experience it. It sometimes encourages us to do things - at other times, it prevents us from doing them. It can be supple or rigid, benign or malignant, open or closed. Its power lies in its networked looseness. It is able to combine, recombine and permute in hundreds of unforeseeable ways. It metamorphoses and the constancy of these changes is what gives us a sense of identity.

Actually, when the personality is rigid to the point of being unable to change in reaction to shifting circumstances - we say that it is disordered. One has a personality disorder when one's habits substitute for one's identity. Such a person identifies

himself with his environment, taking behavioural, emotional, and cognitive cues exclusively from it. His inner world is, so to speak, vacated, his True Self merely an apparition.

Such a person is incapable of loving and of living. He is incapable of loving because to love another one must first love oneself. And, in the absence of a Self that is impossible. And, in the long-term, he is incapable of living because life is a struggle towards multiple goals, a striving, a drive at something. In other words: life is change. He who cannot change, does not live.

What is Personality and What is Normal?

In their opus magnum "Personality Disorders in Modern Life", Theodore Millon and Roger Davis define personality as:

"(A) complex pattern of deeply embedded psychological characteristics that are expressed automatically in almost every area of psychological functioning." [p. 2]

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) IV-TR [2000], published by the American Psychiatric Association, defines personality traits as:

"(E)nduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of social and personal contexts." [p. 686]

Laymen often confuse and confute "personality" with "character" and "temperament".

Our temperament is the biological-genetic template that interacts with our environment.

Our temperament is a set of in-built dispositions we are born with. It is mostly unalterable (though recent studies demonstrate that the brain is far more plastic and elastic than we thought).

In other words, our temperament is our nature.

Our character is largely the outcome of the process of socialization, the acts and imprints of our environment and nurture on our psyche during the formative years (0-6 years and in adolescence).

Our character is the set of all acquired characteristics we possess, often judged in a cultural-social context.

Sometimes the interplay of all these factors results in an abnormal personality.

Personality disorders are dysfunctions of our whole identity, tears in the fabric of who we are. They are all-pervasive because our personality is ubiquitous and permeates each and every one of our mental cells.

In the background lurks the question: what constitutes normal behaviour? Who is normal?

There is the statistical response: the average and the common are normal. But it is an unsatisfactory and incomplete answer. Conforming to social edicts and mores does not guarantee normalcy. Think about anomic societies and periods of history such as Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia. Model citizens in these hellish environments were the criminal and the sadist.

Rather than look to the outside for a clear definition, many mental health professionals ask: is the patient functioning and happy (ego-syntonic)? If he or she is both then all is well and normal. Abnormal traits, behaviours, and personalities are, therefore defined as those traits, behaviours, and personalities that are dysfunctional and cause subjective distress.

But, of course, this definition falls flat on its face at the slightest scrutiny. Many evidently mentally ill people are rather happy and reasonably functional.

Some scholars reject the concept of "normalcy" altogether. The anti-psychiatry movement object to the medicalization and pathologization of whole swathes of human conduct. Others prefer to study the disorders themselves rather to "go metaphysical" by trying to distinguish them from an imaginary and ideal state of being "mentally healthy".

I subscribe to the later approach. I much prefer to delve into the phenomenology of mental health disorders: their traits, characteristics, and impact on others.

Appendix for Mental Health Professionals

The Myth of Mental Illness

"You can know the name of a bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird... So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing - that's what counts. I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something."

[Richard Feynman, Physicist and 1965 Nobel Prize laureate (1918-1988)]

"You have all I dare say heard of the animal spirits and how they are transfused from father to son etcetera etcetera - well you may take my word that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend on their motions and activities, and the different tracks and trains you put them into, so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, away they go clattering like hey-go-mad."

[Lawrence Sterne (1713-1758), "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman", 1759]

Overview

Someone is considered mentally "ill" if:

1. His conduct rigidly and consistently deviates from the typical, average behaviour of all other people in his culture and society that fit his profile (whether this conventional behaviour is moral or rational is immaterial), or
2. His judgement and grasp of objective, physical reality is impaired, and
3. His conduct is not a matter of choice but is innate and irresistible, and
4. His behaviour causes him or others discomfort, and is
5. Dysfunctional, self-defeating, and self-destructive even by his own yardsticks.

Descriptive criteria aside, what is the ESSENCE of mental disorders? Are they merely physiological disorders of the brain, or, more precisely of its chemistry? If so, can they be cured by restoring the balance of substances and secretions in that mysterious organ? And, once equilibrium is reinstated - is the illness "gone" or is it still lurking there, "under wraps", waiting to erupt? Are psychiatric problems inherited, rooted in faulty genes (though amplified by environmental factors) - or brought on by abusive or wrong nurturance?

These questions are the domain of the "medical" school of mental health.

Others cling to the spiritual view of the human psyche. They believe that mental ailments amount to the metaphysical discomposure of an unknown medium - the soul. Theirs is a holistic approach, taking in the patient in his or her entirety, as well as his milieu.

The members of the functional school regard mental health disorders as perturbations in the proper, statistically "normal", behaviours and manifestations of "healthy" individuals, or as dysfunctions. The "sick" individual - ill at ease with himself (ego-dystonic) or making others unhappy (deviant) - is "mended" when rendered functional again by the prevailing standards of his social and cultural frame of reference.

In a way, the three schools are akin to the trio of blind men who render disparate descriptions of the very same elephant. Still, they share not only their subject matter - but, to a counter intuitively large degree, a faulty methodology.

As the renowned anti-psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, of the State University of New York, notes in his article "The Lying Truths of Psychiatry", mental health scholars, regardless of academic predilection, infer the aetiology of mental disorders from the success or failure of treatment modalities.

This form of "reverse engineering" of scientific models is not unknown in other fields of science, nor is it unacceptable if the experiments meet the criteria of the scientific method. The theory must be all-inclusive (anamnetic), consistent, falsifiable, logically compatible, monovalent, and parsimonious. Psychological "theories" - even the "medical" ones (the role of Serotonin and Dopamine in mood disorders, for instance) - are usually none of these things.

The outcome is a bewildering array of ever-shifting mental health "diagnoses" expressly centred around Western civilization and its standards (example: the ethical objection to suicide). Neurosis, a historically fundamental "condition" vanished after 1980. Homosexuality, according to the American Psychiatric Association, was a pathology prior to 1973. Seven years later, narcissism was declared a "personality disorder", almost seven decades after it was first described by Freud.

The Biochemistry and Genetics of Mental Health

Certain mental health afflictions are either correlated with a statistically abnormal biochemical activity in the brain - or are ameliorated with medication. Yet the two FACTS are not ineludibly facets of THE SAME underlying phenomenon. In other words, that a given medicine reduces or abolishes certain symptoms does not necessarily mean they were CAUSED by the processes or substances affected by the drug administered. Causation is only one of many possible connections and chains of events.

To designate a pattern of behaviour as a mental health disorder is a value judgement, or at best a statistical observation. Such designation is effected regardless of the facts of brain science.

Moreover, correlation is not causation. Deviant brain or body biochemistry (once called "polluted animal spirits") do exist - but are they truly the roots of mental perversion? Nor is it clear which triggers what: do the aberrant neurochemistry or biochemistry cause mental illness - or the other way around?

That psychoactive medication alters behaviour and mood is indisputable. So do illicit and legal drugs, certain foods, and all interpersonal interactions. That the changes brought about by

prescription are desirable - is debatable and involves tautological thinking. If a certain pattern of behaviour is described as (socially) "dysfunctional" or (psychologically) "sick" - clearly, every change would be welcomed as "healing" and every agent of transformation would be called a "cure".

The same applies to the alleged heredity of mental illness. Single genes or gene complexes are frequently "associated" with mental health diagnoses, personality traits, or behaviour patterns. But too little is known to establish irrefutable sequences of causes-and-effects. Even less is proven about the interaction of nature and nurture, genotype and phenotype, the plasticity of the brain and the psychological impact of trauma, abuse, upbringing, role models, peers, and other environmental elements.

Nor is the distinction between psychotropic substances and talk therapy that clear-cut. Words and the interaction with the therapist also affect the brain, its processes and chemistry - albeit more slowly and, perhaps, more profoundly and irreversibly. Medicines - as David Kaiser reminds us in "Against Biologic Psychiatry" [Psychiatric Times, Volume XIII, Issue 12, December 1996] - treat symptoms, not the underlying processes that yield them.

The Variance of Mental Disease

If mental illnesses are bodily and empirical, they should be invariant both temporally and spatially, across cultures and societies. This, to some degree, is, indeed, the case. Psychological diseases are not context dependent - but the pathologizing of certain behaviours is. Suicide, substance abuse, narcissism, eating disorders, antisocial ways, schizotypal symptoms, depression, even psychosis are considered sick by some cultures - and utterly normative or advantageous in others.

This was to be expected. The human mind and its dysfunctions are alike around the world. But values differ from time to time and from one place to another. Hence, disagreements about the propriety and desirability of human actions and inaction are bound to arise in a symptom-based diagnostic system.

As long as the PSEUDO-MEDICAL definitions of mental health disorders continue to rely exclusively on signs and symptoms - i.e., mostly on observed or reported behaviours - they remain vulnerable to such discord and devoid of much-sought universality and rigour.

Mental Disorders and the Social Order

The mentally sick receive the same treatment as carriers of AIDS or SARS or the Ebola virus or smallpox. They are sometimes quarantined against their will and coerced into involuntary treatment by medication, psychosurgery, or electroconvulsive therapy. This is done in the name of the greater good, largely as a preventive policy.

Conspiracy theories notwithstanding, it is impossible to ignore the enormous interests vested in psychiatry and psychopharmacology. The multibillion dollar industries involving drug companies, hospitals, managed healthcare, private clinics, academic departments, and law enforcement agencies rely, for their continued and exponential growth, on the propagation of the concept of "mental illness" and its corollaries: treatment and research.

Mental Ailment as a Useful Metaphor

Abstract concepts form the core of all branches of human knowledge. No one has ever seen a quark, or untangled a chemical bond, or surfed an electromagnetic wave, or visited the unconscious. These are useful metaphors, theoretical entities with explanatory or descriptive power.

"Mental health disorders" are no different. They are shorthand for capturing the unsettling quiddity of "the Other". Useful as taxonomies, they are also tools of social coercion and conformity, as Michel Foucault and [Louis Althusser](#) observed. Relegating both the dangerous and the idiosyncratic to the collective fringes is a vital technique of social engineering.

The aim is progress through social cohesion and the regulation of innovation and creative destruction. Psychiatry, therefore, is reifies society's preference of evolution to revolution, or, worse still, to mayhem. As is often the case with human endeavour, it is a noble cause, unscrupulously and dogmatically pursued.

The Insanity Defence

"It is an ill thing to knock against a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor. He that wounds them is culpable, but if they wound him they are not culpable."

[Mishna, Babylonian Talmud]

If mental illness is culture-dependent and mostly serves as an organizing social principle - what should we make of the insanity defence (NGRI - Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity)?

A person is held not responsible for his criminal actions if s/he cannot tell right from wrong ("lacks substantial capacity either to

appreciate the criminality (wrongfulness) of his conduct" - diminished capacity), did not intend to act the way he did (absent "mens rea") and/or could not control his behaviour ("irresistible impulse"). These handicaps are often associated with "mental disease or defect" or "mental retardation".

Mental health professionals prefer to talk about an impairment of a "[person's perception or understanding of reality](#)". They hold a "guilty but mentally ill" verdict to be contradiction in terms. All "mentally-ill" people operate within a (usually coherent) worldview, with consistent internal logic, and rules of right and wrong (ethics). Yet, these rarely conform to the way most people perceive the world. The mentally-ill, therefore, cannot be guilty because s/he has a tenuous grasp on reality.

Yet, experience teaches us that a criminal maybe mentally ill even as s/he maintains a perfect reality test and thus is held criminally responsible (Jeffrey Dahmer comes to mind). The "perception and understanding of reality", in other words, can and does co-exist even with the severest forms of mental illness.

This makes it even more difficult to comprehend what is meant by "mental disease". If some mentally ill maintain a grasp on reality, know right from wrong, can anticipate the outcomes of their actions, are not subject to irresistible impulses (the official position of the American Psychiatric Association) - in what way do they differ from us, "normal" folks?

This is why the insanity defence often sits ill with mental health pathologies deemed socially "acceptable" and "normal" - such as religion or [love](#).

Consider the following case:

A mother bashes the skulls of her three sons. Two of them die. She claims to have acted on instructions she had received from God. She is found not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury determined that she "[did not know right from wrong during the killings](#)".

But why exactly was she judged insane?

Her belief in the existence of God - a being with inordinate and inhuman attributes - may be irrational.

But it does not constitute insanity in the strictest sense because it conforms to social and cultural creeds and codes of conduct in her milieu. Billions of people faithfully subscribe to the same ideas, adhere to the same transcendental rules, observe the same mystical rituals, and claim to go through the same experiences. This shared psychosis is so widespread that it can no longer be deemed pathological, statistically speaking.

She claimed that God has spoken to her.

As do numerous other people. Behaviour that is considered psychotic (paranoid-schizophrenic) in other contexts is lauded and admired in religious circles. Hearing voices and seeing visions - auditory and visual delusions - are considered rank manifestations of righteousness and sanctity.

Perhaps it was the content of her hallucinations that proved her insane?

She claimed that God had instructed her to kill her boys. Surely, God would not ordain such evil?

Alas, the Old and New Testaments both contain examples of God's appetite for human sacrifice. Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son (though this savage command was rescinded at the last moment). Jesus, the son of God himself, was crucified to atone for the sins of humanity.

A divine injunction to slay one's offspring would sit well with the Holy Scriptures and the Apocrypha as well as with millennia-old Judeo-Christian traditions of martyrdom and sacrifice.

Her actions were wrong and incommensurate with both human and divine (or natural) laws.

Yes, but they were perfectly in accord with a literal interpretation of certain divinely-inspired texts, millennial scriptures, apocalyptic thought systems, and fundamentalist religious ideologies (such as the ones espousing the imminence of "rupture"). Unless one declares these doctrines and writings insane, her actions are not.

We are forced to the conclusion that the murderous mother is perfectly sane. Her frame of reference is different to ours. Hence, her definitions of right and wrong are idiosyncratic. To her, killing her babies was the right thing to do and in conformity with valued teachings and her own epiphany. Her grasp of reality - the immediate and later consequences of her actions - was never impaired.

It would seem that sanity and insanity are relative terms, dependent on frames of cultural and social reference, and statistically defined. There isn't - and, in principle, can never emerge - an "objective", medical, scientific test to determine mental health or disease unequivocally.

Adaptation and Insanity

"Normal" people adapt to their environment - both human and natural.

"Abnormal" ones try to adapt their environment - both human and natural - to their idiosyncratic needs/profile.

If they succeed, their environment, both human (society) and natural is pathologized.

Sam Vaknin

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This article appears in my book, "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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*Malignant
Self Love*
Narcissism Revisited

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder

A Primer on Narcissism And the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)

*Most narcissists are men.
This is why I use male pronouns throughout this book.*

What is Pathological Narcissism?

Pathological narcissism is a life-long pattern of traits and behaviours which signify infatuation and obsession with one's self to the exclusion of all others and the egotistic and ruthless pursuit of one's gratification, dominance and ambition.

As distinct from [healthy narcissism](#) which we all possess, pathological narcissism is maladaptive, rigid, persisting, and causes significant distress, and functional impairment.

Pathological narcissism was first described in detail by Freud in his essay "On Narcissism" [1915]. Other major contributors to the study of narcissism are: Melanie Klein, Karen Horney, Franz Kohut, Otto Kernberg, Theodore Millon, Elsa Roningstam, J.G. Gunderson, and Robert Hare.

What is Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)?

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is a form of pathological narcissism. It is a Cluster B (dramatic, emotional, or erratic) [Personality Disorder](#). Other Cluster B personality disorders are the Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), the Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD), and the Histrionic Personality Disorder (HPD). The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) first appeared as a mental health diagnosis in the DSM-III-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) in 1980.

Diagnostic Criteria

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is not a new psychological construct. In previous centuries it was called "egotism" or "megalomania". It is an extreme form of pathological narcissism.

The ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases), published by the World Health Organization in Geneva [1992], does not include the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). It regards it as "*a personality disorder that fits none of the specific rubrics*" and puts it together with other bizarre dysfunctions such as, "haltlose", immature, passive-aggressive, and psychoneurotic personality disorders and types in a catchall category: "Other Specific Personality Disorders".

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) [2000], published by the American Psychiatric Association, based in Washington D.C., USA, provides the diagnostic criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) [301.81] on page 717.

The DSM-IV-TR defines Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as "*an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts*", such as family life and work.

Five or more of the DSM's nine diagnostic criteria must be met for a diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) to be rendered.

[In the text below, I have proposed modifications to the language of these criteria to incorporate current knowledge about this disorder. My modifications appear in italics.]

[My amendments do not constitute a part of the text of the DSM-IV-TR, nor is the American Psychiatric Association (APA) associated with them in any way.]

[Click [here](#) to download a [bibliography](#) of the studies and research regarding the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) on which I based my proposed revisions.]

Proposed Amended Criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder

- Feels grandiose and self-important (e.g., exaggerates accomplishments, talents, *skills, contacts, and personality traits to the point of lying, demands* to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements);
- Is *obsessed* with fantasies of unlimited success, *fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled* brilliance (*the*

cerebral narcissist), *bodily beauty or sexual performance (the somatic narcissist)*, or *ideal, everlasting, all-conquering love or passion*;

- Firmly convinced that he or she is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, *should only be treated by*, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status people (or institutions);
- Requires excessive admiration, *adulation, attention and affirmation* - or, *failing that, wishes to be feared and to be notorious (Narcissistic Supply)*;
- Feels entitled. *Demands automatic and full compliance* with his or her unreasonable expectations for special and *favourable priority* treatment;
- Is "interpersonally exploitative", i.e., *uses others to achieve his or her own ends*;
- *Devoid of empathy. Is unable or unwilling to identify with, acknowledge, or accept the feelings, needs, preferences, priorities, and choices of others*;
- Constantly envious of others *and seeks to hurt or destroy the objects of his or her frustration. Suffers from persecutory (paranoid) delusions as he or she believes that they feel the same about him or her and are likely to act similarly*;
- Behaves arrogantly and haughtily. *Feels superior, omnipotent, omniscient, invincible, immune, "above the law", and omnipresent (magical thinking). Rages when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted* by people he or she considers inferior to him or her and unworthy.

Prevalence and Age and Gender Features

What is the difference between healthy narcissism and the pathological kind?

Luckily for us, we are all narcissists to some degree. But healthy narcissism is adaptive, flexible, empathic, causes elation and joy (happiness), and help us to function. Pathological narcissism is maladaptive, rigid, persisting, and causes significant distress, and functional impairment.

"The lifetime prevalence rate of NPD is approximately 0.5-1 percent; however, the estimated prevalence in clinical settings is approximately 2-16 percent. Almost 75 percent of individuals diagnosed with NPD are male (APA, DSM-IV-TR 2000)."

[\[Psychotherapeutic Assessment and Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorder\]](#) by Robert C. Schwartz, Ph.D., DAPA and Shannon D. Smith, Ph.D.,

DAPA (American Psychotherapy Association, Article 3004 Annals July/August 2002)]

We must carefully distinguish between the narcissistic traits of [adolescents](#) - narcissism is an integral part of their healthy personal development - and the full-fledged disorder. Adolescence is about self-definition, differentiation, separation from one's parents, and individuation. These inevitably involve narcissistic assertiveness which is not to be conflated or confused with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is exacerbated by the onset of [aging](#) and the physical, mental, and occupational restrictions it imposes.

In certain situations, such as under [constant public scrutiny and exposure](#), a transient and reactive form of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) has been observed by Robert Milman and labelled "[Acquired Situational Narcissism](#)".

There is only scant research regarding the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), but studies did not demonstrate any ethnic, social, cultural, economic, genetic, or professional predilection to it.

Co-Morbidity and Differential Diagnoses

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is often diagnosed with [other mental health disorders](#) ("co-morbidity"), such as [mood disorders](#), [eating disorders](#), and [substance-related disorders](#). Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are frequently abusive and prone to [impulsive and reckless behaviours](#) ("dual diagnosis").

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is also commonly diagnosed with [other personality disorders](#), such as the Histrionic, Borderline, Paranoid, and [Antisocial](#) Personality Disorder.

The personal style of those suffering from the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) should be distinguished from the personal styles of patients with other Cluster B personality disorders. The narcissist is grandiose, the histrionic coquettish, the antisocial (psychopath) callous, and the borderline needy.

As opposed to patients with the Borderline Personality Disorder, the self-image of the narcissist is stable, he or she is less impulsive and less self-defeating or self-destructive and less concerned with abandonment issues (not as clinging).

Contrary to the histrionic patient, the narcissist is achievements-orientated and proud of his or her possessions and accomplishments. Narcissists also rarely display their emotions as

histrionics do and they hold the sensitivities and needs of others in contempt.

According to the DSM-IV-TR, both narcissists and psychopaths are "tough-minded, glib, superficial, exploitative, and un-empathic". But narcissists are less impulsive, less aggressive, and less deceitful. Psychopaths rarely seek Narcissistic Supply. As opposed to psychopaths, few narcissists are criminals.

Patients suffering from the range of obsessive-compulsive disorders are committed to perfection and believe that only they are capable of attaining it. But, as opposed to narcissists, they are self-critical and far more aware of their own deficiencies, flaws, and shortcomings.

Clinical Features of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder

The onset of pathological narcissism is in infancy, childhood and early adolescence. It is commonly attributed to childhood abuse and trauma inflicted by parents, authority figures, or even peers. Pathological narcissism is a defence mechanism intended to deflect hurt and trauma from the victim's "True Self" into a "[False Self](#)" which is construed by the narcissist to be omnipotent, invulnerable, and omniscient. The narcissist uses the False Self to regulate his or her labile sense of self-worth by extracting from his environment [Narcissistic Supply](#) (any form of attention, both positive and negative).

There is a whole range of narcissistic reactions, styles, and personalities: from the mild, reactive and transient to the permanent personality disorder.

Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) feel injured, humiliated and empty when criticized. They often react with disdain (devaluation), [rage](#), and defiance to any slight, real or [imagined](#). To avoid such situations, some patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) socially withdraw and feign [false modesty and humility](#) to mask their underlying grandiosity. Dysthymic and depressive disorders are common reactions to isolation and feelings of shame and inadequacy.

The interpersonal relationships of patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are typically impaired due to their lack of empathy, disregard for others, exploitativeness, sense of entitlement, and constant need for attention (Narcissistic Supply).

Though often ambitious and capable, inability to tolerate setbacks, disagreement, and criticism make it difficult for patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) to [work in a team](#) or to maintain long-term professional achievements. The narcissist's

fantastic grandiosity, frequently coupled with a hypomanic mood, is typically incommensurate with his or her real accomplishments (the "Grandiosity Gap").

Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are either "cerebral" (derive their Narcissistic Supply from their intelligence or academic achievements) or "somatic" (derive their Narcissistic Supply from their physique, exercise, physical or sexual prowess and romantic or physical "conquests").

Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are either "classic" (meet five of the nine diagnostic criteria included in the DSM), or they are "compensatory" (their narcissism compensates for deep-set feelings of inferiority and lack of self-worth).

Some narcissists are covert, or [inverted narcissists](#). As co-dependents, they derive their Narcissistic Supply from their relationships with classic narcissists.

Treatment and Prognosis

The common treatment for patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is talk therapy (mainly psychodynamic psychotherapy or cognitive-behavioural treatment modalities). Talk therapy is used to modify the narcissist's antisocial, interpersonally exploitative, and dysfunctional behaviours, often with some success. Medication is prescribed to control and ameliorate attendant conditions such as [mood disorders](#) or [obsessive-compulsive disorders](#).

The prognosis for an adult suffering from the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is poor, though his adaptation to life and to others can improve with treatment.

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*Malignant
Self Love*
Narcissism Revisited

The Mind of the Narcissist

This section contains professional terms.

CHAPTER I

The Soul of a Narcissist The State of the Art

We all love ourselves. That seems to be such an instinctively true statement that we do not bother to examine it more thoroughly. In our daily affairs - in love, in business, in other areas of life - we act on this premise. Yet, upon closer inspection, it looks shakier.

Some people explicitly state that they do not love themselves at all (they are ego-dystonic). Others confine their lack of self-love to certain of their traits, to their personal history, or to some of their behaviour patterns. Yet others feel content with who they are and with what they are doing (ego-syntonic).

But one group of people seems distinct in its mental constitution - narcissists.

According to the legend of Narcissus, this Greek boy fell in love with his own reflection in a pond. In a way, this amply sums up the nature of his namesakes: narcissists. The mythological Narcissus rejected the advances of the nymph Echo and was punished by the goddess Nemesis. He was consigned to pine away as he fell in love with his own reflection - exactly as Echo had pined away for him. How apt. Narcissists are punished by echoes and reflections of their problematic personalities up to this very day.

Narcissists are said to be in love with themselves.

But this is a fallacy. Narcissus is not in love with HIMSELF. He is in love with his REFLECTION.

There is a major difference between one's True Self and reflected-self.

Loving your True Self is healthy, adaptive, and functional.

Loving a reflection has two major drawbacks:

1. One depends on the existence and availability of the reflection to produce the emotion of self-love.

2. The absence of a "compass", an "objective and realistic yardstick", by which to judge the authenticity of the reflection. In other words, it is impossible to tell whether the reflection is true to reality and, if so, to what extent.

The popular misconception is that narcissists love themselves. In reality, they direct their love at other people's impressions of them. He who loves only impressions is incapable of loving people, himself included.

But the narcissist does possess the in-bred desire to love and to be loved. If he cannot love himself, he must love his reflection. But to love his reflection, it must be loveable. Thus, driven by the insatiable urge to love (which we all possess), the narcissist is preoccupied with projecting a loveable image, albeit compatible with his self-image (the way he "sees" himself).

The narcissist maintains this projected image and invests resources and energy in it, sometimes depleting him to the point of rendering him vulnerable to external threats.

But the most important characteristic of the narcissist's projected image is its lovability.

To a narcissist, love is interchangeable with other emotions, such as awe, respect, admiration, attention, or even being feared (collectively known as [Narcissistic Supply](#)). Thus, to him, a projected image, which provokes these reactions in others, is both "loveable and loved". It also feels like self-love.

The more successful this projected image (or series of successive images) is in generating Narcissistic Supply (NS), the more the narcissist becomes divorced from his True Self and married to the image.

I am not saying that the narcissist does not have a central nucleus (a "self"). All I am saying is that he prefers his image - with which he identifies unreservedly - to his True Self. The True Self becomes serf to the Image. The narcissist, therefore, is not selfish because his True Self is paralyzed and subordinate.

The narcissist is not attuned exclusively to his needs. On the contrary: he ignores them because many of them conflict with his ostensible omnipotence and omniscience. He does not put himself first - he puts his self last. He caters to the needs and wishes of everyone around him because he craves their love and admiration. It is through their reactions that he acquires a sense of distinct self. In many ways he annuls himself only to re-invent himself through the look of others. The narcissist is the person most insensitive to his true needs.

The narcissist drains himself of mental energy in this process. This is why he has none left to dedicate to others. This fact, as well as his inability to love human beings in their many dimensions and facets, ultimately transform him into a recluse. He guards his territory jealously and fiercely. He protects what he perceives to constitute his independence.

Why should people indulge the narcissist? And what is the "evolutionary", survival value of preferring one kind of love (directed at an image) to another (directed at one's self)?

These questions torment the narcissist. His convoluted mind comes up with the most elaborate contraptions in lieu of answers.

Why should people indulge the narcissist, divert time and energy, give him attention, love and adulation? The narcissist's answer is simple: because he is [entitled](#) to it. He feels that he deserves whatever he succeeds to extract from others and much more besides. Actually, he feels betrayed, discriminated against and underprivileged because he believes that he is not being treated fairly, that he should get more than he does.

There is a discrepancy between his infinite certainty that his is a special status which renders him worthy of recurrent praise and adoration, replete with special benefits and prerogatives and the actual state of his affairs. To the narcissist, his uniqueness is bestowed upon him not by virtue of his achievements, but merely because he exists.

The narcissist's deems his mere existence as sufficiently unique to warrant the kind of treatment that he expects to get from the world. This is the paradox, which haunts the narcissist: he derives his sense of uniqueness from the very fact that he exists and he derives his sense of existence from his belief that he is unique.

Clinical data show that there is rarely any realistic basis for these [grandiose notions](#) of greatness and uniqueness.

Some narcissists are high achievers with proven track records. Some of them are pillars of their communities. Mostly, they are dynamic and successful. Still, they are ridiculously pompous and inflated personalities, bordering on the farcical and provoking resentment.

The narcissist is forced to use other people in order to feel that he exists. It is through their eyes and through their behaviour that he obtains proof of his uniqueness and grandeur. He is a habitual "people-junkie". With time, he comes to regard those around him as mere instruments of gratification, as two-dimensional cartoon figures with negligible lines in the script of his magnificent life.

He becomes unscrupulous, never bothered by the constant [exploitation](#) of his milieu, indifferent to the consequences of his actions, to the damage and the pain that he inflicts on others and even to the social condemnation and sanctions that he often has to endure.

When a person persists in a dysfunctional, maladaptive or plain useless behaviour despite grave repercussions to himself and to others, we say that his acts are [compulsive](#). The narcissist is compulsive in his pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. This linkage between narcissism and obsessive-compulsive disorders sheds light on the mechanisms of the narcissistic psyche.

The narcissist does not suffer from a faulty sense of causation. He is not oblivious to the likely outcomes of his actions and to the price he may have to pay. But he doesn't care.

A personality whose very existence is a derivative of its reflection in other people's minds is perilously dependent on these people's perceptions. They are the Sources of Narcissistic Supply (NSS). [Criticism and disapproval](#) are interpreted by the narcissist as a sadistic withholding of said supply and as a direct threat to the narcissist's mental house of cards.

The narcissist lives in a world of all or nothing, of a constant "to be or not be". Every discussion that he holds, every [glance](#) of every passer-by reaffirm his existence or cast it in doubt. This is why the reactions of the narcissist seem so disproportionate: he reacts to what he perceives to be a danger to the very cohesion of his self. Thus, every minor disagreement with a Source of Narcissistic Supply - another person - is interpreted as a threat to the narcissist's very self-worth.

This is such a crucial matter, that the narcissist cannot take chances. He would rather be mistaken than remain without Narcissistic Supply. He would rather discern disapproval and unjustified criticism where there are none than face the consequences of being caught off-guard.

The narcissist has to condition his human environment to refrain from expressing criticism and disapproval of him or of his actions and decisions. He has to teach people around him that these provoke him into frightful fits of temper and rage attacks and turn him into a constantly cantankerous and irascible person. His exaggerated reactions constitute a punishment for their inconsiderateness and their ignorance of his true psychological state.

The narcissist [blames others](#) for his behaviour, accuses them of provoking him into his temper tantrums and believes firmly that

"they" should be punished for their "misbehaviour". Apologies - unless accompanied by verbal or other humiliation - are not enough. The fuel of the narcissist's rage is spent mainly on vitriolic verbal send-offs directed at the (often imaginary) perpetrator of the (oft innocuous) offence.

The narcissist - wittingly or not - utilises people to buttress his self-image and to regulate his sense of self-worth. As long and in as much as they are instrumental in achieving these goals, he holds them in high regard, they are valuable to him. He sees them only through this lens. This is a result of his inability to love others: he lacks empathy, he thinks utility, and, thus, he reduces others to mere instruments.

If they cease to "function", if, no matter how inadvertently, they cause him to doubt his illusory, half-baked, self-esteem, they are subjected to a reign of terror. The narcissist then proceeds to hurt these "insubordinates". He belittles and humiliates them. He displays aggression and violence in myriad forms. His behaviour metamorphoses, kaleidoscopically, from over-valuing (idealizing) the useful person to a severe devaluation of same. The narcissist abhors, almost physiologically, people judged by him to be "useless".

These rapid alterations between absolute overvaluation (idealization) and complete devaluation make long-term interpersonal relationships with the narcissist all but impossible.

The more pathological form of narcissism - the [Narcissistic Personality Disorder \(NPD\)](#) - was defined in successive versions of the American DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual published by the American Psychiatric Association) and the international ICD (International Classification of Diseases, published by the World Health Organization). It is useful to scrutinize these geological layers of clinical observations and their interpretation.

In 1977 the DSM-III criteria included:

- An inflated valuation of oneself (exaggeration of talents and achievements, demonstration of presumptuous self-confidence);
- Interpersonal exploitation (uses others to satisfy his needs and desires, expects preferential treatment without undertaking mutual commitments);
- Possesses expansive imagination (externalizes immature and non-regimented fantasies, "prevaricates to redeem self-illusions");

- Displays supercilious imperturbability (except when the narcissistic confidence is shaken), nonchalant, unimpressed and cold-blooded;
- Defective social conscience (rebels against the conventions of common social existence, does not value personal integrity and the rights of other people).

Compare the 1977 version with the one adopted 10 years later (in the DSM-III-R) and expanded upon in 1994 (in the DSM-IV) and in 2000 (the DSM-IV-TR) - click [here](#) to read the latest diagnostic criteria.

The narcissist is portrayed as a monster, a ruthless and exploitative person. Yet, inside, the narcissist suffers from a chronic lack of confidence and is fundamentally dissatisfied. This applies to all narcissists. The distinction between "compensatory" and "classic" narcissists is spurious. All narcissists are walking scar tissue, the outcomes of various forms of [abuse](#).

On the outside, the narcissist may appear to be labile and [unstable](#). But, this does not capture the barren landscape of misery and fears that is his soul. His brazen and [reckless behaviour](#) covers up for a [depressive](#), anxious interior.

How can such contrasts coexist?

Freud (1915) offered a trilateral model of the human psyche, composed of the Id, the Ego, and the Superego.

According to Freud, narcissists are dominated by their Ego to such an extent that the Id and Superego are neutralized. Early in his career, Freud believed narcissism to be a normal developmental phase between autoeroticism and object-love. Later on, he concluded that linear development can be thwarted by the very efforts we all make in our infancy to evolve the capacity to love an object (another person).

Some of us, thus Freud, fail to grow beyond the phase of self-love in the development of our libido. Others refer to themselves and prefer themselves as objects of love. This choice - to concentrate on the self - is the result of an unconscious decision to give up a consistently frustrating and unrewarding effort to love others and to trust them.

The frustrated and abused child learns that the only "object" he can trust and that is always and reliably available, the only person he can love without being abandoned or hurt is himself.

So, is pathological narcissism the outcome of verbal, sexual, physical, or psychological abuse - or, on the contrary, the sad result of spoiling the child and idolizing it?

This debate is easier to resolve if one agrees to adopt a more comprehensive definition of "abuse". Overweening, smothering, spoiling, overvaluing, and idolizing the child are also forms of parental abuse.

This is because, as Horney pointed out, the smothered and spoiled child is dehumanized and instrumentalized. His parents love him not for what he really is but for what they wish and imagine him to be: the fulfilment of their dreams and frustrated wishes. The child becomes the vessel of his parents' discontented lives, a tool, the magic airbrush with which they seek to retouch their failures into successes, their humiliation into victory, their frustrations into happiness.

The child is taught to give up on reality and adopt the parental fantasies. Such an unfortunate child feels omnipotent and omniscient, perfect and brilliant, worthy of adoration and entitled to special treatment. The faculties that are honed by constantly brushing against bruising reality - empathy, compassion, a realistic assessment of one's abilities and limitations, realistic expectations of oneself and of others, personal boundaries, team work, social skills, perseverance and goal-orientation, not to mention the ability to postpone gratification and to work hard to achieve it - are all deficient or missing altogether.

This kind of child turned adult sees no reason to invest resources in his skills and education, convinced that his inherent genius should suffice. He feels entitled for merely being, rather than for actually doing (rather as the nobility in days gone by felt entitled not by virtue of its merits but as the inevitable, foreordained outcome of its birth right). The narcissist is not meritocratic but aristocratic.

Such a mental structure is brittle, susceptible to criticism and disagreement, vulnerable to the incessant encounter with a harsh and intolerant world. Deep inside, narcissists of both kinds (those wrought by "classic" abuse and those yielded by being idolized) feel inadequate, phoney, fake, inferior, and deserving of punishment.

Millon makes a distinction between several types of narcissists. He wrongly assumes that the "classic" narcissist is the outcome of parental overvaluation, idolization, and spoiling and, thus, is possessed of supreme, unchallenged, self-confidence, and is devoid of all self-doubt.

According to Millon, it is the "compensatory" narcissist that falls prey to nagging self-doubts, feelings of inferiority, and a masochistic desire for self-punishment.

Yet, this distinction is both wrong and unnecessary. Psychodynamically, there is only one type of pathological narcissism - though there are two developmental paths to it. And all narcissists are besieged by deeply ingrained (though at times not conscious) feelings of inadequacy, fears of failure, masochistic desires to be penalized, a fluctuating sense of self-worth (regulated by Narcissistic Supply), and an overwhelming sensation of fraudulence.

In the early childhood of all narcissists, meaningful others are inconsistent in their acceptance of the child. They pay attention to the narcissist only when they wish to satisfy their needs. They tend to ignore him - or actively abuse him - when these needs are no longer pressing.

The narcissist's past of abuse teaches him to avoid deeper relationships in order to escape this painful approach-avoidance pendulum. Protecting himself from hurt and from abandonment, he insulates himself from people around him. He digs in rather than spring out.

We all put people around us (the aforementioned objects) to recurrent tests. This is the "primary narcissistic stage". A positive relationship with one's parents or caregivers (Primary Objects) secures the smooth transition to "object love". The child then forgoes his narcissism.

Giving up one's narcissism is tough. Narcissism is alluring, soothing, warm and dependable. It is always present and all-pervasive. It is custom tailored to the needs of the individual. To love oneself is to have the perfect lover. Good reasons and strong forces - collectively known as "parental love" - are required to motivate the child to give up its narcissism.

The child progresses beyond its primary narcissism in order to be able to love his parents. If they are narcissists, they subject him to idealization (over-valuation) and devaluation cycles. They do not reliably satisfy the child's needs. In other words, they frustrate him. He gradually realizes that he is no more than a toy, an instrument, a means to an end: his parents' gratification.

This shocking revelation deforms the child's budding Ego. The child forms a strong dependence (as opposed to attachment) on his parents. This dependence is really the outcome of fear, the mirror image of aggression. In Freud-speak (psychoanalysis) we say that the child is likely to develop accentuated oral fixations and regressions. In plain terms, we are likely to see a lost, phobic, helpless, raging child.

But a child is still a child and his relationship with his parents is of ultimate importance to him.

He, therefore, resists his natural reactions to his abusive caregivers, and tries to defuse his libidinal and aggressive sensations and emotions. This way, he hopes to rehabilitate the damaged relationship with his parents (which never really existed). Hence the [primordial confabulation](#), the mother of all future narcissistic [fantasies](#). In his embattled mind, the child transforms the Superego into an idealized, sadistic parent-child. His Ego, in turn, becomes a hated, devalued child-parent.

The family is the mainspring of support of every kind. It mobilizes psychological resources and alleviates emotional burdens. It allows for the sharing of tasks, provides material supplies coupled with cognitive training. It is the prime socialization agent and encourages the absorption of information, most of it useful and adaptive.

This division of labour between parents and children is vital both to personal growth and to proper adaptation. The child must feel, as he does in a functional family, that he can share his experiences without being defensive and that the feedback that he is getting is open and unbiased. The only "bias" acceptable (often because it is consonant with feedback from the outside) is the family's set of beliefs, values and goals that are finally internalized by the child by way of imitation and unconscious identification.

So, the family is the first and the most important source of identity and emotional support. It is a greenhouse, where the child feels loved, cared for, accepted, and secure - the prerequisites for the development of personal resources. On the material level, the family should provide the basic necessities (and, preferably, beyond), physical care and protection, and refuge and shelter during crises.

The role of the mother (the Primary Object) has often been discussed. The father's part is mostly neglected, even in professional literature. However, recent research demonstrates his importance to the orderly and healthy development of the child.

The father participates in the day-to-day care, is an intellectual catalyst who encourages the child to develop his interests and to satisfy his curiosity through the manipulation of various instruments and games. He is a source of authority and discipline, a boundary setter, enforcing and encouraging positive behaviours and eliminating negative ones.

The father also provides emotional support and economic security, thus stabilizing the family unit. Finally, he is the prime source of masculine orientation and identification to the male child and gives warmth and love as a male to his daughter, without transgressing the socially permissible limits.

We can safely say that the narcissist's family is as severely disordered as he is. Pathological narcissism is largely a reflection of this dysfunction. Such an environment breeds self-deception. The narcissist's internal dialogue is "I do have a relationship with my parents. It is my fault - the fault of my emotions, sensations, aggressions and passions - that this relationship is not working. It is, therefore, my responsibility to make amends. I will construct a narrative in which I am both loved and punished. In this script, I will allocate roles to myself and to my parents. This way, everything will be fine and we will all be happy."

Thus starts the cycle of over-valuation (idealization) and devaluation. The dual roles of sadist and punished masochist (Superego and Ego), parent and child, permeate all the narcissist's interactions with other people.

The narcissist experiences a reversal of roles as his relationships progress. At the beginning of a relationship he is the child in need of attention, approval and admiration. He becomes dependent. Then, at the first sign of disapproval (real or imaginary), he is transformed into an avowed sadist, punishing and inflicting pain.

It is commonly agreed that a loss (real or perceived) at a critical junction in the psychological development of the child forces him to refer to himself for nurturing and for gratification. The child ceases to trust others and his ability to develop object love, or to idealize is hampered. He is constantly haunted by the feeling that only he can satisfy his emotional needs.

He exploits people, sometimes unintentionally, but always ruthlessly and mercilessly. He uses them to obtain confirmation of the accuracy of his grandiose self-portrait.

The narcissist is usually above treatment. He knows best. He feels [superior to his therapist](#) in particular and to the science of psychology in general. He seeks treatment only following a major life crisis, which directly threatens his projected and perceived image. Even then he only wishes to restore the previous balance.

[Therapy](#) sessions with the narcissist resemble a battlefield. He is aloof and distanced, demonstrates his superiority in a myriad ways, resents what he perceives to be an intrusion on his innermost sanctum. He is offended by any hint regarding defects or dysfunctions in his personality or in his behaviour. A narcissist is

a narcissist is a narcissist - even when he asks for help with his world and worldview shattered.

Appendix: Object Relations Theories and Narcissism

Otto Kernberg (1975, 1984, 1987) disagrees with Freud. He regards the division between an "object libido" (energy directed at objects, meaningful others, people in the immediate vicinity of the infant) and a "narcissistic libido" (energy directed at the self as the most immediate and satisfying object), which precedes it as spurious.

Whether a child develops normal or pathological narcissism depends on the relations between the representations of the self (roughly, the image of the self that the child forms in his mind) and the representations of objects (roughly, the images of other people that the child forms in his mind, based on all the emotional and objective information available to him). It is also dependent on the relationship between the representations of the self and real, external, "objective" objects.

Add to these instinctual conflicts related to both the libido and to aggression (these very strong emotions give rise to strong conflicts in the child) and a comprehensive explanation concerning the formation of pathological narcissism emerges.

Kernberg's concept of Self is closely related to Freud's concept of Ego. The self is dependent upon the unconscious, which exerts a constant influence on all mental functions. Pathological narcissism, therefore, reflects a libidinal investment in a pathologically structured self and not in a normal, integrative structure of the self.

The narcissist suffers because his self is devalued or fixated on aggression. All object relations of such a self are distorted: it detaches from real objects (because they hurt it often), dissociates, represses, or projects. Narcissism is not merely a fixation on an early developmental stage. It is not confined to the failure to develop intra-psychic structures.

Franz Kohut regarded narcissism as the final product of the failing efforts of parents to cope with the needs of the child to idealize and to be grandiose (for instance, to be omnipotent).

Idealization is an important developmental path leading to narcissism. The child merges the idealized aspects of the images of his parents (Imagos, in Kohut's terminology) with those wide segments of the image of the parent which are cathected (infused) with object libido (in which the child invests the energy that he reserves for objects).

This exerts an enormous and all-important influence on the processes of re-internalization (the processes in which the child re-introduces the objects and their images into his mind) in each of the successive phases.

Through these processes, two permanent nuclei of the personality are constructed:

- a. The basic, neutralizing texture of the psyche, and
- b. The ideal Superego

Both of them are characterized by an invested instinctual narcissistic cathexis (invested energy of self-love which is instinctual).

At first, the child idealizes his parents. As he grows up, he begins to notice their shortcomings and vices. He withdraws part of the idealizing libido from the images of the parents, which is conducive to the natural development of the Superego. The narcissistic part of the child's psyche remains vulnerable throughout its development. This is largely true until the "child" re-internalizes the ideal parent image.

Also, the very construction of the mental apparatus can be tampered with by traumatic deficiencies and by object losses right through the Oedipal period (and even in latency and in adolescence).

The same effect can be attributed to traumatic disappointment by objects.

Disturbances leading to the formation of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) can be thus grouped into:

1. *Very early disturbances in the relationship with an ideal object.* These lead to a structural weakness of the personality, which develops a deficient and/or dysfunctional stimuli-filtering mechanism. The ability of the individual to maintain a basic narcissistic homeostasis of the personality is damaged. Such a person suffers from diffusive narcissistic vulnerability.
2. *A disturbance occurring later in life - but still pre-Oedipally -* affects the pre-Oedipal formation of the basic mechanisms for controlling, channelling, and neutralizing drives and urges. The nature of the disturbance has to be a traumatic encounter with the ideal object (such as a major disappointment). The symptomatic manifestation of this structural defect is the propensity to re-sexualize drive derivatives and internal and external conflicts, either in the form of fantasies or in the form of deviant acts.

3. *A disturbance formed in the Oedipal or even in the early latent phases* - inhibits the completion of the Superego idealization. This is especially true of a disappointment related to an ideal object of the late pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal stages, where the partly idealized external parallel of the newly internalized object is traumatically destroyed.

Such a person possesses a set of values and standards, but he is always on the lookout for ideal external figures from whom he aspires to derive the affirmation and the leadership that he cannot get from his insufficiently idealized Superego.

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Malignant
Self Love
Narcissism Revisited

Frequently Asked Questions

Pathological Narcissism A Dysfunction or a Blessing?

Is pathological narcissism a blessing or a malediction?

The answer is: it depends. Healthy narcissism is a mature, balanced love of oneself coupled with a stable sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Healthy narcissism implies knowledge of one's boundaries and a proportionate and realistic appraisal of one's achievements and traits. Pathological narcissism is wrongly described as too much healthy narcissism (or too much self-esteem). Yet, these are two absolutely unrelated phenomena which, regrettably, came to bear the same name. Confusing pathological narcissism with healthy self-esteem betrays a fundamental ignorance of both.

Pathological narcissism involves an impaired, dysfunctional, immature (True) Self coupled with a compensatory fiction (the False Self). The sick narcissist's sense of self-worth and self-esteem derive entirely from audience feedback. The narcissist has no self-esteem or self-worth of his own (no such ego functions). In the absence of observers, the narcissist shrivels to non-existence and feels dead. Hence the narcissist's preying habits in his constant pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. Pathological narcissism is an addictive behaviour.

Still, dysfunctions are reactions to abnormal environments and situations (e.g., abuse, trauma, smothering, etc.).

Paradoxically, his dysfunction allows the narcissist to function. It compensates for his lacks, deficits, and deficiencies by exaggerating certain tendencies and traits. It is like the overdeveloped tactile sense of a blind person. In short: pathological narcissism is a result of over-sensitivity, the repression of overwhelming memories and experiences, and the

suppression of inordinately strong negative feelings (e.g., hurt, envy, anger, or humiliation).

That the narcissist functions at all is because of his pathology and thanks to it. The alternative is complete decompensation and integration.

In time, the narcissist learns how to leverage his pathology, how to use it to his advantage, how to deploy it in order to maximize benefits and utilities - in other words, how to transform his curse into a blessing.

Narcissists are obsessed with delusions of fantastic grandeur and superiority. As a result they are very competitive. They are strongly compelled - where others are merely motivated. They are driven, relentless, tireless, and ruthless. They often make it to the top. But even when they do not, they strive and fight and learn and climb and create and think and devise and design and conspire. Faced with a challenge, they are likely to do better than non-narcissists.

Yet, we often find that narcissists abandon their efforts in mid-stream, give up, vanish, lose interest, devalue former pursuits, or slump. Why is that?

Coping with a challenge, even with a guaranteed eventual triumph is meaningless in the absence of onlookers. The narcissist needs an audience to applaud, affirm, recoil, approve, admire, adore, fear, or even detest him. He craves the attention and depends on the Narcissistic Supply only others can provide. The narcissist derives sustenance only from the outside - his emotional innards are hollow and moribund.

The narcissist's enhanced performance is predicated on the existence of a challenge (real or imaginary) and of an audience.

First published on the [Suite 101](#) Narcissistic Personality Disorder Topic.

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The Narcissist's Reaction to Deficient Narcissistic Supply

Question: How does the narcissist react when he fails to obtain enough [Narcissistic Supply](#)?

Answer: Very much as a drug addict reacts to the absence of his drug of choice.

The narcissist constantly consumes (really, preys upon) adoration, admiration, approval, applause, attention and other forms of Narcissistic Supply. When lacking or deficient, a [Narcissistic Deficiency Dysphoria](#) sets in. The narcissist then appears to be lethargic or (more rarely) agitated, depressed or (infrequently) manic, his movements slow down or become frantic, his sleep patterns are disordered (he either sleeps too much or becomes insomniac), his [eating patterns](#) change (he gorges on food or is avoids it altogether).

Typically, when deprived of Narcissistic Supply, the narcissist is constantly dysphoric (sad) and anhedonic (finds no pleasure in anything, including his former pursuits, hobbies, and interests). He is subjected to violent mood swings (mainly rage attacks) and all his (visible and painful) efforts at self-control fail. He may compulsively and ritually resort to an alternative [addiction](#): alcohol, drugs, reckless driving, shopaholism.

This gradual disintegration is the narcissist's futile effort both to escape his predicament and to sublimate his aggressive urges. His whole behaviour seems constrained, artificial, and effortful. The narcissist gradually turns more and more mechanical, detached, and "unreal". His thoughts constantly wander or become obsessive and repetitive, his speech may falter, he appears to be far away, in a world of his narcissistic fantasies, where Narcissistic Supply is aplenty.

He withdraws from his painful existence, where others fail to appreciate his greatness, special skills and talents, potential, or achievements. The narcissist thus ceases to bestow himself upon a cruel universe, punishing the world for its shortcomings, its inability to realize how unique the narcissist is.

The narcissist goes into a [schizoid](#) mode: he isolates himself, a hermit in the kingdom of his hurt. He minimizes his social interactions and uses "messengers" to communicate with the outside. Devoid of energy, the narcissist can no longer pretend to succumb to social conventions. His former compliance gives way to open withdrawal (a rebellion of sorts). Smiles are transformed to frowns, courtesy becomes rudeness, emphasized etiquette used as a weapon, an outlet of aggression, an act of violence.

The narcissist, blinded by pain, seeks to restore his balance, to take another sip of the narcissistic nectar. In this quest, the narcissist turns both to and upon those nearest to him. His real attitude emerges: for him, his nearest and dearest are nothing but tools, one-dimensional instruments of gratification, Sources of Supply or pimps of such supply, catering to his narcissistic lusts.

Having failed to procure for him his "drug" (Narcissistic Supply), the narcissist regards friends, colleagues, and even family members as dysfunctional, frustrating objects. In his wrath, he tries to "mend" them by forcing them to perform again, to function.

This is coupled with merciless self-flagellation, a deservedly self-inflicted punishment, the narcissist feels. In extreme cases of deprivation, the narcissist entertains suicidal thoughts, this is how deeply he loathes his self and his dependence.

Throughout, the narcissist is beset by a pervading sense of malignant nostalgia, harking back to a [past](#), which never existed except in the thwarted fantastic grandiosity of the narcissist. The longer the lack of Narcissistic Supply, the more the narcissist glorifies, re-writes, misses and mourns this past.

This nostalgia serves to enhance other negative feelings, together amounting to [clinical depression](#). The narcissist proceeds to develop paranoia. He concocts a prosecuting world, incorporating in it his life's events and his social milieu. This gives meaning to what is erroneously perceived by the narcissist to be a sudden shift (from over-supply to no supply).

These theories of conspiracy account for the decrease in Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist then - frightened, in pain, and in despair - embarks upon an orgy of [self-destruction](#) intended to generate "alternative Supply Sources" (attention) at all costs. The

narcissist is poised to commit the ultimate narcissistic act: self-destruction in the service of self-aggrandizement.

When deprived of Narcissistic Supply - both Primary AND Secondary - the narcissist feels annulled, hollowed out, or mentally disembowelled. This is an overpowering sense of evaporation, disintegration into molecules of terrified anguish, helplessly and inexorably.

Without Narcissistic Supply the narcissist crumbles like the zombies or the vampires one sees in horror movies. It is terrifying and the narcissist will do anything to avoid it. Again, like the drug addict, the narcissist's withdrawal symptoms are: delusions, physiological effects, irritability, and emotional lability.

In the absence of regular Narcissistic Supply, narcissists often experience [brief, decompensatory psychotic episodes](#). This also happens while in therapy or following a life-crisis accompanied by a major [narcissistic injury](#).

These psychotic episodes may be closely allied to another feature of narcissism: magical thinking. Narcissists are like children in this sense. Many, for instance, fully believe in two things: that whatever happens, they will prevail and that good things will always happen to them. It is more than mere belief. Narcissists just KNOW it, the same way one "knows" about gravity: directly, immediately and assuredly.

The narcissist believes that, no matter what he does, he will always be forgiven, always [prevail and triumph](#), always come on top. The narcissist is, therefore, fearless in a manner perceived by others to be both admirable and reckless. He attributes to himself divine and cosmic [immunity](#): he cloaks himself in it, it renders him invisible to his enemies and to the powers of "evil". It is a childish phantasmagoria, but to the narcissist it is very real.

With equal certitude, the more self-aware narcissist knows that he will squander this good fortune time and again - a painful experience best avoided. So, no matter what serendipity or fortuity, what lucky circumstance, what blessing the narcissist receives, he always strives with blind fury to deflect them and, thus, to ruin his chances.

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The Delusional Way Out

"The man abandoned by all gods escapes completely from reality and creates for himself another world in which he ... can achieve everything that he wants. as been unloved, even tormented, he now splits off from himself a part which in the form of a helpful, loving, often motherly minder commiserates with the tormented remainder of the self, nurses him and decides for him ... with the deepest wisdom and most penetrating intelligence..."

[Ferenczi and Sandor - "Notes and Fragments" - International Journal of Psychoanalysis - Vol XXX (1949), p. 234]

Question: When my husband goes through a bad spot, he shuts himself in his den all day long, doesn't talk to anyone, just surfs the Web. Is this typical? Should I be worried?

Answer: The study of narcissism is a century old and the two scholarly debates central to its conception are still undecided. Is there such a thing as HEALTHY adult narcissism (Kohut) - or are all the manifestations of narcissism in adulthood pathological (Freud, Kernberg)? Moreover, is pathological narcissism the outcome of verbal, sexual, physical, or psychological abuse (the prevailing view) - or, on the contrary, the sad result of spoiling the child and idolizing it (Millon, Freud in his alter writings)?

The second debate is easier to resolve if one agrees to adopt a more comprehensive definition of "abuse". Overweening, smothering, spoiling, overvaluing, and idolizing the child are all forms of parental abuse.

This is because, as Horney pointed out, the child is dehumanized and instrumentalized. His parents love him not for what he really is but for what they wish and imagine him to be: the fulfilment of their dreams and frustrated wishes. The child becomes the vessel of his parents' discontented lives, a tool, the magic wand with which they can transform their failures into successes, their

humiliation into victory, and their frustrations into happiness. The child is taught to ignore reality and to occupy the parental fantastic space. Such an unfortunate child feels omnipotent and omniscient, perfect and brilliant, worthy of adoration and entitled to special treatment. The faculties that are honed by constantly brushing against bruising reality - empathy, compassion, a realistic assessment of one's abilities and limitations, realistic expectations of oneself and of others, personal boundaries, team work, social skills, perseverance and goal-orientation, not to mention the ability to postpone gratification and to work hard to achieve it - are all lacking or missing altogether. This kind of child turned adult sees no reason to invest in his skills and education, convinced as he is that his inherent genius should suffice. He feels entitled for merely being, rather than for actually doing (rather as the nobility in days gone by felt entitled not by virtue of its merits but as an inevitable, foreordained birth right). In other words, the budding narcissist is not meritocratic but aristocratic.

But such a mental structure is brittle, susceptible to criticism and disagreement, vulnerable to incessant encounters with a harsh and intolerant world. Deep inside, narcissists of both kinds (those wrought by "classic" abuse and those yielded by being idolized) feel inadequate, phoney, fake, inferior, and deserving of punishment.

Millon makes a distinction between several types of narcissists. He wrongly assumes that the "classic" narcissist is the outcome of overvaluation, idolization, and spoiling and, thus, is possessed of supreme, unchallenged, self-confidence, and is devoid of all self-doubt. According to Millon, it is the "compensatory" narcissist that falls prey to nagging self-doubts, feelings of inferiority, and a masochistic desire for self-punishment. Yet, the distinction is both wrong and unnecessary. There is only ONE type of narcissist - though there are TWO developmental paths to it. And ALL narcissists are besieged by deeply ingrained (though at times not conscious) feelings of inadequacy, fears of failure, masochistic desires to be penalized, a fluctuating sense of self-worth (regulated by Narcissistic Supply), and an overwhelming sensation of fraudulence.

The Grandiosity Gap (between a fantastically grandiose self-image and actual, limited, accomplishments and achievements) is grating. Its recurrence threatens the precariously balanced house of cards that is the narcissistic personality. The narcissist finds, to his chagrin that people are much less admiring, accommodating and accepting than his parents. As he [grows old](#), the narcissist

often becomes the target of constant derision and mockery, a sorry sight indeed. His claims to superiority appear less plausible and substantial the more often and the longer he makes them.

Pathological narcissism - originally a defence mechanism intended to shield the narcissist from an injurious world - becomes the main source of hurt, a generator of injuries, counterproductive and dangerous. Overwhelmed by negative or absent Narcissistic Supply, the narcissist is forced to let go of it.

The narcissist then resorts to self-delusion. Unable to completely ignore contrarian opinion and data, he transmutes them. Unable to face the dismal failure that he is, the narcissist partially withdraws from reality. To soothe and salve the pain of disillusionment, he administers to his aching soul a mixture of lies, distortions, half-truths and outlandish interpretations of events around him. These solutions can be classified thus:

The Delusional Narrative Solution

The narcissist constructs a narrative in which he figures as the hero: brilliant, perfect, irresistibly handsome, destined for great things, entitled, powerful, wealthy, the centre of attention, etc. The bigger the strain on this delusional charade - the greater the gap between fantasy and reality - the more the delusion coalesces and solidifies.

Finally, if it is sufficiently protracted, it replaces reality and the narcissist's reality test deteriorates. He withdraws his bridges and may become schizotypal, catatonic, or schizoid.

The Antisocial Solution

The narcissist renounces reality. To his mind, those who pusillanimously fail to recognize his unbounded talents, innate superiority, overarching brilliance, benevolent nature, entitlement, cosmically important mission, perfection, etc. do not deserve consideration. The narcissist's natural affinity with the criminal - his lack of empathy and compassion, his deficient social skills, his disregard for social laws and morals, and his poor impulse control - now erupt and blossom. He becomes a full fledged antisocial (sociopath or psychopath). He ignores the wishes and needs of others, he breaks the law, he violates all rights, both natural and legal, he holds people in contempt and disdain, he derides society and its codes, he punishes the ignorant ingrates who, to his mind, drove him to this state by acting criminally and by jeopardising their safety, lives, or property.

The Paranoid Schizoid Solution

The narcissist develops persecutory delusions. He perceives slights and insults where none were intended. He becomes subject to ideas of reference (he becomes convinced that people are gossiping about him, mocking him, prying into his affairs, hacking his e-mail, etc.). He is convinced that he is the centre of malign and mal-intentioned attention. People are conspiring to humiliate him, punish him, abscond with his property, delude him, impoverish him, confine him physically or intellectually, censor him, impose on his time, force him to action (or to inaction), frighten him, coerce him, surround and besiege him, change his mind, part with his values, victimize or even murder him, and so on.

Some narcissists withdraw completely from a world populated with such minacious and ominous objects (really projections of internal objects and processes). They avoid all social contact, except the most necessary. They refrain from meeting people, falling in love, having sex, talking to others, or even corresponding with them. In short: they become schizoids - not out of social shyness, but out of what they feel to be their choice. "This evil, hopeless world does not deserve me" - goes the inner refrain - "and I shall waste none of my time and resources on it."

The Paranoid Aggressive (Explosive) Solution

Other narcissists, who develop persecutory delusions, resort to an aggressive stance, a more violent resolution of their internal conflict. They become verbally, psychologically, situationally (and, very rarely, physically) abusive. They insult, castigate, chastise, berate, demean, and deride their nearest and dearest (often well wishers and loved ones). They explode in unprovoked displays of indignation, self-righteousness, condemnation, and blame. Theirs is an exegetic Bedlam. They interpret everything - even the most innocuous, inadvertent, and innocent comment - as designed to provoke and humiliate them. They sow fear, revulsion, hate, and malignant envy. They flail against the windmills of reality - a pathetic, forlorn, sight. But often they cause real and lasting damage - fortunately, mainly to themselves.

The Masochistic Avoidant Solution

The narcissist is angered by the lack of Narcissistic Supply. He directs some of this fury inwards, punishing himself for his "failure". This masochistic behaviour has the added "benefit" of forcing the narcissist's closest to assume the roles of dismayed

spectators or of persecutors and thus, either way, to pay him the attention that he craves.

Self-administered punishment often manifests as self-handicapping masochism - a narcissistic cop-out. By undermining his work, his relationships, and his efforts, the increasingly fragile narcissist avoids additional criticism and censure (negative supply). Self-inflicted failure is the narcissist's doing and thus proves that he is the master of his own fate.

Masochistic narcissists keep finding themselves in self-defeating circumstances which render success impossible and *"an objective assessment of their performance improbable"* [Millon, 2000]. They act carelessly, withdraw in mid-effort, are constantly fatigued, bored, or disaffected and thus passive-aggressively sabotage their lives. Their suffering is defiant and by "deciding to abort" they reassert their omnipotence.

The narcissist's pronounced and public misery and self-pity are compensatory and *"reinforce (his) self-esteem against overwhelming convictions of worthlessness"* [Millon, 2000]. His tribulations and anguish render him, in his eyes, unique, saintly, virtuous, righteous, resilient, and significant. They are, in other words, self-generated Narcissistic Supply.

Thus, paradoxically, the worst his anguish and unhappiness, the more relieved and elated such a narcissist feels!

[Additional reading: Millon, Theodore and Davis, Roger - Personality Disorders in Modern Life, 2nd Edition - New York, John Wiley and Sons, 2000]

Note: The Prodigy as Narcissistic Injury

The prodigy - the precocious "genius" - feels [entitled to special treatment](#). Yet, his unrealistic expectations are rarely fulfilled. This frustrates him and renders him even more [aggressive](#), driven, and [overachieving](#) than he is by nature.

Not all precocious prodigies end up under-accomplished and petulant. Many of them go on to attain great stature in their communities and great standing in their [professions](#). But, even then, the gap between the kind of treatment they believe that they deserve and the one they are getting is unbridgeable.

This is because narcissistic prodigies often misjudge the extent and importance of their accomplishments and, as a result, erroneously consider themselves to be indispensable and worthy of special rights, perks, and privileges. When they find out otherwise, they are devastated and [furious](#).

Moreover, people are envious of the prodigy. The genius serves as a constant reminder to others of their mediocrity, lack of creativity, and mundane existence. Naturally, they try to "bring him down to their level" and "cut him down to size". The gifted person's haughtiness and high-handedness only exacerbate his strained relationships.

In a way, merely by existing, the prodigy inflicts constant and repeated [narcissistic injuries](#) on the less endowed and the pedestrian. This creates a vicious cycle. People try to hurt and harm the overweening and arrogant genius and he becomes defensive, aggressive, and aloof. This renders him even more obnoxious than before and others resent him more deeply and more thoroughly. Hurt and wounded, he retreats into fantasies of grandeur and revenge. And the cycle re-commences.

Grandiosity and Intimacy - The Roots of Paranoia

Paranoid ideation - the narcissist's deep-rooted conviction that he is being persecuted by his inferiors, detractors, or powerful ill-wishers - serves two psychodynamic purposes. It upholds the narcissist's grandiosity and it fends off intimacy.

Grandiosity Enhancing Paranoia

Being the target of relentless, ubiquitous, and unjust persecution proves to the paranoid narcissist how important and feared he is. Being hounded by the mighty and the privileged validates his pivotal role in the scheme of things. Only vital, weighty, crucial, essential principals are thus bullied and intimidated, followed and harassed, stalked and intruded upon goes his unconscious inner dialog. The narcissist consistently baits authority figures into punishing him and thus into upholding his delusional self-image as worthy of their attention. This provocative behaviour is called Projective Identification.

The paranoid delusions of the narcissist are always grandiose, "cosmic", or "historical". His pursuers are influential and formidable. They are after his unique possessions, out to exploit his expertise and special traits, or to force him to abstain and refrain from certain actions. The narcissist feels that he is at the centre of intrigues and conspiracies of colossal magnitude.

Alternatively, the narcissist feels victimized by mediocre bureaucrats and intellectual dwarves who consistently fail to appreciate his outstanding - really, unparalleled - talents, skills, and accomplishments. Being hunted by his challenged inferiors substantiates the narcissist's comparative superiority. Driven by

pathological envy, these pygmies collude to defraud him, badger him, deny him his due, denigrate, isolate, and ignore him.

The narcissist projects onto this second class of lesser persecutors his own deleterious emotions and transformed aggression: hatred, rage, and seething jealousy.

The narcissist's paranoid streak is likeliest to erupt when he [lacks Narcissistic Supply](#). The regulation of his labile sense of self-worth is dependent upon external stimuli: adoration, adulation, affirmation, applause, notoriety, fame, infamy, and, in general, attention of any kind.

When such attention is deficient, the narcissist compensates by [confabulating](#). He constructs ungrounded narratives in which he is the protagonist and uses them to force his human environment into complicity.

Put simply, he provokes people to pay attention to him by misbehaving or by behaving oddly.

Intimacy Retarding Paranoia

Paranoia is used by the narcissist to ward off or reverse intimacy. The narcissist is threatened by intimacy because it reduces him to ordinariness by exposing his weaknesses and shortcomings and by causing him to act "normally". The narcissist also dreads the encounter with his deep buried emotions - hurt, envy, anger, aggression - likely to be foisted on him in an intimate relationship.

The paranoid narrative legitimizes intimacy-retarding behaviours such as keeping one's distance, secrecy, aloofness, reclusion, aggression, intrusion on privacy, lying, desultoriness, itinerancy, unpredictability, and idiosyncratic or eccentric reactions. Gradually, the narcissist succeeds to alienate and wear down all his friends, colleagues, well-wishers, spouses, partners, and mates.

Even his closest, nearest, and dearest, his family, feel emotionally detached and "burnt out".

The paranoid narcissist ends life as an oddball recluse: derided, feared, and loathed in equal measures. His paranoia - exacerbated by repeated rejections and ageing - pervades his entire life and diminishes his creativity, adaptability, and functioning. The narcissist's personality, buffeted by paranoia, turns ossified and brittle. Finally, atomized and useless, it succumbs and gives way to a great void. The narcissist is consumed.

*First published on the [Suite 101 Narcissistic Personality Disorder Topic](#).
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The Unstable Narcissist

Question: Is the narcissist characterized by simultaneous instabilities in all the important aspects of his life?

Answer: The narcissist is a person who derives his Ego (and ego functions) from other people's reactions to an image he invents and projects, called the [False Self](#) (Narcissistic Supply). Since no absolute control over the quantity and quality of [Narcissistic Supply](#) is possible - it is bound to fluctuate - the narcissist's view of himself and of his world is correspondingly and equally volatile. As "public opinion" ebbs and flows, so do the narcissist's self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of self-worth, or, in other words, so does his Self. Even the narcissist's convictions are subject to a never-ending process of vetting by others.

The [narcissistic personality](#) is unstable in each and every one of its dimensions. It is the ultimate hybrid: rigidly amorphous, devoutly flexible, reliant for its sustenance on the opinion of people, whom the narcissist undervalues. A large part of this instability is subsumed under the Emotional Involvement Prevention Measures (EIPM), described in the [Essay](#). The narcissist's lability is so ubiquitous and so dominant, that it might well be described as the ONLY stable feature of his personality.

The narcissist does everything with one goal in mind: to attract Narcissistic Supply (attention).

An example of this kind of behaviour:

The narcissist may study a given subject diligently and in great depth in order to impress people later with this newly acquired erudition. But, having served its purpose, the narcissist lets the knowledge thus acquired evaporate. The narcissist maintains a sort of a "short-term" cell or warehouse where he stores whatever may come handy in the pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. But he is

almost never really interested in what he does, or studies, or experiences.

From the outside, this might be perceived as instability. But think about it this way: the narcissist is constantly preparing for life's "exams" and feels that he is on a permanent trial. It is common to forget material studied only in preparation for an exam or for a court appearance.

Short-term memory is perfectly normal. What sets the narcissist apart is the fact that, with him, this short-termism is a CONSTANT state of affairs and affects ALL his functions, not only those directly related to learning, or to emotions, or to experience, or to any single dimension of his life.

Thus, the narcissist learns, remembers and forgets not in line with his real interests or hobbies; he loves and hates not the real subjects of his emotions but one dimensional, utilitarian, cartoons constructed by him. He judges, praises and condemns - all from the narrowest possible point of view: the potential to extract Narcissistic Supply.

He asks not what he can do with the world and in it - but what can the world do for him as far as Narcissistic Supply is concerned. He falls in and out of love with people, workplaces, residences, vocations, hobbies, and interests because they seem to be able to provide more or less Narcissistic Supply and for no other reason.

Still, narcissists belong to two broad categories: the "compensatory stability" and the "enhancing instability" types.

Compensatory Stability ("Classic") Narcissists

These narcissists isolate one or more (but never most) aspects of their lives and "make these aspect/s stable". They do not really emotionally invest themselves in maintaining these areas of their lives stable. Rather, this stability is safeguarded by artificial means: money, celebrity, power, fear. A typical example is a narcissist who changes numerous workplaces, a few careers, myriad hobbies, value systems or faiths. At the same time, he maintains (preserves) a relationship with a single woman (and even remains faithful to her). She is his "island of stability". To fulfil this role, she just needs to be physically present around him.

The narcissist is dependent upon "his" woman to maintain the stability lacking in all other areas of his life (to compensate for his instability). Yet, emotional closeness and intimacy are bound to threaten the narcissist. Thus, he is likely to distance himself from her and to remain detached and indifferent to most of her needs.

Despite this cruel emotional treatment, the narcissist considers her to be a source of sustenance and a fountain of empowerment. This mismatch between what he wishes to receive and what he is able to give, the narcissist prefers to deny, repress and bury deep in his unconscious.

This is why he is always shocked and devastated to learn of his wife's estrangement, infidelity, or intentions to divorce him. Possessed of no emotional depth, being completely clueless and one track minded, he cannot fathom the needs of others. In other words, he cannot [empathize](#).

Another, even more common case is the "career narcissist". This narcissist marries, divorces and remarries with dizzying speed. Everything in his life is in constant flux: friends, emotions, judgements, values, beliefs, place of residence, affiliations, hobbies. Everything, that is, except his work.

His career is the island of compensating stability in his otherwise mercurial existence. This kind of narcissist is dogged by unmitigated ambition and devotion. He perseveres in one workplace or one job, patiently, persistently and blindly climbing up the corporate ladder and treading the career path. In his pursuit of job fulfilment and achievements, the workaholic narcissist is ruthless and unscrupulous, and, very often, successful.

Enhancing Instability ("Borderline") Narcissist

The other kind of narcissist enhances instability in one aspect or dimension of his life by introducing instability in others. Thus, if such a narcissist resigns (or, more likely, is made redundant), he also relocates to another city or country. If he divorces, he is also likely to resign his job.

This added instability gives this type of narcissist the feeling that all the dimensions of his life are changing simultaneously, that he is being "unshackled", that a transformation is in progress. This, of course, is an illusion. Those who know the narcissist, no longer trust his frequent "conversions", "decisions", "crises", "transformations", "developments" and "periods". They see through his pretensions, protestations, and solemn declarations into the core of his instability. They know that he is not to be relied upon. They know that with narcissists, the temporary is the only permanence.

Narcissists hate routine. When a narcissist finds himself doing the same things over and over again, he gets depressed. He oversleeps, over-eats, over-drinks and, in general, engages in addictive, impulsive, [reckless](#), and [compulsive](#) behaviours. This is

his way of re-introducing risk and excitement into what he (emotionally) perceives to be a barren life.

The problem is that even the most exciting and varied existence becomes routine after a while. Living in the same country or apartment, meeting the same people, doing essentially the same things (even with changing content) all amount, in the eyes of the narcissist, to stultifying rote.

The narcissist feels entitled. He feels it is his right - due to his intellectual or physical superiority - to lead a thrilling, rewarding, kaleidoscopic life. He wants to force life itself, or at least people around him, to yield to his wishes and needs, supreme among them the need for stimulating variety.

This rejection of [habit](#) is part of a larger pattern of aggressive entitlement. The narcissist feels that the very existence of a sublime intellect (such as his) warrants concessions and allowances by others.

Thus, queuing in line is a waste of time better spent pursuing knowledge, inventing and creating. The narcissist feels that he deserves only the best medical treatment proffered by the most prominent medical authorities - lest the precious asset that he is should be lost to Mankind. The narcissist makes clear that he should not be bothered with trivial pursuits - these lowly functions are best assigned to the less gifted.

Entitlement is sometimes justified in a Picasso or an Einstein. But few narcissists are either. Their achievements are grotesquely incommensurate with their overwhelming sense of entitlement and with their grandiose self-image.

Of course, this overpowering sense of superiority often serves to mask and compensate for a cancerous complex of inferiority. Moreover, the narcissist infects others with his projected grandiosity and their feedback constitutes the edifice upon which he constructs his self-esteem. He regulates his sense of self-worth by rigidly insisting that he is above the madding crowd while deriving his Narcissistic Supply from the very people he holds in deep contempt.

But there is a second angle to this abhorrence of the predictable. Narcissists employ a host of [Emotional Involvement Prevention Measures](#) (EIPM's). Despising routine and avoiding it is one of these mechanisms. Their function is to prevent the narcissist from getting emotionally involved and, subsequently, hurt.

Their application results in an Approach-Avoidance Repetition Complex. The narcissist fears and loathes intimacy, stability and

security and yet craves them. Consequently, he approaches and then avoids significant others or important tasks in a rapid succession of apparently inconsistent and disconnected cycles.

The Two Loves of the Narcissist

Narcissists "love" their spouses or other significant others - as long as they continue to reliably provide them with Narcissistic Supply (in one word, with attention). Inevitably, they regard others as mere "sources", objects, or functions. Lacking empathy and emotional maturity, the narcissist's love is pathological. But the precise locus of the pathology depends on the narcissist's stability or instability in different parts of his life.

We are, therefore, faced with two pathological forms of narcissistic "love".

One type of narcissist "loves" others as one attaches to objects. He "loves" his spouse, for instance, simply because she exists and is available to provide him with Narcissistic Supply. He "loves" his children because they are part of his self-image as a successful husband and father. He "loves" his ["friends"](#) because - and only as long as - he can exploit them.

Such a narcissist reacts with alarm and rage to any sign of independence and autonomy in his "charges". He tries to "freeze" everyone around him in their "allocated" positions and "assigned roles". His world is rigid and immovable, predictable and static, fully under his control. He punishes for "transgressions" against this ordained order. He thus stifles life as a dynamic process of compromises and growth rendering it instead a mere theatre, a tableau vivant.

The other type of narcissist abhors monotony and constancy, equating them, in his mind, with death. He seeks upheaval, drama, and change, but only when they conform to his plans, designs, and views of the world and of himself. Thus, he does not encourage growth in his nearest and dearest. By monopolizing their lives, he, like the other kind of narcissist, also reduces them to mere objects, props in the exciting drama of his life.

This narcissist likewise rages at any sign of rebellion and disagreement. But, as opposed to the first sub-species, he seeks to animate others with his demented energy, grandiose plans, and megalomaniacal self-perception. An [adrenaline junkie](#), his world is a whirlwind of comings and goings, reunions and separations, loves and hates, vocations adopted and discarded, schemes erected and dismantled, enemies turned friends and vice versa. His Universe is equally a theatre, but a more ferocious and chaotic one.

Where is love in all this? Where is the commitment to the loved one's welfare, the self-discipline, the extension of oneself to incorporate the beloved, the mutual growth?

These are nowhere to be seen. The narcissist's "love" is hate and fear disguised: fear of losing control and hatred of the very people his precariously balanced personality so depends on. The narcissist is egotistically committed only to his own well-being. To him, the objects of his "love" are interchangeable and inferior.

He idealizes his nearest and dearest not because he is smitten by emotion, but because he needs to captivate them and to convince himself that they are worthy Sources of Supply, despite their flaws and mediocrity. Once he deems them useless, he discards and devalues them cold-bloodedly. A predator, always on the lookout, he debases the coin of "love" as he corrupts everything else in himself and around him.

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Other People's Pain

Question: Do narcissists actually enjoy the taunting, the sadistic behaviour, and the punishment that always follows?

Answer: Most narcissists enjoy an irrational and brief burst of [relief](#) after having suffered emotionally ("[narcissistic injury](#)") or after having sustained a loss. It is a sense of freedom, which comes with being unshackled. Having lost everything, the narcissist often feels that he has found himself, that he has been re-born, that he has been charged with natal energy, able to take on new challenges and to explore new territories. This elation is so addictive, that the narcissist often seeks pain, humiliation, punishment, scorn, and contempt - as long as they are public and involve the attention of peers and superiors. Being penalized accords with the tormenting inner voices of the narcissist which keep telling him that he is bad, corrupt, and worthy of punishment.

This is the masochistic streak in the narcissist. But the narcissist is also a sadist, albeit an unusual one. The narcissist inflicts pain and abuse on others. He devalues Sources of Supply, callously and offhandedly abandons them, and discards people, places, partnerships, and friendships unhesitatingly. Some narcissists, though by no means the majority, actually ENJOY abusing, taunting, tormenting, and freakishly controlling others ("gaslighting"). But most of them do these things absentmindedly, automatically, and, often, even without good reason.

What is unusual about the narcissist's sadistic behaviours - premeditated acts of tormenting others while enjoying their anguished reactions - is that they are goal orientated. "Pure" sadists have no goal in mind except the pursuit of pleasure: pain as an art form (remember the Marquis de Sade?). Conversely, the narcissist haunts and hunts his victims for a reason: he wants them

to reflect his inner state. It is all part of a psychological [defence mechanism](#) called Projective Identification.

When the narcissist is angry, unhappy, disappointed, injured, or hurt, he feels unable to express his emotions sincerely and openly since to do so would be to admit his frailty, his neediness, and his weaknesses. He deplores his own humanity: his emotions, his vulnerability, his susceptibility, his gullibility, his inadequacies, and his failures. So, he makes use of other people to express his pain and his frustration, his pent up anger and his aggression.

He achieves this by mentally torturing other people to the point of madness, by driving them to violence, by forcing them to search for an outlet, for [closure](#), and, sometimes, revenge. He causes people to lose their own character traits and [adopt his own instead](#).

In reaction to his constant and well-targeted abuse, they become abusive, vengeful, ruthless, lacking empathy, obsessed, and aggressive. They mirror him faithfully and thus relieve him of the need to express himself directly.

Having constructed this hall of writhing human mirrors, the narcissist withdraws. His goal achieved, he lets go. As opposed to the sadist, he is not in it, indefinitely, for the pleasure. He abuses and traumatizes, humiliates and abandons, discards and ignores, insults and provokes only for the purpose of purging his inner demons. By possessing others, he purifies himself, cathartically, and exorcizes his demented self.

This accomplished, he acts almost with remorse. An episode of extreme abuse is followed by an act of great care and by mellifluous apologies. The Narcissistic Pendulum swings between the extremes of torturing others and soothing the resulting pain.

This incongruous behaviour, these "sudden" shifts between sadism and compassion, abuse and "love", ignoring and caring, abandoning and clinging, viciousness and remorse, the harsh and the tender are, perhaps, the most difficult to comprehend and to accept.

These swings produce in people around the narcissist emotional insecurity, an eroded sense of self-worth, fear, stress, and anxiety (often described as "walking on eggshells"). Gradually, emotional paralysis sets in and they come to occupy the same emotional wasteland inhabited by the narcissist, in effect his prisoners and hostages in more ways than one and even when he is long out of their lives.

The Narcissism of Differences Big and Small

Freud coined the phrase "narcissism of small differences" in a paper titled "The Taboo of Virginity" that he published in 1917. Referring to earlier work by British anthropologist Ernest Crawley, he said that we reserve our most virulent emotions - aggression, hatred, envy - towards those who resemble us the most. We feel threatened not by the Other with whom we have little in common - but by the "nearly-we", who mirror and reflect us.

The "nearly-he" imperils the narcissist's selfhood and challenges his uniqueness, perfection, and superiority: the fundamentals of the narcissist's sense of self-worth. It provokes in him primitive narcissistic defences and leads him to adopt desperate measures to protect, preserve, and restore his balance. I call it the Array of Gulliver Defence Mechanisms.

The very existence of the "nearly-he" constitutes a narcissistic injury. The narcissist feels humiliated, shamed, and embarrassed not to be unique after all and he reacts with envy and aggression towards this source of frustration.

In doing so, he resorts to splitting, projection, and Projective Identification. He attributes to other people personal traits that he dislikes in himself and he forces them to behave in conformity with his expectations. In other words, the narcissist sees in others those parts of himself that he cannot countenance. He forces people around him to become him and to reflect his shameful behaviours, hidden fears, and forbidden wishes.

But how does the narcissist avoid the realization that what he loudly decries and derides is actually part of him? By exaggerating, or even dreaming up and creatively inventing, differences between his qualities and conduct and other people's. The more hostile he becomes towards the "nearly-he", the easier it is to distinguish himself from "the Other".

To maintain this differentiating aggression, the narcissist stokes the fires of hostility by obsessively and vengefully nurturing grudges and hurts (some of them imagined). He dwells on injustice and pain inflicted on him by these stereotypically "bad or unworthy" people. He devalues and dehumanizes them and plots revenge to achieve closure. In the process, he indulges in grandiose fantasies, aimed to boost his feelings of omnipotence and magical immunity.

In the process of acquiring an adversary, the narcissist blocks out information that threatens to undermine his emerging self-perception as righteous and offended. He begins to base his whole identity on the brewing conflict which is by now a major

preoccupation and a defining or even all-pervasive dimension of his existence.

Very much the same dynamic applies to coping with major differences between the narcissist and others. He emphasizes the large disparities while transforming even the most minor ones into decisive and unbridgeable.

Deep inside, the narcissist is continuously subject to a gnawing suspicion that his self-perception as omnipotent, omniscient, and irresistible is flawed, [confabulated](#), and unrealistic. When criticized, the narcissist actually agrees with the critic. In other words, there are only minor differences of opinion between the narcissist and his detractors. But this threatens the narcissist's internal cohesion. Hence the wild rage at any hint of disagreement, resistance, or debate.

Similarly, intimacy brings people closer together: it makes them more similar. There are only minor differences between intimate partners. The narcissist perceives this as a threat to his sense of uniqueness. He reacts by devaluing the cause of his fears: the mate, spouse, lover, or partner. He re-establishes the boundaries and the distinctions that were removed by intimacy. Thus restored, he is emotionally ready to embark on another round of idealization (the Approach-Avoidance Repetition Complex).

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To Age with Grace

"Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time."

[Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937]

"Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

[Dylan Thomas, *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*]

"The permanent temptation of life is to confuse dreams with reality. Then permanent defeat of life comes when dreams are surrendered to reality."

[James Michener, Author]

The narcissist ages without mercy and without grace. His withered body and his overwrought mind betray him all at once. He stares with incredulity and rage at cruel mirrors. He refuses to accept his growing fallibility. He rebels against his decrepitude and mediocrity. Accustomed to being awe-inspiring and the recipient of adulation, the narcissist cannot countenance his social isolation and the pathetic figure that he cuts in his senescence.

As a [child prodigy](#), a sex symbol, a stud, a public intellectual, an actor, an idol, the narcissist was at the centre of attention, the eye of his personal twister, a black hole which sucked people's energy and resources dry and spat out with indifference their mutilated carcasses. No longer. With old age comes disillusionment. Old charms wear thin.

Having been exposed for what he is - a deceitful, treacherous, malignant egotist - the narcissist's old tricks now fail him. People

are on their guard, their gullibility reduced. The narcissist - being the rigid, precariously balanced structure that he is - can't change. He reverts to old forms, re-adopts hoary habits, succumbs to erstwhile temptations. He is made a mockery by his accentuated denial of reality, by his obdurate refusal to grow up, an [eternal, malformed child](#) in the sagging body of a decaying man.

It is the fable of the grasshopper and the ant revisited.

The narcissist - the grasshopper - having relied on supercilious stratagems throughout his life, is singularly ill-adapted to life's rigours and tribulations. He feels entitled, but fails to elicit Narcissistic Supply. Wrinkled time makes child prodigies lose their magic, lovers exhaust their potency, philanderers waste their allure, and geniuses lose their touch. The longer the narcissist lives, the more average he becomes. The wider the gulf between his pretensions and his accomplishments, the more he is the object of derision and contempt.

Yet, few narcissists save for rainy days. Few bother to study a trade, or get an academic degree, pursue a career, maintain a business, keep their jobs, or raise functioning families, nurture their friendships, or broaden their horizons. Narcissists are perennially ill-prepared. Those who succeed in their vocation, end up bitterly alone having squandered the love of spouse, off-spring, and mates. The more gregarious and family-orientated often flunk at work, leap from one job to another, relocate erratically, forever itinerant and peripatetic.

The contrast between his youth and prime and his dilapidated present constitutes a permanent narcissistic injury. The narcissist retreats deeper into himself to find solace. He withdraws into the penumbral universe of his grandiose fantasies. There, on the verge of [psychosis](#), he salves his wounds and comforts himself with trophies of his past. A rare minority of narcissists accept their fate with fatalism or good humour. These precious few are healed mysteriously by the deepest offence to their megalomania: old age. They lose their narcissism and confront the outer world with the poise and composure that they lacked when they were captives of their own, distorted, narrative.

Such changed narcissists develop new, more realistic, expectations and hopes, commensurate with their talents, skills, accomplishments and education. Ironically, it is invariably too late. They are avoided and ignored, rendered transparent by their checkered past. They are passed over for promotion, never invited to professional or social gatherings, cold-shouldered by the media. They are snubbed and disregarded. They are never the recipients

of perks, benefits, or awards. They are blamed when not blameworthy and rarely praised when deserving. They are being constantly and consistently punished for who they once were. It is poetic justice in more than one way. They are being treated narcissistically by their erstwhile victims. They are finally getting to taste their own medicine, the bitter harvest of their erstwhile wrath and arrogance.

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The Inverted Narcissist

With contributions by the members of the Narcissism List

THE CLINICAL PICTURE AND DEVELOPMENTAL ROOTS - OPENING REMARKS

Terminology

Co-Dependents

There is great confusion regarding the terms co-dependent, counter-dependent, and dependent.

Like dependents (people with the Dependent Personality Disorder), co-dependents depend on other people for their emotional gratification and the performance of both inconsequential and crucial daily and psychological functions.

Co-dependents are needy, demanding, and submissive. They suffer from abandonment anxiety and, to avoid being overwhelmed by it, they cling to others and act immaturely. These behaviours are intended to elicit protective responses and to safeguard the "relationship" with their companion or mate upon whom they depend. Co-dependents appear to be impervious to abuse. No matter how badly they are mistreated, they remain committed.

This is where the "co" in "co-dependence" comes into play. By accepting the role of victims, co-dependents seek to control their abusers and manipulate them. It is a [danse macabre](#) in which both members of the dyad collaborate.

The Dependent Personality Disorder is a much disputed mental health diagnosis.

We are all dependent to some degree. We all like to be taken care of. When is this need judged to be pathological, compulsive, pervasive, and excessive? Clinicians who contributed to the study of this disorder use words such as "craving", "clinging", "stifling"

(both the dependent and her partner), and "humiliating", or "submissive". But these are all subjective terms, open to disagreement and differences of opinion.

Moreover, virtually all cultures encourage dependency to varying degrees. Even in developed countries, many women, the very old, the very young, the sick, the criminal, and the mentally-handicapped are denied personal autonomy and are legally and economically dependent on others (or on the authorities). Thus, the Dependent Personality Disorder is diagnosed only when such behaviour does not conform to social or cultural norms.

Co-dependents, as they are sometimes known, are possessed with fantastic worries and concerns and are paralyzed by their abandonment anxiety and fear of separation. This inner turmoil renders them indecisive. Even the simplest everyday decision becomes an excruciating ordeal. This is why co-dependents rarely initiate projects or do things on their own.

Dependents typically go around eliciting constant and repeated reassurances and advice from myriad sources. This recurrent solicitation of succour is proof that the co-dependent seeks to transfer responsibility for his or her life to others, whether they have agreed to assume it or not.

This recoil and studious avoidance of challenges may give the wrong impression that the dependent is indolent or insipid. Yet, most dependents are neither. They are often fired by repressed ambition, energy, and imagination. It is their lack self-confidence that holds them back. They don't trust their own abilities and judgement.

Absent an inner compass and a realistic assessment of their positive qualities on the one hand and limitations on the other hand, dependents are forced to rely on crucial input from the outside. Realizing this, their behaviour becomes self-negating: they never disagree with meaningful others or criticize them. They are afraid to lose their support and emotional nurturance.

Consequently, as I have written in the [Open Site Encyclopedia](#) entry on this disorder:

"The co-dependent moulds himself/herself and bends over backward to cater to the needs of his nearest and dearest and satisfy their every whim, wish, expectation, and demand. Nothing is too unpleasant or unacceptable if it serves to secure the uninterrupted presence of the co-dependent's family and friends and the emotional sustenance s/he can extract (or extort) from them.

The co-dependent does not feel fully alive when alone. S/he feels helpless, threatened, ill-at-ease, and child-like. This acute discomfort drives the co-dependent to hop from one relationship to another. The sources of nurturance are interchangeable. To the co-dependent, being with someone, with anyone, no matter whom - is always preferable to solitude."

Inverted Narcissist

Also called "covert narcissist", this is a co-dependent who depends exclusively on narcissists (narcissist-co-dependent). If you are living with a narcissist, have a relationship with one, if you are married to one, if you are working with a narcissist, etc. - it does NOT mean that you are an inverted narcissist.

To "qualify" as an inverted narcissist, you must CRAVE to be in a relationship with a narcissist, regardless of any abuse inflicted on you by him/her. You must ACTIVELY seek relationships with narcissists and ONLY with narcissists, no matter what your (bitter and traumatic) past experience has been. You must feel EMPTY and UNHAPPY in relationships with ANY OTHER kind of person. Only then, and if you satisfy the other diagnostic criteria of a Dependent Personality Disorder, can you be safely labelled an "inverted narcissist".

Counter-Dependents

Counter-dependents reject and despise authority (they are contumacious) and often clash with authority figures (parents, bosses, or the law). Their sense of self-worth and their very self-identity are premised on and derived from (in other words, are dependent on) these acts of bravura and defiance. Counter-dependents are fiercely independent, controlling, self-centred, and aggressive.

These behaviour patterns are often the result of a deep-seated fear of intimacy. In an intimate relationship, the counter-dependent feels enslaved, ensnared, and captive. Counter-dependents are locked into Approach-Avoidance Repetition Complex cycles. Hesitant approach is followed by avoidance of commitment. They are "lone wolves" and bad team players.

Most "classical" (overt) narcissists are counter-dependents. Their emotions and needs are buried under a "scar tissue" which had formed, coalesced, and hardened during years of one form of abuse or another. Grandiosity, a sense of [entitlement](#), a lack of [empathy](#), and overweening haughtiness usually hide gnawing insecurity and a fluctuating sense of self-worth.

Counter-dependence is a reaction formation. The counter-dependent dreads his own weaknesses. He seeks to overcome them by projecting an image of omnipotence, omniscience, success, self-sufficiency, and superiority.

Introduction

Co-dependence is an important and integral part of narcissism. Narcissists are either counter-dependent or co-dependent (inverted).

The DSM-IV-TR uses 9 criteria to define the [Narcissistic Personality Disorder \(NPD\)](#). It is sufficient to show signs of 5 of them to be diagnosed as a narcissist. Thus, theoretically, it is possible to have NPD without being grandiose.

Many scholars (Alexander Lowen, Jeffrey Satinover, Theodore Millon and others) suggested a "taxonomy" of pathological narcissism. They divided narcissists to sub-groups (very much as I do with my [somatic versus cerebral narcissist](#) dichotomy).

Lowen, for instance, talks about the "phallic" narcissist versus others. Satinover and Millon make a very important distinction between narcissists who were raised by "classically" abusive parents and those who were raised by doting and smothering or domineering mothers.

Glenn O. Gabbard in "Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice" [The DSM-IV-TR Edition. Comments on Cluster B Personality Disorders - Narcissistic. American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 2000] we find this:

"...These criteria (the DSM-IV-TR's) identify a certain kind of narcissistic patient - specifically, the arrogant, boastful, 'noisy' individual who demands to be in the spotlight. However, they fail to characterize the shy, quietly grandiose, narcissistic individual whose extreme sensitivity to slights leads to an assiduous avoidance of the spotlight."

The DSM-III-R alluded to at least two types of narcissists, but the DSM-IV-TR committee chose to delete this portion of the text:

"...included criterion, 'reacts to criticism with feelings of rage, shame, or humiliation (even not if expressed)' due to lack of 'specificity'."

Other theoreticians, clinicians and researchers similarly suggested a division between "the oblivious narcissist" (a.k.a. overt) and "the hypervigilant narcissist" (a.k.a. covert).

The Inverted Narcissist

It is clear that there is, indeed, a hitherto neglected type of narcissist. It is the "self-effacing" or "introverted" narcissist. I call it the "inverted narcissist" (hereinafter: IN). Others call it "narcissist-co-dependent", "co-narcissist", or "N-magnet" (which erroneously implies the inverted narcissist's passivity and victimhood).

The Inverted Narcissist is a narcissist who, in many respects, is the mirror image of the "classical" narcissist. The psychodynamics of the inverted narcissist are not clear, nor are its developmental roots. Perhaps it is the product of an overweening Primary Object (parent) or caregiver. Perhaps excessive abuse leads to the repression of even the narcissistic and other defence mechanisms. Perhaps the IN's parents suppress every manifestation of grandiosity and of narcissism (very common in early childhood and adolescence), so that the narcissistic defence mechanism is "inverted" and internalized in this unusual form.

These narcissists are self-effacing, sensitive, emotionally fragile, and sometimes socially phobic. They derive all their self-esteem and sense of self-worth from the outside (from others), are pathologically envious (a [transformation of aggression](#)), are likely to intermittently engage in aggressive/violent behaviours, and are more emotionally labile than the classic narcissist.

There are, therefore, three "basic" types of narcissists:

1. *The offspring of neglecting parents* who default to narcissism as the predominant form of object relations (with themselves as the exclusive love object);
2. *The offspring of doting or domineering parents (often narcissists themselves)* - These children internalize their parents' voices in the form of a sadistic, ideal, immature Superego and spend their lives trying to be perfect, omnipotent, omniscient and to be judged "a success" by these parent-images and their later representations and substitutes (authority figures);
3. *The offspring of abusive parents* internalize the abusing, demeaning and contemptuous voices and spend their lives in an effort to elicit "counter-voices" from other people and thus to regulate their labile self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

All three types experience recurrent and Sisyphean failures. Shielded by their defence mechanisms, they constantly gauge reality wrongly, their actions and reactions become more and

more rigid and the damage inflicted by them on themselves and on others is ever greater.

The narcissistic parent seems to employ a myriad primitive [defence](#) in his or her dealings with his or her children:

1. *Splitting, idealization, and devaluation* - Idealizing the child and devaluing him in cycles, which reflect the internal dynamics of the parent rather than anything the child does.
2. *Projective Identification* - Forcing the child to behave in a way which vindicates the parent's fears regarding himself or herself, his or her self-image and his or her self-worth. This is a particularly powerful and pernicious mechanism. If the narcissist parent fears his or her own deficiencies ("defects"), vulnerability, perceived weaknesses, susceptibility, gullibility, or emotions, he or she is likely to force the child to "feel" these rejected and (to him or her) repulsive emotions, to behave in ways strongly abhorred by the parent, to exhibit character traits the parent strongly rejects in himself or herself.
3. *Projection* - The child, in a way, becomes the "trash bin", the reflecting mirror of the parents' inhibitions, fears, self-loathing, self-contempt, perceived lack of self-worth, sense of inadequacy, rejected traits, repressed emotions, failures and emotional reticence. They attribute all these unwanted traits and emotions to the child.

Coupled with the parent's treatment of the child as the parent's extension, these psychological defences totally inhibit the psychological growth and emotional maturation of the child. The child becomes a reflection of the parent, a conduit through which the parent experiences and realizes himself or herself for better (hopes, aspirations, ambition, life goals) and for worse (weaknesses, "undesirable" emotions, "negative" traits).

Relationships between [such parents](#) and their progeny easily deteriorate to sexual or other modes of [abuse](#) because there are no functioning boundaries between them.

It seems that the child's reaction to a narcissistic parent can be either accommodation and assimilation, or rejection.

Accommodation and Assimilation

The child accommodates, idealizes and internalizes (introjects) the narcissistic and abusive Primary Object (parent) successfully. This means that the child's "internal voice" is also narcissistic and abusive. The child tries to comply with its directives and with its explicit and perceived wishes.

The child becomes a masterful provider of [Narcissistic Supply](#), a perfect match to the parent's personality, an ideal source, an accommodating, understanding and caring caterer to all the needs, whims, mood swings and cycles of the narcissist parent. The child learns to endure devaluation and idealization with equanimity and adapt to the narcissist's [cultish](#) world view. The child, in short, becomes the ultimate extension. This is what we call an inverted narcissist.

We must not neglect the abusive aspect of such a relationship. The narcissistic parent always alternates between idealization and devaluation of his or her offspring. The child is likely to internalize these devaluing, abusive, critical, demeaning, berating, diminishing, minimizing, upbraiding, chastising voices.

The abusive parent (or caregiver) goes on to survive inside the child-turned-adult (as part of a sadistic and ideal Superego and a fantastic Ego Ideal). These internalized voices are so powerful that they inhibit even the development of reactive narcissism, the child's typical defence mechanism.

The child-turned-adult keeps looking for narcissists in order to feel whole, alive and wanted. He craves to be treated by a narcissist narcissistically. What others call abuse is, to him or her, familiar territory and constitutes Narcissistic Supply. To the inverted narcissist, the classic narcissist is a Source of Supply (Primary or Secondary) and his narcissistic behaviours constitute Narcissistic Supply. The IN feels dissatisfied, empty and unwanted when not "loved" by a narcissist.

The roles of Primary Source of Narcissistic Supply (PSNS) and Secondary Source of Narcissistic Supply (SSNS) are reversed. To the inverted narcissist, her narcissistic spouse is a Source of PRIMARY Narcissistic Supply.

But the child can also reject the narcissistic parent rather than accommodate him or her.

Rejection

The child may react to the narcissism of the Primary Object (parent) with a peculiar type of rejection. He develops his own narcissistic personality, replete with grandiosity and lack of empathy - but his personality is antithetical to that of the narcissistic parent.

If the parent were a somatic narcissist, the child is likely to grow up to be a cerebral one. If his father prided himself on being virtuous, the son turns out sinful. If his narcissistic mother bragged about her frugality, her daughter would tend towards profligacy.

An Attempted DSM-Style List of Criteria

It is possible to compose a DSM-IV-TR-like set of criteria for the inverted narcissist, using the classic narcissist's as a template. The two are, in many ways, flip sides of the same coin, or "the mould and the moulded" - hence the neologisms "mirror narcissist" or "inverted narcissist".

The narcissist tries to merge with an idealized but badly internalized object. He does so by "digesting" the meaningful others in his life and transforming them into extensions of his self. He uses various techniques to achieve this.

The inverted narcissist (IN), on the other hand, does not attempt, except in fantasy or in dangerous, masochistic sexual practice, to merge with an idealized external object. This is because she so successfully internalized the narcissistic Primary Object to exclude everyone else. The IN feels ill at ease in her relationships with non-narcissists because these dalliances are unconsciously perceived by her to constitute "betrayal", "cheating", an abrogation of the exclusivity clause she has with the narcissistic Primary Object.

This is the big difference between classical narcissists and their inverted sisters.

Classic narcissists of all stripes reject the Primary Object in particular (and object relations in general) in favour of a handy substitute: themselves.

Inverted narcissists accept the (narcissist) Primary Object and internalize it to the exclusion of all others (unless they are perceived to be faithful renditions, replicas of the narcissistic Primary Object).

Criterion ONE

Possesses a rigid sense of lack of self-worth.

The classic narcissist has a badly regulated sense of self-worth. However this is not conscious. He goes through [cycles](#) of self-devaluation (and experiences them as dysphorias).

The IN's sense of self-worth does not fluctuate. It is rather stable - but it is very low. Whereas the narcissist devalues others - the IN devalues herself as an offering, a sacrifice to the narcissist. The IN pre-empts the narcissist by devaluing herself, by actively berating her own achievements, or talents. The IN is exceedingly distressed when singled out because of actual accomplishments or a demonstration of superior skills.

The inverted narcissist is compelled to filter all of her narcissistic needs through the primary narcissist in her life. Independence or personal autonomy are not permitted. The IN feels amplified by the narcissist's running commentary (because nothing can be accomplished by the IN without the approval of a primary narcissist in her life).

Criterion TWO

Pre-occupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance and beauty or of an ideal love.

This is the same as the DSM-IV-TR criterion for Narcissistic Personality Disorder but, with the IN, it manifests absolutely differently, i.e. the cognitive dissonance is sharper here because the IN is so absolutely and completely convinced of her worthlessness that these fantasies of grandeur are extremely painful "dissonances".

With the classical narcissist, the dissonance exists on two levels:

1. Between the unconscious feeling of lack of stable self-worth and the grandiose fantasies;
2. AND between the grandiose fantasies and reality (the Grandiosity Gap).

In comparison, the inverted narcissist can only vacillate between a sense of lack of self-worth and reality. No grandiosity is permitted, except in dangerous, forbidden fantasy. This shows that the IN is psychologically incapable of fully realizing her inherent potentials without a primary narcissist to filter the praise, adulation or accomplishments through. She must have someone to whom praise can be redirected.

The dissonance between the IN's certainty of self-worthlessness and genuine praise that cannot be deflected is likely to emotionally derail the inverted narcissist every time.

Criterion THREE

Believes that she is absolutely un-unique and un-special (i.e., worthless and not worthy of merger with the fantasized ideal) and that no one at all could understand her because she is innately unworthy of being understood. The IN becomes very agitated the more one tries to understand her because that also offends against her righteous sense of being properly excluded from the human race.

A sense of worthlessness is typical of many other personality disorders (as well as the feeling that no one could ever understand

them). The narcissist himself endures prolonged periods of self-devaluation, self-deprecation and self-doubt. This is part of the [Narcissistic Cycle](#).

In this sense, the inverted narcissist is a partial narcissist. She is permanently fixated in a part of the Narcissistic Cycle, never to experience its complementary half: the narcissistic grandiosity and sense of entitlement.

The "righteous sense of being properly excluded" comes from the sadistic Superego in concert with an "overbearing, externally reinforced, conscience".

Criterion FOUR

Demands anonymity (in the sense of seeking to remain excluded at all costs) and is intensely irritated and uncomfortable with any attention being paid to her - similar to the [Avoidant](#) or the [Schizoid](#).

Criterion FIVE

Feels that she is undeserving and not entitled.

Feels that she is inferior to others, lacking, insubstantial, unworthy, unlikable, unappealing, unlovable, someone to scorn and dismiss, or to ignore.

Criterion SIX

Is extinguishingly selfless, sacrificial, even unctuous in her interpersonal relationships and avoids the assistance of others at all costs. Can only interact with others when she can be seen to be giving, supportive, and expending an unusual effort to assist.

Some narcissists behave the [same way](#) but only as a means to obtain Narcissistic Supply (praise, adulation, affirmation, attention). This must not be confused with the behaviour of the IN.

Criterion SEVEN

Lacks empathy. Is intensely attuned to others' needs, but only in so far as it relates to her own need to perform the required self-sacrifice, which in turn is necessary in order for the IN to obtain her Narcissistic Supply from the primary narcissist.

By contrast, narcissists are never empathic. They are intermittently attuned to others only in order to optimise the extraction of Narcissistic Supply from them.

Criterion EIGHT

Envy others. Cannot conceive of being envied and becomes extremely agitated and uncomfortable if even brought into a situation where comparison might occur. Loathes and avoids competition at all costs, if there is any chance of actually winning it, or being singled out.

Criterion NINE

Displays extreme shyness, lack of any real relational connections, is publicly self-effacing in the extreme, is internally highly moralistic and critical of others; is a perfectionist and engages in lengthy ritualistic behaviours, which can never be perfectly performed (is obsessive-compulsive, though not necessarily to the full extent exhibited in [Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder](#)). Notions of being individualistic are anathema.

The Reactive Patterns of the Inverted Narcissist

The inverted narcissist does not suffer from a "milder" form of narcissism. Like the "classic" narcissists, inverted narcissism has degrees and shades. But it is much rarer and the DSM-IV-TR classical variety is the more prevalent.

The inverted narcissist is liable to react with rage whenever threatened, or...

...When envious of other people's achievements, their ability to feel wholeness, happiness, to accept rewards and successes; when her sense of self-worthlessness is diminished by a behaviour, a comment, an event, when her lack of self-worth and voided self-esteem is threatened. Thus, this type of narcissist might surprisingly react violently or wrathfully to GOOD things: a kind remark, a mission accomplished, a reward, a compliment, a proposition, or a sexual advance.

...When thinking about the past, when emotions and memories are evoked (usually negative ones) by certain music, a given smell, or sight.

...When her pathological envy leads to an all-pervasive sense of injustice and being discriminated against or deprived by a spiteful world.

...When she believes that she failed (and she always entertains this belief), that she is imperfect and useless and worthless, a good for nothing half-baked creature.

...When she realizes to what extent her inner demons possess her, constrain her life, torment her, and deform her and the hopelessness of it all.

When the inverted narcissist rages, she becomes verbally and emotionally abusive. She uncannily spots and attacks the vulnerabilities of her target, and mercilessly drives home the poisoned dagger of despair and self-loathing until it infects her adversary.

The calm after such a storm is even eerier, a thundering silence. The inverted narcissist regrets her behaviour and admits her feelings while apologizing profusely.

The inverted narcissist nurtures her negative emotions as yet another weapon of [self-destruction and self-defeat](#). It is from this repressed self-contempt and sadistic self-judgement that the [narcissistic rage](#) springs forth.

One important difference between inverted narcissists and non-narcissists is that the former are less likely to react with [PTSD \(Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder\)](#) following the break-up of their relationships with their narcissists. They seem to be "desensitized" to the narcissist's unpredictable ways by their early upbringing.

Whereas the reactions of normal people to narcissistic behaviour patterns (and especially to the splitting and Projective Identification defence mechanisms and to the idealization devaluation cycles) is shock, profound hurt and disorientation - inverted narcissists show none of the above.

The Life of the Inverted Narcissist

The IN is, usually, exceedingly and painfully shy as a child. Despite this Social Phobia, her grandiosity (absorbed from the parent) might direct her to seek "limelight" professions and occupations, which involve exposure, competition, "stage fright" and social friction.

The setting can vary from the limited (family) to the expansive (national media) - but, whatever it is, the result is constant conflict and feelings of discomfort, even terror and extreme excitement and thrill ("[adrenaline rush](#)"). This is because the IN's grandiosity is "imported" and not fully integrated. It is, therefore, not supportive of her "grandiose" pursuits (as is the case with the classical narcissist). On the contrary, the IN feels awkward, pitted on the edge of a precipice, contrived, and deceitful.

The inverted narcissist grows up in a stifling environment, whether it is an orthodox, hyper-religious, collectivist, or traditionalist culture, a monovalent, "black and white", doctrinarian and indoctrinating society - or a family which manifests all the above in a microcosm.

The inverted narcissist is cast in a negative (emergent) role within her family. Her "negativity" is attributed to her gender, the order of her birth, religious, social, or cultural dictates and commandments, her "character flaws", her relation to a specific person or event, her acts or inaction and so on.

In the words of one such IN:

"In the religious culture I grew up in, women are SO suppressed, their roles are so carefully restricted. They are the representation, in the flesh, of all that is sinful, degrading, of all that is wrong with the world.

These are the negative gender/cultural images that were force fed to us the negative 'otherness' of women, as defined by men, was fed to me. I was so shy, withdrawn, unable to really relate to people at all from as early as I can remember."

The IN is subjected and exposed either to an overbearing, overvalued parent, or to an aloof, detached, emotionally unavailable one - or to both - at an early stage of her life:

"I grew up in the shadow of my father who adored me, put me on a pedestal, told me I could do or be anything I wanted because I was incredibly bright, BUT, he ate me alive, I was his property and an extension of him.

I also grew up with the mounting hatred of my narcissist brother who got none of this attention from our father and got no attention from our mother either. My function was to make my father look wonderful in the eyes of all outsiders, the wonderful parent with a genius Wunderkind as his last child, and the only child of the six that he was physically present to raise from the get go.

The overvaluation combined with being abjectly ignored or raged at by him when I stepped out of line even the tiniest bit, was enough to warp my personality."

The IN is prevented from developing full-blown secondary narcissism. The IN is so heavily preoccupied in her pre-school years with satisfying the narcissistic parent, that the traits of grandiosity and self-love, even the need for Narcissistic Supply, remain dormant or repressed.

The IN simply "knows" that only the narcissistic parent can provide the requisite amount of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissistic parent is so controlling that any attempt to garner praise or adulation from any other source (without the approval of the parent) is severely punished by swift devaluation and even the occasional spanking or abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual).

This is a vital part of the conditioning that gives rise to inverted narcissism. Where the classical narcissist exhibits grandiosity, the IN is intensely uncomfortable with personal praise, and always wishes to divert praise away from herself onto her narcissist. This is why the IN can only truly feel anything when she is in a relationship with another narcissist. The IN is conditioned and programmed from the very beginning to be the perfect companion to the narcissist: to feed his Ego, to be purely his extension, to seek only praise and adulation if it brings greater praise and adulation to her narcissist.

The Inverted Narcissist's Survival Guide

- Listen attentively to everything the narcissist says and agree with it all. Don't believe a word of it but let it slide as if everything is just fine, business as usual.
- Offer something absolutely unique to the narcissist which they cannot obtain anywhere else. Also be prepared to line up future Sources of Primary NS for your narcissist because you will not be IT for very long, if at all. If you take over the procuring function for the narcissist, they become that much more dependent on you which makes it a bit tougher for them to pull their haughty stuff - an inevitability, in any case.
- Be endlessly patient and go way out of your way to be accommodating, thus keeping the Narcissistic Supply flowing liberally, and keeping the peace (relatively speaking).
- Get tremendous personal satisfaction out of endlessly giving. This one may not be attractive to you, but it is a take it or leave it proposition.
- Be absolutely emotionally and financially independent of the narcissist. Take what you need: the excitement and engulfment (i.e., NS) and refuse to get upset or hurt when the narcissist does or says something dumb. Yelling back works really well but should be reserved for special occasions when you fear your narcissist may be on the verge of leaving you; the silent treatment is better as an ordinary response, but it must be devoid of emotional content, more with the air of boredom and "I'll talk to you later, when I am good and ready, and when you are behaving in a more reasonable fashion."
- If your narcissist is cerebral and not interested in having much sex, give yourself ample permission to have sex with other people. Your cerebral narcissist is not indifferent to infidelity, so discretion and secrecy is of paramount importance.

- If your narcissist is somatic and you don't mind, join in on group sex encounters but make sure that you choose properly for your narcissist. They are heedless and very indiscriminating in respect of sexual partners and that can get very problematic.
- If you are a "fixer", which most inverted narcissists are, focus on fixing situations, preferably before they become "situations". Don't for one moment delude yourself that you can actually fix the narcissist - it simply will not happen. Not because they are being stubborn - they just simply can't be fixed.
- If there is any fixing that can be done, it is to help your narcissist become aware of their condition, and (this is very important) with no negative implications or accusations in the process at all. It is like living with a physically handicapped person and being able to discuss, calmly, unemotionally, what the [limitations and benefits](#) of the handicap are and how the two of you can work with these factors, rather than trying to change them.
- Finally, and most important of all for the inverted narcissist: get to know yourself. What are you getting from the relationship? Are you actually a masochist? Why is this relationship attractive and interesting?

Define for yourself what good and beneficial things you believe you are receiving in this relationship. Define the things that you find harmful to you. Develop strategies to minimize the harm to yourself.

Don't expect that you will cognitively be able to reason with the narcissist to change who he is. You may have some limited success in getting your narcissist to tone down on the really harmful behaviours that affect you, which emanate from the unchangeable essence of the narcissist. This can only be accomplished in a very trusting, frank and open relationship.

The inverted narcissist can have a reasonably good, long lasting relationship with the narcissist. You must be prepared to give your narcissist a lot of space and leeway.

You don't really exist for him as a fully realized person - no one does. They are not fully realized people so they cannot possibly have the skills, no matter how smart or sexy, to be a complete person in the sense that most adults are complete.

Somatic versus Cerebral Inverted Narcissists

The inverted narcissist is really an erstwhile narcissist internalized by the IN. Inevitably, we are likely to find among the inverted the same propensities, predilections, preferences and inclinations that we do among proper narcissists.

The cerebral IN is an IN whose Source of vicarious Primary Narcissistic Supply lies - through the medium and mediation of a narcissist - in the exercise of his intellectual faculties. A somatic IN would tend to make use of her body, sex, shape or health in trying to secure NS for "her" narcissist.

The inverted narcissist feeds on the primary narcissist and this is her Narcissistic Supply. So these two typologies can essentially become a self-supporting, [symbiotic system](#).

In reality though, both the narcissist and the inverted narcissist need to be quite well aware of the dynamics of this relationship in order to make it work as a successful long-term arrangement. It might well be that this symbiosis would only work between a cerebral narcissist and a cerebral invert. The somatic narcissist's incessant sexual dalliances would be far too threatening to the equanimity of the cerebral invert for there to be much chance of this succeeding, even for a short time.

It would seem that only opposing types of narcissist can get along when two classic narcissists are involved in a [couple](#). It follows, syllogistically, that only identical types of narcissist and inverted narcissist can survive in a couple. In other words: the best, most enduring couples of narcissist and his inverted narcissist mate would involve a somatic narcissist and a somatic IN - or a cerebral narcissist and a cerebral IN.

Coping with Narcissists and Non-Narcissists

The inverted narcissist is a person who grew up enthralled by the narcissistic parent. This parent engulfed and subsumed the child's being to such an extent that the child's personality was irrevocably shaped by this immersion, damaged beyond hope of repair. The child was not even able to develop defence mechanisms such as narcissism to cope with the abusive parent.

The end result is an inverted narcissistic personality. The traits of this personality are primarily evident in the context of romantic relationships. The child was conditioned by the narcissistic parent to only be entitled to feel whole, useful, happy, and productive when the child augmented or mirrored to the parent the parent's False Self. As a result the child is shaped by this engulfment and

cannot feel complete in any significant adult relationship unless they are with narcissists.

The Inverted Narcissist in Relationship with the Narcissist

The inverted narcissist is drawn to significant relationships with other narcissists in her adulthood. These relationships are usually spousal primary relationships but can also be friendships with narcissists outside of the primary love relationship.

In a primary relationship, the inverted narcissist attempts to recreate the parent-child relationship. The IN thrives on mirroring to the narcissist his grandiose fantasies and in so doing the IN obtains her own Narcissistic Supply (which is the dependence of the narcissist upon the IN for his Secondary Narcissistic Supply).

The IN must have this form of relationship with a narcissist in order to feel whole. The IN goes as far as needed to ensure that the narcissist is happy, cared for, properly adored, as she feels is the narcissist's right. The IN glorifies and lionizes her narcissist, places him on a pedestal, endures any and all narcissistic devaluation with calm equanimity, impervious to the overt slights of the narcissist.

[Narcissistic rage](#) is handled deftly by the inverted narcissist. The IN is exceedingly adept at managing every aspect of her life, tightly controlling all situations, so as to minimize the potential for the inevitable narcissistic rages of her narcissist.

The IN wishes to be subsumed by the narcissist. The IN only feels truly loved and alive in this kind of relationship. The IN is loath to abandon her relationships with narcissists. The relationship only ends when the narcissist withdraws completely from the symbiosis. Once the narcissist has determined that the IN is of no further use, and withholds all Narcissistic Supply from the IN, only then does the IN reluctantly move on to another relationship.

The IN is most likely to equate sexual intimacy with engulfment. This can be easily misread to mean that the IN is herself a somatic narcissist, but it would be incorrect. The IN can endure years of minimal sexual contact with her narcissist and still be able to maintain the self-delusion of intimacy and engulfment. The IN finds a myriad of other ways to "merge" with the narcissist, becoming intimately, though only in support roles, involved with the narcissist's business, career, or any other activity where the IN can feel that they are needed by the narcissist and are indispensable.

The IN is an expert at doling out Narcissistic Supply and even goes as far as procuring Primary Narcissistic Supply for their narcissist (even where this means finding another lover for the narcissist, or participating in group sex with the narcissist).

Usually though, the IN seems most attracted to the cerebral narcissist and finds him easier to manage than the somatic narcissist. The cerebral narcissist is uninterested in sex and this makes life considerably easier for the IN, i.e., the IN is less likely to "lose" her cerebral narcissist to another primary partner. A somatic narcissist may be prone to changing partners with greater frequency or wish to have no partner, preferring to have multiple, casual sexual relationships of no apparent depth which never last very long.

The IN regards relationships with narcissists as the only true and legitimate form of primary relationship. The IN is capable of having primary relationships with non-narcissists. But without the engulfment and the drama, the IN feels unneeded, unwanted and emotionally uninvolved.

When Can a [Classic Narcissist](#) Become an Inverted Narcissist?

A classic narcissist can become an inverted narcissist in one (or more) of the following (typically cumulative) circumstances:

1. Immediately following a life crisis and a [narcissistic injury](#) (divorce, devastating financial loss, death of a parent, or a child, imprisonment, loss of social status and, in general, any other narcissistic injury); or
2. When the injured narcissist then meets another classic narcissist who restores a sense of meaning and superiority (uniqueness) to his life. The injured narcissist derives Narcissistic Supply vicariously, by proxy, through the "dominant" narcissist.
3. As part of an effort to secure a particularly desired Source of Narcissistic Supply. The conversion from classic to inverted narcissism serves to foster an attachment (bonding) between the narcissist and his source. When the narcissist judges that the source is his and can be taken for granted, he reverts to his former, classically narcissistic self.

Such a "conversion" is always temporary. It does not last and the narcissist reverts to his "default" or dominant state.

***When Can an Inverted Narcissist
Become a [Classic Narcissist](#)?***

The inverted narcissist can become a classic narcissist in one (or more) of the following (typically cumulative) circumstances:

1. Immediately following a life crisis that involves the incapacitation or dysfunction of the inverted narcissist's partner (sickness, accident, demotion, divorce, devastating financial loss, death of a parent, or a child, imprisonment, loss of social status and, in general, any other narcissistic injury); or
2. When the inverted narcissist, injured and disillusioned, then meets another inverted narcissist who restores a sense of meaning and superiority (uniqueness) to her life. The injured narcissist derives Narcissistic Supply from the inverted narcissist.
3. As part of an effort to secure a particularly desired Source of Narcissistic Supply. The conversion from inverted to classic narcissism serves to foster an attachment (bonding) between the narcissist and her source. When the narcissist judges that the source is hers and can be taken for granted, she reverts to her former, inverted narcissistic self.

Such a "conversion" is always temporary. It does not last and the narcissist reverts to her "default" or dominant state.

***Relationships between the
Inverted Narcissist and Non-Narcissists***

The inverted narcissist can maintain relationships outside of the symbiotic primary relationship with a narcissist. But the IN does not "feel" loved because she finds the non-narcissist not "engulfing" or not "exciting". Thus, the IN tends to devalue her non-narcissistic primary partner as less worthy of the IN's love and attention.

The IN may be able to sustain a relationship with a non-narcissist by finding other narcissistic symbiotic relationships outside of this primary relationship. The IN may, for instance, have a narcissistic friend or lover, to whom she pays extraordinary attention, ignoring the real needs of the non-narcissistic partner.

Consequently, the only semi-stable primary relationship between the IN and the non-narcissist occurs where the non-narcissist is very easy going, emotionally secure and not needing much from the IN at all by way of time, energy or commitment to activities requiring the involvement of both parties. In a relationship with this kind of non-narcissist, the IN may become a

workaholic or very involved in outside activities that exclude the non-narcissist spouse.

It appears that the inverted narcissist in a relationship with a non-narcissist is behaviourally indistinguishable from a true narcissist. The only important exception is that the IN does not rage at his non-narcissist partner - she instead withdraws from the relationship even further. This passive-aggressive reaction has been noted, though, with narcissists as well.

INVERTED AND OTHER ATYPICAL / PARTIAL (NOS) NARCISSISTS

Inverted Narcissists Talk about Themselves

Competition and (Pathological) Envy

"I have a dynamic that comes up with every single person I get close to, where I feel extremely competitive toward and envious of the other person. But I don't ACT competitive, because at the very outset, I see myself as the loser in the competition. I would never dream of trying to beat the other person, because I know deep in my heart that they would win and I would be utterly humiliated. There are fewer things on earth that feel worse to me than losing a contest and having the other person gloat over me, especially if they know how much I cared about not losing. This is one thing that I actually feel violent about. I guess I tend to project the grandiosity part of the NPD package onto the other person rather than on a False Ego of my own. So most of the time I'm stuck in a state of deep resentment and envy toward her. To me, she's always far more intelligent, likable, popular, talented, self-confident, emotionally developed, morally good, and attractive than I am. And I really hate her for that, and feel humiliated by it. So it's incredibly hard for me to feel happy for this person when she has a success, because I'm overcome with humiliation about myself. This has ruined many a close relationship. I tend to get this way about one person at a time, usually the person who is playing the role of 'my better half', best friends or lovers/partners. So it's not like I'm unable to be happy for anyone, ever, or that I envy every person I meet. I don't get obsessed with how rich or beautiful movie stars are or anything like that. It only gets projected onto this partner-person, the person I'm depending on the most in terms of supplies (attention, reassurance, security, building up my self-esteem, etc.)...

...The really destructive thing that happens is, I see her grandiose traits as giving her the power to have anything and anyone she wants. So I feel a basic insecurity, because why should

she stay with a loser like me, when she's obviously so out of my league? So really, what I'm envious of is the power that all that talent, social ability, beauty, etc., gives her to have CHOICES - the choice to stay or leave me. Whereas I am utterly dependent on her. It's this emotional inequality that I find so humiliating."

"I agree with the inverted narcissist designation - sometimes I've called myself a 'closet narcissist'. That is, I've internalized the value system of grandiosity, but have not applied the grandiose identity to myself.

I believe I SHOULD BE those grandiose things, but at the same time, I know I'm not and I'm miserable about it. So people don't think of me as having an inflated Ego - and indeed I don't - but scratch the surface, and you'll find all these inflated expectations. I mean to say that perhaps the parents suppressed every manifestation of grandiosity (very common in early childhood) and of narcissism - so that the defence mechanism that narcissism is was 'inverted' and internalized in this unusual form."

"Maybe there aren't two discrete states (NPD vs. 'regular' low self-esteem) - maybe it's more of a continuum. And maybe it's just the degree and depth of the problem that distinguishes one from the other.

My therapist describes NPD as 'the inability to love oneself'. As she defines it, the 'narcissistic wound' is a deep wounding of the sense of self, the image of oneself. That doesn't mean that other disorders - or for that matter, other life stressors - can't also cause low self-esteem. But I think NPD IS low self-esteem...

That's what the disorder is really about - an image of yourself that is profoundly negative, and the inability to attain a normal and healthy self-image..."

"Yes, I'm a survivor of child abuse. But remember that not all abuse is alike. There are different kinds of abuse, and different effects. My XXX's style of abuse had to do with trying to annihilate me as a separate person. It also had to do with the need to put all his negative self-image onto me - to see in me what he hated in himself. So I got to play the role of the loser that he secretly feared he was. I was flipped back and forth in those roles - sometimes I'd be a Source of NS for him, and other times I was the receptacle of all his pain and rage. Sometimes my successes were used to reflect back on him, to show off to the rest of the family. Other times, my successes were threatening to my father, who suddenly feared that I was superior to him and had to be squelched.

I experience emotions that most people I know don't feel. Or maybe they do feel them, but to far less extreme intensity. For example, the envy and comparison/competition I feel toward others. I guess most of us have experienced rivalry, jealousy, being compared to others. Most of us have felt envy at another's success. Yet most people I know seem able to overcome those feelings to some extent, to be able to function normally. In a competition, for example, they may be driven to do their best so they can win. For me, the fear of losing and being humiliated is so intense that I avoid competition completely. I am terrified of showing people that I care about doing well, because it's so shaming for me if I lose. So I underachieve and pretend I don't care. Most people I know may envy another person's good luck or success, but it doesn't prevent them from also being happy for them and supporting them. But for me, when I'm in a competitive dynamic with someone, I can't hear about any of their successes, or compliments they've received, etc. I don't even like to see the person doing good things, like bringing Thanksgiving leftovers to the sick old guy next door, because those things make me feel inferior for not thinking of doing that myself (and not having anyone in my life that I'd do that for). It's just so incredibly painful for me to see evidence of the other person's good qualities, because it immediately brings up my feeling of inferiority. I can't even stand to date someone, who looks really good, because I'm jealous of their good looks! So this deep and obsessive envy has destroyed my joy in other people. All the things about other people that I love and take pleasure in is a double-edged sword because I also hate them for it, for having those good qualities (while, presumably, I don't).

I don't know - do you think this is garden-variety low self-esteem? I know plenty of people who suffer from lack of confidence, from timidity, social awkwardness, hatred of their body, feeling unlovable, etc. But they don't have this kind of hostile, corrosive resentment of another person for being all the wonderful things that they can't be, or aren't allowed to be, etc. And one thing I hate is when people are judgemental of me about how I feel, as though I can help it. It's like, 'You shouldn't be so selfish, you should feel happy for her that she's successful', etc. They don't understand that I would love to feel those things, but I can't. I can't stop the incredible pain that explodes in me when these feelings get triggered, and I often can't even HIDE the feelings. It's just so overwhelming. I feel so damaged sometimes. There's more, but that's the crux of it for me, anyway."

Getting Compliments

"I love getting compliments and rewards, and do not react negatively to them. In some moods, when my self-hate has gotten triggered, I can sometimes get to places where I'm inconsolable, because I get stuck in bitterness and self-pity, and so I doubt the sincerity or the reliability of the good thing that someone is saying to me (to try to cheer me up or whatever). But, if I'm in a reasonable mood and someone offers me something good, I'm all too happy to accept it! I don't have a stake in staying miserable."

The Partiality of the Condition

"I do agree that it's (atypical or inverted narcissism) not MILDER. But how I see it is that it's PARTIAL. The part that's there is just as destructive as it is in the typical narcissist. But there are parts missing from that total, full-blown disorder - and I see that as healthy, actually. I see it as parts of myself that WERENT infected by the pathology, that are still intact.

In my case, I did not develop the overweening Ego part of the disorder. So in a sense, what you have with me is the naked pathology, with no covering: no suaveness, no charm, no charisma, no confidence, no persuasiveness, but also no excuses, no lies, no justifications for my feelings. Just the ugly self-hate, for all to see. And the self-hate part is just as bad as it is with a full-blown narcissist, so again, it's not milder.

But because I don't have the denial part of the disorder, I have a lot more insight, a lot more motivation to do something about my problems (i.e., I 'self-refer' to therapy), and therefore, I think, a lot more hope of getting better than people whose defence involves totally denying they even have a problem."

"When my full-blown XXX's pathological envy would get triggered, he would respond by putting down the person he was envious of - or by putting down the accomplishment itself, or whatever good stuff the other person had. He'd trivialize it, or outright contradict it, or find some way to convince the other person (often me) that the thing they're feeling good about isn't real, or isn't worthwhile, or is somehow bad, etc. He could do this because the inflated ego defence was fully formed and operating with him.

When MY pathological envy gets triggered, I will be bluntly honest about it. I'll say something self-pitying, such as: 'You always get the good stuff, and I get nothing'; 'You're so much better than I'; 'People like you better - you have good social skills

and I'm a jerk'; and so on. Or I might even get hostile and sarcastic: 'Well, it must be nice to have so many people worshipping you, isn't it?' I don't try to convince myself that the other person's success isn't real or worthwhile, etc. Instead, I'm totally flooded with the pain of feeling utterly inferior and worthless - and there's no way for me to convince myself or anyone else otherwise. I'm not saying that the things I say are pleasant to hear - and it is still manipulative of me to say them, because the other person's attention is drawn away from their joy and onto my pain and hostility. And instead of doubting their success's worth or reality, they feel guilty about it, or about talking about it, because it hurts me so much. So from the other person's point of view, maybe it's not any easier to live with a partial narcissist than with a full-blown, in that their joys and successes lead to pain in both cases. It's certainly not easier for me, being flooded with rage and pain instead of being able to hide behind a delusion of grandeur. But from my therapist's point of view, I'm much better off because I know I'm unhappy - it's in my face all the time. So I'm motivated to work on it and change it. And time has borne her words out.

Over the past several years that I've worked on this issue, I have changed a great deal in how I deal with it. Now when the envy gets triggered, I don't feel so entwined with the other person - I recognize that it's my OWN pain getting triggered, not something they are doing to me. And so I can acknowledge the pain in a more responsible way, taking ownership of it by saying, 'The jealousy feelings are getting triggered again, and I'm feeling worthless and inferior. Can you reassure me that I'm not?' That's a lot better than making some snide, hostile, or self-pitying comment that puts the other person on the defensive or makes them feel guilty... I do prefer the term 'partial' because that's what it feels like to me. It's like a building that's partially built - the house of narcissism. For me, the structure is there, but not the outside, so you can see inside the skeleton to all the junk that's inside. It's the same junk that's inside a full-blown narcissist, but their building is completed, so you can't see inside. Their building is a fortress, and it's almost impossible to bring it down. My defences aren't as strong ... which makes my life more difficult in some ways because I REALLY feel my pain. But it also means that the house can be brought down more easily, and the junk inside cleaned out..."

Thinking about the Past and the World

"I don't usually get rageful about the past. I feel sort of emotionally cut-off from the past, actually. I remember events very clearly, but usually can't remember the feelings. When I do remember the feelings, my reaction is usually one of sadness, and sometimes of relief that I can get back in touch with my past. But not rage. All my rage seems to get displaced on the current people in my life."

"...When I see someone being really socially awkward and geeky, passive-aggressive, indirect and victim-like, it does trigger anger in me because I identify with that person and I don't want to. I try to put my negative feelings onto them, to see that person as the jerk, not me - that's what a narcissist does, after all. But for me it doesn't completely work because I know, consciously, what I'm trying to do. And ultimately, I'm not kidding anyone, least of all myself."

Self-Pity and Depression

"More self-pity and depression here - not so much rage. One of the things that triggers my rage more than anything else is the inability to control another person, the inability to dominate them and force my reality on them. I feel impotent, humiliated, forced back on my empty self. Part of what I'm feeling here is envy: that person who can't be controlled clearly has a self and I don't, and I just hate them for it. But it's also a power struggle - I want to get Narcissistic Supply by being in control and on top and having the other person submissive and compliant..."

Regretting, Admitting Mistakes

"I regret my behaviour horribly, and I DO admit my feelings. I am also able, in the aftermath, to have empathy for the feelings of the person I've hurt, and I'm horribly sad about it, and ashamed of myself. It's as though I'd been possessed by a demon, acted out all this abusive horrible stuff, and then, after the departure of the demon, I'm back in my right mind and it's like, 'What have I DONE???' I don't mean I'm not responsible for what I did (i.e., a demon made me do it). But when I'm triggered, I have no empathy - I can only see my projection onto that person, as a huge threat to me, someone who must be demolished. But when my head clears, I see that person's pain, hurt, fear - and I feel terrible. I want to make it up to them. And that feeling is totally sincere - it's not an act. I'm genuinely sorry for the pain I've caused the other person."

Rage

"I wouldn't say that my rage comes from repressed self-contempt (mine is not repressed - I'm totally aware of it). And it's not missing atonement either, since I do atone. The rage comes from feeling humiliated, from feeling that the other person has somehow sadistically and gleefully made me feel inferior, that they're getting off on being superior, that they're mocking me and ridiculing me, that they have scorn and contempt for me and find it all very amusing. That - whether real or imagined (usually imagined) - is what causes my rage."

Pursuing Relationships with Narcissists

"There are some very few of us who actually seek out relationships with narcissists. We do this with the full knowledge that we are not wanted, despised even. We persist and pursue no matter the consequences, no matter the cost."

I am an 'inverted narcissist'. It is because as a child I was 'imprinted/fixated' with a particular pattern involving relationships. I was engulfed so completely by my father's personality and repressed so severely by various other factors in my childhood that I simply didn't develop a recognisable personality. I existed purely as an extension of my father. I was his genius Wunderkind. He ignored my mother and poured all his energy and effort into me. I did not develop full-blown secondary narcissism... I developed into the perfect 'other half' of the narcissists moulding me. I became the perfect, eager co-dependent. And this is an imprint, a pattern in my psyche, a way of (not) relating to the world of relationships by only being able to truly relate to one person (my father) and then one kind of person - the narcissist.

He is my perfect lover, my perfect mate, a fit that is so slick and smooth, so comfortable and effortless, so filled with meaning and actual feelings - that's the other thing. I cannot feel on my own. I am incomplete. I can only feel when I am engulfed by another (first it was my father) and now - well now it has to be a narcissist. Not just any narcissist either. He must be exceedingly smart, good looking, have adequate reproductive equipment and some knowledge on how to use it and that's about it.

When I am engulfed by someone like this I feel completed, I can actually FEEL. I am whole again. I function as a sibyl, an oracle, an extension of the narcissist. His fiercest protector, his

purveyor/procurer of NS, the secretary, organizer, manager, etc. I think you get the picture and this gives me INTENSE PLEASURE.

So the answer to your question: 'Why would anyone want to be with someone who doesn't want them back?' The short answer is, 'Because there is no one else remotely worth looking at.'

Making Amends

"I mostly apologize, and I give the person space to talk about what hurt them so that (1) they get to express their anger or hurt to me, and (2) I can understand better and know better how not to hurt them (if I can avoid it) the next time there's a conflict. Sometimes the hurt I cause is unintentional - maybe I've been insensitive or forgetful or something, in which case I feel more certain that I can avoid repeating the hurtful behaviour, since I didn't want to hurt them in the first place. If the hurt I caused has to do with my getting my trigger pulled and going into a rage, then that hurt was quite deliberate, although at the time I was unable to experience the other person as vulnerable or capable of being hurt by me. And I do realize that if that trigger is pulled again, it might happen again. But I also hope that there'll be a LITTLE TINY window where the memory of the conversation will come back to me while I'm in my rage, and I'll remember that the person really IS vulnerable. I hope that by hearing over and over that the person actually does feel hurt by what I say while in rages, that I might remember that when I am triggered and raging. So, mostly I apologize and try to communicate with the other person. I don't verbally self-flagellate, because that's manipulative. Not to say I never do that - in fact I've had a dynamic with people where I verbally put myself down and try to engage the other person into arguing me out of it.

But if I'm in the middle of apologizing to the other person for hurting them, then I feel like this is their moment, and I don't want to turn the focus toward getting them to try to make me feel better. I will talk about myself, but only in an attempt to communicate, so that we can understand each other better. I might say, 'I got triggered about such-and-such, and you seemed so invulnerable that it enraged me', etc. - and the other person might react with, 'But I was feeling vulnerable, I just couldn't show it', etc. - and we'll go back and forth like that. So it's not like I don't think my feelings count, and I do want the other person to UNDERSTAND my feelings, but I don't want to put the other person in the role of taking care of my feelings in that

moment, because they have just been hurt by me and I'm trying to make it up to them, not squeeze more stuff OUT of them..."

"So when I've been a real jerk to someone, I want them to feel like it's OK to be pissed off at me, and I want them to know that I am interested in and focused on how they feel, not just on how I feel. As for gifts - I used to do that, but eventually I came to feel that that was manipulative, too, that it muddled things because then the other person would feel like they couldn't be angry anymore, since after all, I've just brought them this nice gift. I also feel that in general, gift-giving is a sweet and tender thing to do, and I don't want to sully that tenderness by associating it with the hurt that comes from abusive behaviour."

Why Narcissists?

"I am BUILT this way. I may have overstated it by saying that I have 'no choice' because, in fact I do.

The choice is - live in an emotionally deadened monochrome world where I can reasonably interact with normal people OR I can choose to be with a narcissist in which case my world is Technicolor, emotionally satisfying, alive and wondrous (also can be turbulent and a real roller coaster ride for the unprepared, not to mention incredibly damaging for people who are not inverted narcissists and who fall into relationships with narcissists). As I have walked on both sides of the street, and because I have developed coping mechanisms that protect me really quite well, I can reasonably safely engage in a primary, intimate relationship with a narcissist without getting hurt by it.

The real WHY of it all is that I learned, as a young child, that being 'eaten alive' by a narcissist parent, to the point where your existence is but an extension of his own, was how all relationships ought to work. It is a psychological imprint - my 'love map', it is what feels right to me intrinsically. A pattern of living - I don't know how else to describe it so you and others will understand how very natural and normal this is for me. It is not the torturous existence that most of the survivors of narcissism are recounting on this list.

My experiences with narcissists, to me, ARE NORMAL for me. Comfortable like an old pair of slippers that fit perfectly. I don't expect many people to attempt to do this, to 'make themselves into' this kind of person. I don't think anyone could, if they tried.

It is my need to be engulfed and merged that drives me to these relationships and when I get those needs met I feel more normal, better about myself. I am the outer extension of the narcissist. In

many ways I am a vanguard, a public two-way warning system, fiercely defending my narcissist from harm, and fiercely loyal to him, catering to his every need in order to protect his fragile existence. These are the dynamics of my particular version of engulfment. I don't need anyone to take care of me. I need only to be needed in this very particular way, by a narcissist who inevitably possesses the ability to engulf in a way that normal, fully realized adults cannot. It is somewhat paradoxical - I feel freer and more independent with a narcissist than without one. I achieve more in my life when I am in this form of relationship. I try harder, work harder, am more creative, think better of myself, excel in most every aspect of my life."

"...I go ahead and cater to him and pretend that his words don't hurt, and later, I engage in an internal fight with myself for being so damned submissive. It's a constant battle and I can't seem to decide which voice in my head I should listen to... I feel like a fool, yet, I would rather be a fool with him than a lonely, well-rounded woman without him. I've often said that the only way that we can stay together is because we feed off of each other. I give him everything he needs and he takes it. Seeing him happy and pleased is what gives me pleasure. I feel very successful then."

Partial NPD

"I do think it's uncommon for girls to develop these patterns, as they are usually trained to be self-effacing. I certainly was! However, I have a lot of the very same underlying patterns that full-blown, obnoxiously egotistical NPs have, but I am not egotistical because I didn't develop the pattern of inflated Ego and grandiosity. All the rest of it is there, though: fragile Ego, lack of a centre or self, super-sensitive to criticism and rejections, pathological, obsessive envy, comparisons and competitive attitudes toward others, a belief that everyone in the world is either superior or inferior to me, and so on.

Sometimes I kind of wish I had developed the inflated Ego of a complete NP, because then I would at least be able to hide from all the pain I feel.

But at the same time, I'm glad I didn't, because those people have a much lower chance of recovery - how can they recover if they don't acknowledge anything is wrong? Whereas it's pretty clear to me I have problems, and I've spent my life working on them and trying to change myself and heal."

Narcissist-Non Narcissist And Narcissist-Inverted Narcissist Couples

"Can a N and a non-N ever maintain a long lasting marriage? It would seem that a non-N would have too much self-esteem to lend himself to a lifetime of catering and pandering to an N's unending need for unearned adoration and glory. I, as a non-N... got tired of these people and their unremitting attempts to drain my psyche within a relatively short period of time and abandoned them as soon as I realized what I was dealing with to preserve my own sanity."

"It depends on the non-narcissist, really. Narcissism is a RIGID, systemic pattern of responses. It is so all-pervasive and all-encompassing that it is a PERSONALITY disorder. If the non-narcissist is co-dependent, for instance, then the narcissist is a perfect match for him and the union will last..."

"You have to pimp for the narcissist, intellectually, and sexually. If your narcissist is somatic, you are much better off lining up the sex partners than leaving it to him. Intellectual pimping is more varied. You can think of wonderful things and then subtly string out the idea, in the most delicate of packages and watch the narcissist cogitate their way to 'their' brilliant discovery whilst you bask in the glow of their perfection and success... The point of this entire exercise is to assure YOUR supply, which is the narcissist himself, not to punish yourself by giving away a great idea or abase yourself because, of course, YOU are not worthy of having such a great idea on your own - but who knows, it may seem that way to the inverted narcissist. It really depends on how self-aware the inverted is."

"The only rejection you need to fear is the possibility of losing the narcissist and if one is doing everything else right, this is very unlikely to happen! So by 'emotionally independent' I am talking about being self-assured, doing your own thing, having a life, feeling strong and good about yourself, getting emotional sustenance from other people. I mean, let's face it, a drug is a drug is a habit. Habits just are, and what they ARE NOT are the be all and end all of love, commitment and serene symmetrical, balanced emotional perfection that is the ideal of the romanticized 'love-for-a-lifetime' all-American relationship dream."

"(I am) terribly turned on by narcissists. The most exciting moments of my life in every venue have been with narcissists. It is as if living and loving with normal people is a grey thing by

comparison, not fuelled by sufficient adrenaline. I feel like a junkie, now, that I no longer permit myself the giddy pleasure of the RUSH I used to know when I was deeply and hopelessly involved with an N. I am like a lotus-eater. And I always felt guilty about this and also sorry that I ever succumbed that first time to my first narcissist lover."

"I am exactly this way and I feel exactly as you do, that the world is a sepia motion picture but when I am intimately involved with a narcissist, it breaks out into three-dimensional Technicolor and I can see and feel in ways that are not available to me otherwise. In my case I developed this (inverted narcissism) as a result of being the favourite of my father who so completely absorbed me into his personality that I was not able to develop a sense of separation. So I am stuck in this personality matrix of needing to be engulfed, adored by and completely taken over by a narcissist in my life. In turn, I worship, defend, regulate and procure Narcissistic Supply for my narcissist. It is like the mould and the moulded."

"In my case, I realize that while I can't stop loving my current narcissist, it isn't necessary for me to avoid as long as I can understand. In my way of looking at it, he is deserving of love, and since I can give him love without it hurting me, then as long as he needs it, he shall have it."

"My personal theory is that dogmatic religious culture is a retarding influence on the growth and maturation of those heavily involved - more and more autonomy (and hence personal responsibility) seems to be blithely sacrificed to the group mind/spirit. It is as though the church members become one personality and that personality is narcissistic and the individual just folds under the weight of that kind of group pressure - particularly if you are a child."

"If I displayed behaviour that made my XXX look good to others, I was insipidly overvalued. When I dared be something other than who she wanted me to be, the sarcastic criticism and total devaluation was unbelievable. So, I learned to be all things to all people. I get a heavenly high from surrendering my power to a narcissist, to catering to them, in having them overvalue and need me, and it is the only time that I truly feel alive..."

"We have very little choice in all of this. We are as vacant and warped as the narcissist. XXX is wont to say, 'I don't HAVE a personality disorder, I AM a personality disorder.' It defines who we are and how we will respond. You will always and ONLY have real feelings when you are with a narcissist. It is your love map, it

is the programming within your psyche. Does it need to control your behaviour? Not necessarily. Knowing what you are can at least give you the opportunity to forecast the effect of an action before you take it. So, loveless black and white may be the very healthiest thing for you for the foreseeable future. I tend to think of these episodes with narcissists as being cyclic. You will likely need to cut loose for a while when your child is older.

DO NOT feel ashamed please! Should a physically handicapped person feel ashamed of their handicap? No and neither should we. The trouble with us is that we are fooled into thinking that these relationships are 'guilty pleasures'. They feel so very good for a time but they are more akin to addiction satisfaction rather than being the 'right match' or an 'appropriate relationship'. I am still very conflicted myself about this. I wrote a few months ago that it was like having a caged very dangerous animal inside of me. When I get near narcissists, the animal smells its own kind and it wants out. I very carefully 'micro-manage' my life. This means that I daily do fairly regular reality checks and keep a very tight reign on my self and my behaviours. I am also obsessive-compulsive."

"I feel as though I'm constantly on an emotional roller coaster. I may wake up in a good mood, but if my N partner does or says something, which is hurtful to me, my mood changes immediately. I now feel sad, empty, afraid. All I want to do at this point is anything that will make him say something NICE to me.

Once he does, I'm back on top of the world. This pattern of mood changes, or whatever you may call them, can take place several times a day. Each and every day. I've gotten to the point where I'm not sure that I can trust myself to feel any one way, because I know that I have no control over myself. He has the control. It's scary, yet I've sort of come to depend on him determining how I am going to feel."

"When I was first involved with my cerebral narcissist I was like this but after awhile I just learned to become more emotionally distant (the ups and downs were just too much) and find emotional gratification with other people, mostly girl friends and one of two male friends. I make a point of saying ... that the invert must be or become emotionally and financially independent (if you don't do this he will eat you up and when he has finished with you and you are nothing but a husk, you will be expelled from his life in one big vomit). It is really important for you to start to take responsibility for your own emotional

wellness without regard to how he treats you. Remember that the narcissist has the emotional maturity of a two-year old! Don't expect much in the way of emotional depth or support in your relationship - he simply is not capable of anything that sophisticated."

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The Selfish Gene

The Genetic Underpinnings of Narcissism

Question: Is pathological narcissism the outcome of inherited traits - or the sad result of abusive and traumatizing upbringing? Or, maybe it is the confluence of both? It is a common occurrence, after all, that, in the same family, with the same set of parents and an identical emotional environment - some siblings grow to be malignant narcissists, while others are perfectly "normal". Surely, this indicates a predisposition of some people to developing narcissism, a part of one's genetic heritage.

Answer: To identify the role of heredity, researchers have resorted to a few tactics: they studied the occurrence of similar psychopathologies in identical twins separated at birth, in twins and siblings who grew up in the same environment, and in relatives of patients (usually across a few generations of an extended family).

Tellingly, twins - both those raised apart and together - show the same correlation of personality traits, 0.5 [Bouchard, Lykken, McGue, Segal, and Tellegan, 1990]. Even attitudes, values, and interests have been shown to be highly affected by genetic factors [Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, et al., 1990].

A review of the literature demonstrates that the genetic component in certain personality disorders (mainly the Antisocial and Schizotypal) is strong [Thapar and McGuffin, 1993]. Nigg and Goldsmith found a connection in 1993 between the Schizoid and Paranoid personality disorders and schizophrenia.

The three authors of the Dimensional Assessment of Personality Pathology (Livesley, Jackson, and Schroeder) joined forces with Jang in 1993 to study whether 18 of the personality dimensions

were heritable. They found that 40 to 60% of the recurrence of certain personality traits across generations can be explained by heredity: anxiousness, callousness, cognitive distortion, compulsivity, identity problems, oppositionality, rejection, restricted expression, social avoidance, stimulus seeking, and suspiciousness. Each and every one of these qualities is associated with a personality disorder. In a roundabout way, therefore, this study supports the hypothesis that personality disorders are hereditary.

This would go a long way towards explaining why in the same family, with the same set of parents and an identical emotional environment, some siblings grow to have personality disorders, while others are perfectly "normal". Surely, this indicates a genetic predisposition of some people to developing personality disorders.

Still, this oft-touted distinction between nature and nurture may be merely a question of semantics.

When we are born, we are not much more than the sum of our genes and their manifestations. Our brain - a physical object - is the residence of mental health and its disorders. Mental illness cannot be explained without resorting to the body and, especially, to the brain. And our brain cannot be contemplated without considering our genes. Thus, any explanation of our mental life that leaves out our hereditary makeup and our neurophysiology is lacking. Such lacking theories are nothing but literary narratives. [Psychoanalysis](#), for instance, is often accused of being divorced from corporeal reality.

Our genetic baggage makes us resemble a personal computer. We are an all-purpose, universal, machine. Subject to the right programming (conditioning, socialization, education, upbringing), we can turn out to be anything and everything. A computer can imitate any other kind of discrete machine, given the right software. It can play music, screen movies, calculate, print, paint. Compare this to a television set: it is constructed and expected to do one, and only one, thing. It has a single purpose and a unitary function. We, humans, are more like computers than like television sets.

True, single genes rarely account for any behaviour or trait. An array of coordinated genes is required to explain even the minutest human phenomenon. "Discoveries" of a "gambling gene" here and an "aggression gene" there are derided by the more serious and less publicity-prone scholars. Yet, it would seem that

even complex behaviours such as risk taking, reckless driving, and compulsive shopping have genetic underpinnings.

What about the Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

It would seem reasonable to assume - though, at this stage, there is not a shred of proof - that the narcissist is born with a propensity to develop narcissistic defences. These are triggered by abuse or trauma during the formative years in infancy or during early adolescence [see FAQ: [Narcissist's Mother](#)].

By "abuse" I am referring to a spectrum of behaviours which objectify the child and treat it as an extension of the caregiver (parent) or as an instrument. Dotting and smothering are as abusive as beating and starving. And abuse can be dished out by peers as well as by adult role models.

Still, the development of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is attributed mostly to nurture. The Narcissistic Personality Disorder is an extremely complex battery of phenomena: behaviour patterns, cognitions, emotions, conditioning, and so on. NPD is a PERSONALITY disorder and even the most ardent proponents of the school of genetics do not attribute the development of the whole personality to genes.

From my article "[The Interrupted Self](#)":

"Organic' and 'mental' disorders (a dubious distinction at best) have many characteristics in common (confabulation, antisocial behaviour, emotional absence or flatness, indifference, psychotic episodes and so on)."

From an essay I wrote "[On Dis-ease](#)":

"Moreover, the distinction between the psychic and the physical is hotly disputed, philosophically. The psychophysical problem is as intractable today as it ever was (if not more so). It is beyond doubt that the physical affects the mental and the other way around. This is what disciplines like psychiatry are all about. The ability to control 'autonomous' bodily functions (such as heartbeat) and mental reactions to pathogens of the brain are proof of the artificialness of this distinction. It is a result of the reductionist view of nature as divisible and summable..."

The distinction between the patient and the outside world is superfluous and wrong. The patient AND his environment are ONE and the same. Disease is a perturbation in the operation and management of the complex ecosystem known as patient-world. Humans absorb their environment and feed it in equal measures. This on-going interaction IS the patient. We cannot exist without the intake of water, air, visual stimuli and food. Our environment is defined by our actions and output, physical and mental.

Thus, one must question the classical differentiation between 'internal' and 'external'. Some illnesses are considered 'endogenic' (generated from the inside). Natural, 'internal', causes - a heart defect, a biochemical imbalance, a genetic mutation, a metabolic process gone awry - cause disease. Aging and deformities also belong in this category.

In contrast, problems of nurturance and environment - early childhood abuse, for instance, or malnutrition - are 'external' and so are the 'classical' pathogens (germs and viruses) and accidents.

But this, again, is a counter-productive approach. Exogenic and Endogenic pathogenesis is inseparable. Mental states increase or decrease the susceptibility to externally induced disease. Talk therapy or abuse (external events) alter the biochemical balance of the brain (an internal event).

The inside constantly interacts with the outside and is so intertwined with it that all distinctions between them are artificial and misleading. The best example is, of course, medication: it is an external agent, it influences internal processes and it has a very strong mental correlate (its efficacy is influenced by mental factors as in the placebo effect).

The very nature of dysfunction and sickness is highly culture-dependent.

Societal parameters dictate right and wrong in health (especially mental health). It is all a matter of statistics. Certain diseases are accepted in certain parts of the world as a fact of life or even a sign of distinction (e.g., the paranoid schizophrenic as chosen by the gods). If there is no dis-ease there is no disease. That the physical or mental state of a person CAN be different - does not imply that it MUST be different or even that it is desirable that it should be different. In an over-populated world, sterility might be the desirable thing - or even the occasional epidemic. There is no such thing as ABSOLUTE dysfunction. The body and the mind ALWAYS function. They adapt themselves to their environment and if the latter changes - they change. Personality disorders are the best possible responses to abuse."

First published on the [Suite 101](#) Narcissistic Personality Disorder Topic.

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The Weapon of Language

Question: My wife was diagnosed as a narcissist. She twists everything and turns it against me. She distorts everything I ever said, ignores the context, and even invents her own endings. It is impossible to have a meaningful conversation with her because she won't commit to anything she says.

Answer: In the narcissist's surrealistic world, even language is pathologized. It mutates into a weapon of self-defence, a verbal fortification, a medium without a message, replacing words with duplicitous and ambiguous vocables.

Narcissists (and, often, by contagion, their unfortunate victims) don't talk, or communicate. They fend off. They hide and evade and avoid and disguise. In their planet of capricious and arbitrary unpredictability, of shifting semiotic and semantic dunes - they perfect the ability to say nothing in lengthy, Castro-like speeches.

The ensuing convoluted sentences are arabesques of meaninglessness, acrobatics of evasion, a lack of commitment elevated to an ideology. The narcissist prefers to wait and see what waiting brings. It is the postponement of the inevitable that leads to the inevitability of postponement as a strategy of survival.

It is often impossible to really understand a narcissist. The evasive syntax fast deteriorates into ever more labyrinthine structures. The grammar tortured to produce the verbal Doppler shifts essential to disguise the source of the information, its distance from reality, the speed of its degeneration into rigid "official" versions.

Buried under the lush flora and fauna of idioms without an end, the language erupts, like some exotic rash, an autoimmune reaction to its infection and contamination. Like vile weeds it

spreads throughout, strangling with absent minded persistence the ability to understand, to feel, to agree, to disagree and to debate, to present arguments, to compare notes, to learn and to teach.

Narcissists, therefore, never talk to others - rather, they talk at others, or lecture them. They exchange subtexts, camouflage-wrapped by elaborate, florid, texts. They read between the lines, spawning a multitude of private languages, prejudices, superstitions, conspiracy theories, rumours, phobias and hysterias. There is a solipsistic world: where communication is permitted only with oneself and the aim of language is to throw others off the scent or to obtain Narcissistic Supply.

This has profound implications. Communication through unequivocal, unambiguous, information-rich symbol systems is such an integral and crucial part of our world that its absence is not postulated even in the remotest galaxies which grace the skies of science fiction. In this sense, narcissists are nothing short of aliens. It is not that they employ a different language, a code to be deciphered by a new Freud. Their linguistic deficiency is also not the outcome of upbringing or socio-cultural background.

It is the fact that language is put by narcissists to a different use - not to communicate but to obscure, not to share but to abstain, not to learn but to defend and resist, not to teach but to preserve ever less tenable monopolies, to disagree without incurring wrath, to criticize without commitment, to agree without appearing to do so. Thus, an "agreement" with a narcissist is a vague expression of intent at a given moment - rather than the clear listing of long-term, iron-cast and mutual commitments.

The rules that govern the narcissist's universe are loopholed incomprehensibles, open to an exegesis so wide and so self-contradictory that it renders them meaningless. The narcissist often hangs himself by his own verbose Gordic knots, having stumbled through a minefield of logical fallacies and endured self-inflicted inconsistencies. Unfinished sentences hover in the air, like vapour above a semantic swamp.

In the case of the inverted narcissist, who had been suppressed and abused by overbearing caregivers, there is the strong urge not to offend. Intimacy and co-dependence are companions. Parental or peer pressures are irresistible and result in conformity and self-deprecation. Aggressive tendencies, strongly repressed in the social pressure cooker, teem under the veneer of forced civility and violent politeness. Constructive ambiguity, a non-committal "everyone is good and right", an atavistic variant of moral relativism and tolerance bred of fear and of contempt - are all at

the service of this eternal vigilance against aggressive drives, at the disposal of a never ending peacekeeping mission.

With the classic narcissist, language is used cruelly and ruthlessly to ensnare one's enemies, to sow confusion and panic, to move others to emulate the narcissist (Projective Identification), to leave the listeners in doubt, in hesitation, in paralysis, to gain control, or to punish. Language is enslaved and forced to lie. The language is appropriated and expropriated. It is considered to be a weapon, an asset, a piece of lethal property, a traitorous mistress to be gang raped into submission.

To cerebral narcissists, language is a lover. The infatuation with its very sound leads to a pyrotechnic type of speech which sacrifices its meaning to its music. Its speakers pay more attention to the composition than to the content. They are swept by it, intoxicated by its perfection, inebriated by the spiralling complexity of its forms. Here, language is an inflammatory process. It attacks the very tissues of the narcissist's relationships with artistic fierceness. It invades the healthy cells of reason and logic, of cool headed argumentation and level headed debate.

Language is a leading indicator of the psychological and institutional health of social units, such as the family, or the workplace. Social capital can often be measured in cognitive (hence, verbal-lingual) terms. To monitor the level of comprehensibility and lucidity of texts is to study the degree of sanity of family members, co-workers, friends, spouses, mates, and colleagues. There can be no hale society without unambiguous speech, without clear communications, without the traffic of idioms and content that is an inseparable part of every social contract. Our language determines how we perceive our world. It IS our mind and our consciousness. The narcissist, in this respect, is a great social menace.

First published on the [Suite 101](#) Narcissistic Personality Disorder Topic.

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Collective Narcissism

Narcissism, Culture and Society

"It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness."

[Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents]

Question: I believe that (ethnic group deleted) are all narcissists. Can it be that a group of people are all narcissists or am I your average bigot and racist?

Answer: In their book "Personality Disorders in Modern Life", Theodore Millon and Roger Davis state, as a matter of fact, that pathological narcissism was the preserve of *"the royal and the wealthy"* and that it *"seems to have gained prominence only in the late twentieth century"*. Narcissism, according to them, may be associated with *"higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs... Individuals in less advantaged nations ... are too busy trying (to survive) ... to be arrogant and grandiose"*.

They - like [Christopher Lasch](#) before them - attribute pathological narcissism to *"a society that stresses individualism and self-gratification at the expense of community, namely the United States"*. They assert that the disorder is more prevalent among certain professions with "star power" or respect. *"In an individualistic culture, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the world'. In a collectivist society, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the collective'."*

Millon quotes Warren and Caponi's "The Role of Culture in the Development of Narcissistic Personality Disorders in America, Japan and Denmark":

"Individualistic narcissistic structures of self-regard (in individualistic societies) ... are rather self-contained and independent... (In collectivist cultures) narcissistic configurations of the we-self ... denote self-esteem derived from strong identification with the reputation and honour of the family, groups, and others in hierarchical relationships."

But Millon and Davis are wrong. Theirs is, indeed, the quintessential American point of view which lacks an intimate knowledge of other parts of the world. Millon even wrongly claims that the DSM's international equivalent, the ICD, does not include the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (it does, though not as a separate mental health diagnosis).

Pathological narcissism is a ubiquitous phenomenon because every human being - regardless of the nature of his society and culture - develops healthy narcissism early in life. Healthy narcissism is rendered pathological by abuse - and abuse, alas, is a universal human behaviour. By "abuse" we mean any refusal to acknowledge the emerging boundaries of the individual - smothering, doting, and excessive expectations are as abusive as beating and incest.

There are malignant narcissists among subsistence farmers in Africa, nomads in the Sinai desert, day labourers in East Europe, and intellectuals and socialites in Manhattan. Malignant narcissism is all-pervasive and independent of culture and society.

It is true, though that the WAY pathological narcissism manifests and is experienced is dependent on the particulars of societies and cultures. In some cultures, it is encouraged, in others suppressed. In some societies it is channelled against minorities - in others it is tainted with paranoia. In collectivist societies, it may be projected onto the collective, in individualistic societies it is an individual's trait.

Yet, can families, organizations, ethnic groups, churches, and even whole nations be safely described as "narcissistic" or "pathologically self-absorbed"? Wouldn't such generalizations be a trifle racist and more than a trifle wrong? The answer is: it depends.

Human collectives - states, firms, households, institutions, political parties, cliques, bands - acquire a life and a character all their own. The longer the association or affiliation of the members, the more cohesive and conformist the inner dynamics of the group, the more persecutory or numerous its enemies, the more intensive the physical and emotional experiences of the individuals it is comprised of, the stronger the bonds of locale,

language, and history - the more rigorous might an assertion of a common pathology be.

Such an all-pervasive and extensive pathology manifests itself in the behaviour of each and every member. It is a defining - though often an implicit or underlying - mental structure. It has explanatory and predictive powers. It is recurrent and invariable: a pattern of conduct melded with distorted cognition and stunted emotions. And it is often vehemently denied.

A possible DSM-like list of criteria for narcissistic organizations or groups:

An all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning at the group's early history and present in various contexts. Persecution and abuse are often the causes - or at least the antecedents - of the pathology.

Five (or more) of the following criteria must be met:

- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - feel grandiose and self-important (e.g., they exaggerate the group's achievements and talents to the point of lying, demand to be recognized as superior simply for belonging to the group and without commensurate achievement).
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are obsessed with group fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance, bodily beauty or performance, or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering ideals or political theories.
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are firmly convinced that the group is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status groups (or institutions).
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - require excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation - or, failing that, wish to be feared and to be notorious (Narcissistic Supply).
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - feel entitled. They expect unreasonable or special and

favourable priority treatment. They demand automatic and full compliance with expectations. They rarely accept responsibility for their actions ("alloplastic defences"). This often leads to anti-social behaviour, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are "interpersonally exploitative", i.e., use others to achieve their own ends. This often leads to anti-social behaviour, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are devoid of empathy. They are unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of other groups. This often leads to anti-social behaviour, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are constantly envious of others or believe that they are being equally envied. This often leads to anti-social behaviour, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
- The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are arrogant and sport haughty behaviours or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, punished, limited, or confronted. This often leads to anti-social behaviour, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

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The Spouse/Mate/Partner of the Narcissist

Question: What kind of a spouse/mate/partner is likely to be attracted to a narcissist?

Answer:

The Victims

On the face of it, there is no partner or mate, who typically "binds" with a narcissist. They come in all shapes and sizes. The initial phases of attraction, infatuation and falling in love are pretty normal. The narcissist puts on his best face - the other party is blinded by budding love. A natural selection process occurs only much later, as the relationship develops and is put to the test.

Living with a narcissist can be exhilarating, is always onerous, often harrowing. Surviving a relationship with a narcissist indicates, therefore, the parameters of the personality of the survivor. She (or, more rarely, he) is moulded by the relationship into The Typical Narcissistic Mate/Partner/Spouse.

First and foremost, the narcissist's partner must have a deficient or a distorted grasp of her self and of reality. Otherwise, she (or he) is bound to abandon the narcissist's ship early on. The cognitive distortion is likely to consist of belittling and demeaning herself, while aggrandizing and adoring the narcissist.

The partner is, thus, placing herself in the position of the eternal victim: undeserving, punishable, a scapegoat. Sometimes, it is very important to the partner to appear moral, sacrificial and victimized. At other times, she is not even aware of this predicament. The narcissist is perceived by the partner to be a person in the position to demand these sacrifices from her because

he is superior in many ways (intellectually, emotionally, morally, professionally, or financially).

The status of professional victim sits well with the partner's tendency to punish herself, namely: with her masochistic streak. She feels that the tormented life with the narcissist is just what she deserves.

In this respect, the partner is the mirror image of the narcissist. By maintaining a symbiotic relationship with him, by being totally dependent upon her source of masochistic supply (which the narcissist most reliably constitutes and most amply provides), the partner enhances certain traits and encourages certain behaviours, which are at the very core of narcissism.

The narcissist is never whole without an adoring, submissive, available, self-denigrating partner. His very sense of superiority, indeed his False Self, depends on it. His sadistic Superego switches its attentions from the narcissist (in whom it often provokes suicidal ideation) to the partner, thus finally obtaining an alternative source of sadistic satisfaction.

It is through self-denial that the partner survives. She denies her wishes, hopes, dreams, aspirations, sexual, psychological and material needs, choices, preferences, values, and much else besides. She perceives her needs as threatening because they might engender the wrath of the narcissist's God-like supreme figure.

The narcissist is rendered in her eyes even more superior through and because of this self-denial. Self-denial undertaken to facilitate and ease the life of a "great man" is more palatable. The "greater" the man (the narcissist), the easier it is for the partner to ignore her own self, to dwindle, to degenerate, to turn into an appendix of the narcissist and, finally, to become nothing but an extension, to merge with the narcissist to the point of oblivion and of merely dim memories of herself.

The two collaborate in this [macabre dance](#). The narcissist is formed by his partner inasmuch as he forms her. Submission breeds superiority and masochism breeds sadism. The relationship is characterized by emergentism: within the couple, roles are allocated almost from the start and any deviation meets with an aggressive, even violent reaction.

The predominant state of the partner's mind is utter confusion. Even the most basic relationships - with husband, children, or parents - remain bafflingly obscured by the giant shadow cast by the intensive interaction with the narcissist. A suspension of judgement is part and parcel of a suspension of individuality,

which are both prerequisites to and the outcomes of living with a narcissist. The partner no longer knows what is true and right and what is wrong and forbidden.

The narcissist recreates for the partner the sort of emotional ambience that led to his own formation in the first place: capriciousness, fickleness, arbitrariness, emotional (and physical or sexual) abandonment. The world becomes hostile and ominous and the partner has only one thing left to cling to: the narcissist.

And cling she does. If there is anything which can safely be said about those who emotionally team up with narcissists, it is that they are overtly and overly dependent.

The partner doesn't know what to do - and this is only too natural in the mayhem that is the relationship with the narcissist. But the typical partner also does not know what she wants and, to a large extent, who she is and what she wishes to become.

These unanswered questions hamper the partner's ability to gauge reality. Her primordial sin is that she fell in love with an image, not with a real person. It is the voiding of the image that is mourned when the relationship ends.

The break-up of a relationship with a narcissist is, therefore, very emotionally charged. It is the culmination of a long chain of humiliations and of subjugation. It is the rebellion of the functioning and healthy parts of the partner's personality against the tyranny of the narcissist.

The partner is likely to have totally misread and misinterpreted the whole interaction (I hesitate to call it a relationship). This lack of proper interface with reality might be labelled "pathological".

Why is it that the partner seeks to prolong her pain? What is the source and purpose of this masochistic streak? Upon the break-up of the relationship, the partner (but not the narcissist, who usually refuses to provide closure) engage in a tortuous and drawn out post mortem.

But the question who did what to whom (and even why) is irrelevant. What is relevant is to stop mourning oneself, start smiling again and love in a less subservient, hopeless, and pain-inflicting manner.

The Abuse

Abuse is an integral, inseparable part of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

The narcissist idealizes and then DEVALUES and discards the object of his initial idealization. This abrupt, heartless devaluation

IS abuse. The narcissist exploits, lies, insults, demeans, ignores (the "silent treatment"), manipulates, and controls others.

There are many forms of abuse. To love too much is to abuse. It is tantamount to treating someone as one's extension, an object, or an instrument of gratification. To be over-protective, not to respect privacy, to be brutally honest, with a morbid sense of humour, or consistently tactless is to abuse. To expect too much, to denigrate, to ignore someone are all modes of abuse. There is physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse. The list is long.

Narcissists are masters of abusing surreptitiously ("[ambient abuse](#)"). They are "stealth abusers". You have to actually live with one in order to witness the abuse.

There are two important categories of abuse:

1. *Overt Abuse* - The open and explicit abuse of another person. Threatening, coercing, battering, lying, berating, demeaning, chastising, insulting, humiliating, exploiting, ignoring ("silent treatment"), devaluing, unceremoniously discarding, verbal abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse are all forms of overt abuse.
2. *Covert or Controlling Abuse* - Narcissism is almost entirely about control. It is a primitive and immature reaction to the circumstances of the narcissist's life (usually in his childhood) in which he was rendered helpless. It is about re-asserting one's identity, re-establishing predictability, mastering the environment, both human and physical.

The bulk of narcissistic behaviours can be traced to this panicky reaction to the potential for loss of control. Narcissists are hypochondriacs (and difficult patients) because they are afraid to lose control over their body, their appearance, and their proper functioning. They are obsessive-compulsive in their efforts to subdue their physical habitat and render it foreseeable. They stalk people and harass them as a means of "being in touch": another form of narcissistic control.

But why the panic?

The narcissist is a solipsist. To him, nothing exists except himself. Meaningful others are his extensions, assimilated by him, they are internal objects - not external ones. Thus, losing control of a significant other is equivalent to losing the use of a limb, or of one's brain. It is terrifying.

Independent or disobedient people evoke in the narcissist the realization that something is wrong with his worldview, that he is

not the centre of the world or its prime mover and that he cannot control what, to him, are internal representations.

To the narcissist, losing control means going insane. Because other people are mere elements in the narcissist's mind, being unable to manipulate them literally means losing it (his mind). Imagine, if you suddenly were to find out that you cannot manipulate your memories or control your thoughts... It would have felt nightmarish!

Moreover, it is often only through manipulation and extortion that the narcissist can secure his [Narcissistic Supply \(NS\)](#). Controlling his Sources of Narcissistic Supply is a (mental) life or death question for the narcissist. The narcissist is a drug addict (his drug being Narcissistic Supply) and he goes to great lengths to obtain the next dose.

In his frantic efforts to maintain control or re-assert it, the narcissist resorts to a myriad of fiendishly inventive stratagems and mechanisms. Here is a partial list:

Unpredictability

The narcissist acts unpredictably, capriciously, inconsistently and irrationally. This serves to demolish in others their carefully crafted worldview. They become dependent upon the next twist and turn of the narcissist, his inexplicable whims, his outbursts, denial, or smiles.

In other words: the narcissist makes sure that HE is the only stable entity in the lives of others by shattering the rest of their world through his seemingly insane behaviour. He guarantees his presence in their lives by destabilizing them.

In the absence of a self, there are no likes or dislikes, preferences, predictable behaviour or characteristics. It is not possible to know the narcissist. There is no one there.

The narcissist was conditioned from an early age of abuse and trauma to expect the unexpected. His was a world in which (sometimes sadistic) capricious caretakers and peers often behaved arbitrarily. He was trained to deny his True Self and nurture a False one.

Having invented himself, the narcissist sees no problem in re-inventing that which he designed in the first place. The narcissist is his own repeated creator - hence his grandiosity.

Moreover, the narcissist is a man for all seasons, forever adaptable, constantly imitating and emulating role models, a human sponge, a perfect mirror, a chameleon, a non-entity that is, at the same time, all entities combined.

The narcissist is best described by Heidegger's phrase: "Being and Nothingness". Into this reflective vacuum, this sucking black hole, the narcissist attracts the Sources of his Narcissistic Supply.

To an observer, the narcissist appears to be fractured or discontinuous.

Pathological narcissism has been compared to the Dissociative Identity Disorder (formerly the Multiple Personality Disorder). By definition, the narcissist has at least two selves, the True and False ones. His personality is very primitive and disorganized. Living with a narcissist is a nauseating experience not only because of what he is, but because of what he is NOT. He is not a fully formed human, but a dizzyingly kaleidoscopic gallery of ephemeral images, which melt into each other seamlessly. It is incredibly disorienting.

It is also exceedingly problematic. Promises made by the narcissist are easily disowned by him. His plans are transient. His emotional ties a simulacrum. Most narcissists have one [island of stability](#) in their life (spouse, family, their career, a hobby, their religion, country, or idol) pounded by the turbulent currents of an otherwise stochastic existence.

The narcissist does not keep agreements, does not adhere to laws or social norms, and regards consistency and predictability as demeaning traits.

Thus, to invest in a narcissist is a purposeless, futile and meaningless activity. To the narcissist, every day is a new beginning, a hunt, a new cycle of idealization or devaluation, a newly invented self. There is no accumulation of credits or goodwill because the narcissist has no past and no future. He occupies an eternal and [timeless present](#). He is a fossil caught in the frozen ashes of a volcanic childhood.

What to do?

Refuse to accept such behaviour. Demand reasonably predictable and rational actions and reactions. Insist on respect for your boundaries, predilections, preferences, and priorities.

Disproportional Reactions

One of the favourite tools of manipulation in the narcissist's arsenal is the disproportionality of his reactions. He reacts with supreme rage to the slightest slight. He punishes severely for what he perceives to be an offence against him, no matter how minor. He throws a temper tantrum over any discord or disagreement, however gently and considerately expressed. Immediately thereafter, he may act attentive, charming and seductive (even

over-sexed, if need be). This ever-shifting emotional landscape ("affective dunes") coupled with an inordinately harsh and arbitrarily applied "penal code" are both promulgated by the narcissist. Neediness and dependence on the source of all justice meted - the narcissist - are thus guaranteed.

What to do?

Demand a just and proportional treatment. Reject or ignore unjust and capricious behaviour.

If you are up to the inevitable confrontation, react in kind. Let him taste some of his own medicine.

Dehumanization and Objectification

People have a need to believe in the empathic skills and basic good-heartedness of others. By dehumanizing and objectifying people the narcissist attacks the very foundations of the social treaty. This is the "alien" aspect of narcissists: they may be excellent imitations of fully formed adults but they are emotionally non-existent, or, at best, immature.

This is so horrid, so repulsive, so phantasmagoric that people recoil in terror. It is then, with their defences absolutely down, that they are the most susceptible and vulnerable to the narcissist's control. Physical, psychological, verbal and sexual abuse are all forms of dehumanization and objectification.

What to do?

Never show your abuser that you are afraid of him. Do not negotiate with bullies. They are insatiable. Do not succumb to blackmail.

If things get rough - disengage, involve law enforcement officers, friends and colleagues, or threaten him (legally).

Do not keep your abuse a secret. Secrecy is the abuser's weapon.

Never give him a second chance. React with your full arsenal to the first transgression.

Abuse of Information

From the first moments of an encounter with another person, the narcissist is on the prowl. He collects information with the intention of abusing it later in order to extract Narcissistic Supply. The more he knows about his potential Source of Supply, the better able he is to coerce, manipulate, charm, extort or convert her "to the cause". The narcissist does not hesitate to misuse the information he gleaned, regardless of its intimate nature or the circumstances in which he obtained it. This is a powerful tool in his armoury.

What to do?

Be guarded. Don't be too forthcoming in a first or casual meeting. First, gather intelligence on your interlocutor.

Be yourself. Don't misrepresent your wishes, boundaries, preferences, priorities, and red lines.

Do not behave inconsistently. Do not go back on your word. Be firm and resolute.

Impossible Situations

The narcissist engineers impossible, dangerous, unpredictable, unprecedented, or highly specific situations in which he is sorely and indispensably needed. The narcissist's knowledge, his skills or his traits become the only ones applicable, or the most useful to coping with these artificial predicaments. It is a form of [control by proxy](#).

What to do?

Stay away from such quagmires. Scrutinize every offer and suggestion, no matter how innocuous.

Prepare back-up plans. Keep others informed of your whereabouts and appraised of your situation.

Be vigilant and doubting. Do not be gullible and suggestible. Better safe than sorry.

Control by Proxy

If all else fails, the narcissist recruits friends, colleagues, mates, family members, the authorities, institutions, neighbours, or the media - in short, third parties - to do his bidding. He uses them to cajole, coerce, threaten, stalk, offer, retreat, tempt, convince, harass, communicate and otherwise manipulate his target. He controls these unaware instruments exactly as he plans to control his ultimate prey. He employs the same mechanisms and devices. And he dumps his props unceremoniously when the job is done.

Another form of control by proxy is to engineer situations in which abuse is inflicted upon another person. Such carefully crafted scenarios involve embarrassment and humiliation as well as social sanctions (condemnation, opprobrium, or even physical punishment). Society, or a social group become the instruments of the narcissist.

What to do?

Often the abuser's proxies are unaware of their role. Expose him. Inform them. Demonstrate to them how they are being abused, misused, and plain used by the abuser.

Trap your abuser. Treat him as he treats you. Involve others. Bring it into the open. Nothing like sunshine to disinfect abuse.

Ambient Abuse

Gaslighting or stealth or ambient abuse is the fostering, propagation and enhancement of an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, instability, unpredictability and irritation. There are no acts of traceable or provable explicit abuse, nor any manipulative settings of control. Yet, the irksome feeling remains, a disagreeable foreboding, a premonition, a bad omen.

In the long-term, such an environment erodes one's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Self-confidence is shaken badly. Often, the victims become paranoid or schizoid and thus are exposed even more to criticism and judgement. The roles are thus reversed: the victim is considered mentally disordered and the narcissist the suffering soul or the victim.

What to do?

Run! Get away! Ambient abuse often develops into overt and violent abuse.

You don't owe anyone an explanation but you owe yourself a life. Bail out of the relationship. Leave him now.

Indifference and Decompensation in Pathological Narcissism

The narcissist lacks empathy. Consequently, he is not really interested in the lives, emotions, needs, preferences, and hopes of people around him. Even his nearest and dearest are, to him, mere instruments of gratification. They require his undivided attention only when they "malfunction" - when they become disobedient, independent, or critical. He loses all interest in them if they cannot be "fixed" (for instance, when they are terminally ill or develop a modicum of personal autonomy and independence).

Once he gives up on his erstwhile Sources of Supply, the narcissist proceeds to promptly and peremptorily devalue and discard them. This is often done by simply ignoring them - a facade of indifference that is known as the "silent treatment" and is, at heart, hostile and aggressive. Indifference is, therefore, a form of devaluation. People find the narcissist "cold", "inhuman", "heartless", "clueless", "robotic or machine-like".

Early on in life, the narcissist learns to disguise his socially-unacceptable indifference as benevolence, equanimity, cool-headedness, composure, or superiority. "It is not that I don't care about others" - he shrugs off his critics - "I am simply more level-

headed, more resilient, more composed under pressure... They mistake my equanimity for apathy."

The narcissist tries to convince people that he is compassionate. His profound lack of interest in his spouse's life, vocation, interests, hobbies, and whereabouts he cloaks as [benevolent altruism](#). "I give her all the freedom she can wish for!" - he protests - "I don't spy on her, follow her, or nag her with endless questions. I don't bother her. I let her lead her life the way she sees fit and don't interfere in her affairs!" He makes a virtue out of his emotional truancy.

All very commendable but when taken to extremes such benign neglect turns malignant and signifies the voidance of true love and attachment. The narcissist's emotional (and, often, physical) absence from all his relationships is a [form of aggression](#) and a defence against his own thoroughly [repressed feelings](#).

In rare moments of [self-awareness](#), the narcissist realizes that without his input - even in the form of feigned emotions - people will [abandon him](#). He then swings from cruel aloofness to maudlin and grandiose gestures intended to demonstrate the "larger than life" nature of his sentiments. This bizarre pendulum only proves the narcissist's inadequacy at maintaining adult relationships. It convinces no one and repels many.

The narcissist's guarded detachment is a sad reaction to his unfortunate formative years. [Pathological narcissism](#) is thought to be the result of a prolonged period of severe abuse by primary caregivers, peers, or authority figures. In this sense, pathological narcissism is, therefore, a reaction to [trauma](#). Narcissism IS a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that got ossified and fixated and mutated into a [personality disorder](#).

All narcissists are traumatized and all of them suffer from a variety of post-traumatic symptoms: abandonment anxiety, [reckless behaviours](#), anxiety and mood disorders, [somatoform disorders](#), and so on. But the presenting signs of narcissism rarely indicate post-trauma. This is because pathological narcissism is an EFFICIENT coping (defence) mechanism. The narcissist presents to the world a facade of invincibility, equanimity, superiority, skilfulness, cool-headedness, invulnerability, and, in short: indifference.

This front is penetrated only in times of great crises that threaten the narcissist's [ability to obtain Narcissistic Supply](#). The narcissist then "falls apart" in a process of disintegration known as decompensation. The dynamic forces which render him paralyzed and fake - his vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and fears - are starkly

exposed as his defences crumble and become dysfunctional. The narcissist's extreme dependence on his social milieu for the regulation of his sense of self-worth is painfully and pitifully evident as he is reduced to begging and cajoling.

At such times, the narcissist acts out [self-destructively](#) and anti-socially. His mask of superior equanimity is pierced by displays of impotent rage, self-loathing, self-pity, and crass attempts at manipulation of his friends, family, and colleagues. His ostensible benevolence and caring evaporate. He feels caged and threatened and he reacts as any animal would do - by striking back at his perceived tormentors, at his hitherto "nearest" and "dearest".

The Malignant Optimism of the Abused

I often come across sad examples of the powers of self-delusion that the narcissist provokes in his victims. It is what I call "malignant optimism". People refuse to believe that some questions are unsolvable, some diseases incurable, some disasters inevitable. They see a sign of hope in every fluctuation. They read meaning and patterns into every random occurrence, utterance, or slip of tongue. They are deceived by their own pressing need to believe in the ultimate victory of good over evil, health over sickness, order over disorder. Life appears otherwise so meaningless, so unjust and so arbitrary...

So, they impose upon it a design, progress, aims, and paths. This is magical thinking.

"If only he tried hard enough", "If he only really wanted to heal", "If only we found the right therapy", "If only his defences were down", "There MUST be something good and worthy under his hideous facade", "NO ONE can be that evil and destructive", "He must have meant it differently", "God, or a higher being, or the spirit, or the soul is the solution and the answer to our prayers", "He is not responsible for what he is - his narcissism is the product of a difficult childhood, of abuse, and of his monstrous parents."

The Pollyanna defences of the abused are aimed against the emerging and horrible understanding that humans are mere specks of dust in a totally indifferent universe, the playthings of evil and sadistic forces, of which the narcissist is one and that finally the victims' pains means nothing to anyone but themselves.

The narcissist holds such malignant optimism in barely disguised contempt. To him, it is a sign of weakness. It gives off the scent of prey. It is a gaping vulnerability. He uses and abuses this human need for order, good, and meaning as he uses and abuses all other human needs. Gullibility, selective blindness, malignant optimism

- these are the weapons of the beast. And the abused are hard at work to provide it with its arsenal.

[Return](#)

This article appears in my book, "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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THE AUTHOR

Shmuel (Sam) Vaknin

Curriculum Vitae

Born in 1961 in Qiryat-Yam, Israel.

Served in the Israeli Defence Force (1979-1982) in training and education units.

Education

Graduated a few semesters in the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa.

Ph.D. in Philosophy (major: Philosophy of Physics) - Pacific Western University, California, USA.

Graduate of numerous courses in Finance Theory and International Trading.

Certified [E-Commerce Concepts Analyst](#) by [Brainbench](#).

Certified in [Psychological Counselling Techniques](#) by [Brainbench](#).

Certified [Financial Analyst](#) by [Brainbench](#).

Full proficiency in Hebrew and in English.

Business Experience

1980 to 1983

Founder and co-owner of a chain of computerized information kiosks in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

1982 to 1985

Senior positions with the Nessim D. Gaon Group of Companies in Geneva, Paris and New-York (NOGA and APROFIM SA):

- Chief Analyst of Edible Commodities in the Group's Headquarters in Switzerland
- Manager of the Research and Analysis Division
- Manager of the Data Processing Division
- Project Manager of the Nigerian Computerized Census

- Vice President in charge of RND and Advanced Technologies
- Vice President in charge of Sovereign Debt Financing

1985 to 1986

Represented Canadian Venture Capital Funds in Israel.

1986 to 1987

General Manager of IPE Ltd. in London. The firm financed international multi-lateral countertrade and leasing transactions.

1988 to 1990

Co-founder and Director of "Mikbats-Tesuah", a portfolio management firm based in Tel-Aviv.

Activities included large-scale portfolio management, underwriting, forex trading and general financial advisory services.

1990 to Present

Freelance consultant to many of Israel's Blue-Chip firms, mainly on issues related to the capital markets in Israel, Canada, the UK and the USA.

Consultant to foreign RND ventures and to governments on macro-economic matters.

Freelance journalist and analyst for various media in the USA.

1990 to 1995

President of the Israel chapter of the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) and (briefly) Israel representative of the "Washington Times".

1993 to 1994

Co-owner and Director of many business enterprises:

- The Omega and Energy Air-Conditioning Concern
- AVP Financial Consultants
- Handiman Legal Services - Total annual turnover of the group: 10 million USD.

Co-owner, Director and Finance Manager of COSTI Ltd. - Israel's largest computerized information vendor and developer. Raised funds through a series of private placements locally in the USA, Canada and London.

1993 to 1996

Publisher and Editor of a Capital Markets Newsletter distributed by subscription only to dozens of subscribers countrywide.

In a legal precedent in 1995 - studied in business schools and law faculties across Israel - was tried for his role in an attempted takeover of Israel's Agriculture Bank.

Was interned in the State School of Prison Wardens.

Managed the Central School Library, wrote, published and lectured on various occasions.

Managed the Internet and International News Department of an Israeli mass media group, "Ha-Tikshoret and Namer".

Assistant in the Law Faculty in Tel-Aviv University (to Prof. S.G. Shoham).

1996 to 1999

Financial consultant to leading businesses in Macedonia, Russia and the Czech Republic.

Economic commentator in "[Nova Makedonija](#)", "[Dnevnik](#)", "Makedonija Denes", "Izvestia", "Argumenti i Fakti", "The Middle East Times", "[The New Presence](#)", "[Central Europe Review](#)", and other periodicals, and in the economic programs on various channels of Macedonian Television.

Chief Lecturer in Macedonia in courses organized by the Agency of Privatization, by the Stock Exchange, and by the Ministry of Trade.

1999 to 2002

Economic Advisor to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and to the Ministry of Finance.

2001 to 2003

Senior Business Correspondent for [United Press International \(UPI\)](#).

Web and Journalistic Activities

Author of extensive Web sites in:

- Psychology ("[Malignant Self Love](#)") - An [Open Directory Cool Site](#),
- Philosophy ("[Philosophical Musings](#)"),
- Economics and Geopolitics ("[World in Conflict and Transition](#)").

Owner of the [Narcissistic Abuse Study List](#) and the [Abusive Relationships Newsletter](#) (more than 6000 members).

Owner of the [Economies in Conflict and Transition Study List](#), the [Toxic Relationships Study List](#), and the [Link and Factoid Study List](#).

Editor of mental health disorders and Central and Eastern Europe categories in various Web directories ([Open Directory](#), [Search Europe](#), [Mentalhelp.net](#)).

Editor of the [Personality Disorders](#), [Narcissistic Personality Disorder](#), the [Verbal and Emotional Abuse](#), and the [Spousal \(Domestic\) Abuse and Violence](#) topics on Suite 101 and [Bellaonline](#).

Columnist and commentator in "The New Presence", [United Press International \(UPI\)](#), InternetContent, eBookWeb, [PopMatters](#), "[Global Politician](#)", [eBookNet](#), and "[Central Europe Review](#)".

Publications and Awards

"Managing Investment Portfolios in States of Uncertainty", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1988

"The Gambling Industry", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1990

"[Requesting My Loved One - Short Stories](#)", Yedioth Aharonot, Tel-Aviv, 1997

"[The Suffering of Being Kafka](#)" (electronic book of Hebrew and English Short Fiction), Prague and Skopje, 1998-2004

"The Macedonian Economy at a Crossroads - On the Way to a Healthier Economy" (dialogues with [Nikola Gruevski](#)), Skopje, 1998

"[The Exporters' Pocketbook](#)", Ministry of Trade, Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 1999

"[Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited](#)", Narcissus Publications, Prague and Skopje, 1999-2007

[The Narcissism Series](#) (e-books regarding relationships with abusive narcissists), Skopje, 1999-2007

"[After the Rain - How the West Lost the East](#)", Narcissus Publications in association with [Central Europe Review/CEENMI](#), Prague and Skopje, 2000

Winner of numerous awards, among them [Israel's Council of Culture and Art Prize for Maiden Prose](#) (1997), The Rotary Club Award for Social Studies (1976), and the Bilateral Relations Studies Award of the American Embassy in Israel (1978).

Hundreds of professional articles in all fields of finances and the economy, and numerous articles dealing with geopolitical and political economic issues published in both print and Web periodicals in many countries.

Many appearances in the electronic media on subjects in philosophy and the sciences, and concerning economic matters.

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Psychology: <http://www.narcissistic-abuse.com/>

Philosophy: <http://philosophos.tripod.com/>

Poetry: <http://samvak.tripod.com/contents.html>

Fiction: <http://samvak.tripod.com/sipurim.html>

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Had a Narcissistic Parent?
Married to a Narcissist - or Divorcing One?
Afraid your children will turn out the same?
Want to cope with this pernicious, baffling condition?

OR

Are You a Narcissist - or suspect that You are one...
This book will teach you how to...
Cope, Survive, and Protect Your Loved Ones!
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Sam Vaknin published the EIGHTH, REVISED IMPRESSION of his book about relationships with abusive narcissists, "**Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited**".

The book deals with the Narcissistic Personality Disorder and its effects on the narcissist and his nearest and dearest - in 102 frequently asked questions and two essays - a total of 600 pages!

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And from **Amazon.com** - Click on this link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/8023833847/>

"**After the Rain - How the West Lost the East**" - Click on this link:

<http://barnesandnoble.bfast.com/booklink/click?ISBN=802385173X>

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The previous revised impression of Sam Vaknin's "Malignant Self -
Love - Narcissism Revisited".

Comes with an exclusive BONUS PACK (not available through
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Contains the entire text: essays, frequently asked questions and
appendices regarding pathological narcissism and the Narcissistic
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Free excerpts from the EIGHTH, Revised Impression of "**Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited**" are available as well as a free NEW EDITION of the Narcissism Book of Quotes

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An *electronic book* is a computer file, sent to you as an attachment to an e-mail message. Just save it to your hard disk and click on the file to open, read, and learn!

1. "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

Eighth, Revised Edition (January 2007)

The e-book version of Sam Vaknin's "Malignant Self - Love - Narcissism Revisited". Contains the entire text: essays, frequently asked questions (FAQs) and appendices regarding pathological narcissism and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

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2. "The Narcissism Series"

Eighth, Revised Edition (January 2007)

EIGHT e-books (more than 2500 pages), including the full text of "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited", regarding Pathological Narcissism, relationships with abusive narcissists and psychopaths, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Click on this link to purchase the EIGHT e-books:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_SERIES

3. **"Toxic Relationships - Abuse and its Aftermath"**

Fourth Edition (February 2006)

How to identify abuse, cope with it, survive it, and deal with your abuser and with the system in divorce and custody issues.

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_ABUSE

4. **"The Narcissist and Psychopath in the Workplace"**

(September 2006)

Identify abusers, bullies, and stalkers in the workplace (bosses, colleagues, suppliers, and authority figures) and learn how to cope with them effectively.

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_WORKPLACE

5. **"Abusive Relationships Workbook"** (February 2006)

Self-assessment questionnaires, tips, and tests for victims of abusers, batterers, and stalkers in various types of relationships.

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_WORKBOOK

6. **"Pathological Narcissism FAQs"**

Eighth, Revised Edition (January 2007)

Dozens of Frequently Asked Questions regarding Pathological Narcissism, relationships with abusive narcissists, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_FAQS

7. **"The World of the Narcissist"**

Eighth, Revised Edition (January 2007)

A book-length psychodynamic study of pathological narcissism, relationships with abusive narcissists, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder, using a new vocabulary.

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_ESSAY

8. "Excerpts from the Archives of the Narcissism List"

Hundreds of excerpts from the archives of the Narcissistic Abuse Study List regarding Pathological Narcissism, relationships with abusive narcissists, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Click on this link to purchase the e-book:

http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_EXCERPTS

9. "Diary of a Narcissist" (November 2005)

The anatomy of one man's mental illness - its origins, its unfolding, its outcomes.

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http://www.ccnw.com/cgi-local/cart.cgi?vaksam_JOURNAL

10. "After the Rain - How the West Lost the East"

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- The full text of "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"
- The full text of 102 Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
- Covering all the dimensions of Pathological Narcissism and Abuse in Relationships
- An Essay - The Narcissist's point of view
- Bibliography
- 600 printed pages in a quality paper book

- Digital Bonus Pack! (available only when you purchase the previous edition from the Publisher) - Bibliography, three e-books, additional FAQs, appendices and more - hundreds of additional pages!

Testimonials and Additional Resources

You can read Readers' Reviews at the Barnes and Noble Web page dedicated to "Malignant Self Love" - HERE:

<http://barnesandnoble.bfast.com/booklink/click?ISBN=8023833847>

Dozens of Links and Resources

Click on these links:

The Narcissistic Abuse Study List

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse>

The Toxic Relationships Study List

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/toxicrelationships>

Abusive Relationships Newsletter

<http://groups.google.com/group/narcissisticabuse>

Participate in Discussions about Abusive Relationships

<http://personalitydisorders.suite101.com/discussions.cfm>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Narcissistic_Personality_Disorder

<http://groups.msn.com/NARCISSISTICPERSONALITYDISORDER>

Links to Therapist Directories, Psychological Tests, NPD Resources, Support Groups for Narcissists and Their Victims, and Tutorials

<http://www.suite101.com/links.cfm/npd>

Support Groups for Victims of Narcissists and Narcissists

http://dmoz.org/Health/Mental_Health/Disorders/Personality/Narcissistic

<http://www.narcissistic-abuse.com/freebooks.html>

BE WELL, SAFE AND WARM WHEREVER YOU ARE!

Sam Vaknin

Malignant Self Love

Narcissism Revisited

The Book

"Narcissists live in a state of constant rage, repressed aggression, envy and hatred. They firmly believe that everyone is like them. As a result, they are paranoid, aggressive, haughty and erratic. Narcissists are forever in pursuit of Narcissistic Supply.

They know no past or future, are not constrained by any behavioural consistency, 'rules' of conduct or moral considerations. You signal to a narcissist that you are a willing source - and he is bound to extract his supply from you.

This is a reflex.

He would have reacted absolutely the same to any other source. If what is needed to obtain supply from you is intimations of intimacy - he will supply them liberally."

This book is comprised of two parts.

The first part contains 102 Frequently Asked Questions related to the various aspects of pathological narcissism, relationships with abusive narcissists, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

The second part is an exposition of the various psychodynamic theories regarding pathological narcissism and a proposed new vocabulary.

The Author

Sam Vaknin was born in Israel in 1961. A financial consultant and columnist, he lived (and published) in 12 countries.

He is a published and awarded author of short fiction and reference and an editor of mental health categories in various Web directories. This is his twelfth book.