

Narcissism: the Good, the Bad, the Ugly

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Narcissism is necessary to sustain life.

- Narcissism promotes self-assurance, self-assertion, and self-satisfaction.
- Narcissism fuels confidence, power, and influence.
- Initially, most of us find narcissists attractive, and more exciting than non-narcissists,
- We are drawn to their "sexy" charisma and confidence.
- Narcissists can get things done.

Erich Fromm: collective narcissism

- Golec de Zavala: the belief that the exaggerated greatness of one's group is not recognized by others.
- My group deserves special treatment
- Group can be religious, political, gender, racial, or ethnic group, but also a sports club, or cult.
- In everyday settings, it can keep people from listening to one another,
- It can also lead to reducing people as "the other, the enemy,"
- which can ultimately lead to violence.

Groups may differ on their narrative about why they are superior

- They might believe they are culturally superior
 - Have the “right answers”
 - They are resentful of those outside the group
 - And hypersensitive to any threat to their position
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- They are more focused on threats from the “other” than differences within their own group.

Collective narcissists

- tend to respond to perceived threats from other groups in aggressive ways.
- Group narcissists glorify in-group members
- while overlooking their moral failures.

When people think of narcissists

- They usually think of inflated ego, believing they are smarter, more attractive, more deserving, and special than anyone else.
- These narcissists believe their own press.
- But there are far more narcissists with fragile egos and low self-esteem
- Fragile narcissists have an uncertain sense of self-worth, deeply steeped in shame and distrust,
- These individuals have a great deal of antagonism and self-entitlement.
- Fragile narcissists believe they deserve to be compensated for being deprived of their perceived greatness.

In the U.S., collective narcissism is more strongly correlated with grandiose narcissism

- But, overall, vulnerable narcissists are actually more likely to fall into collective narcissism
- The fragile ego of the vulnerable narcissist may be obsessed with receiving group recognition because they feel so very insecure about their own value.

What are we talking about

- Narcissism:
- One of several types of personality disorders
- A mental condition in which people have an exaggerated sense of their own importance
- A deep need for excessive attention and admiration
- Lack of empathy for others
- Expect to be seen as superior without achievements that warrant it
- Are preoccupied with an inflated belief about their success, power, brilliance, beauty, or having the perfect mate envied by others.

Garden-variety narcissism

- Is oblivious to fairness
- Thinks, talks about self most of the time
- Craves attention
- Demands admiration
- Exaggerates talents and achievements
- Believes in own uniqueness
- Wide, fast mood swings
- Difficulty understanding or considering others
- “If it benefits me, then it is the truth.”

Extremely self-righteous and judgmental

- Prone to bully others
- Often believe the victim deserves the treatment or brought it on themselves
- Never take responsibility for actions that hurt others

Narcissists are also prone to lying

- Because if it benefits them
- In their perception, *it is true!*

For narcissists, whether online or in real life

- It's all about micromanaging and controlling others
- To their advantage

Manipulative narcissists

- Are covert aggressors
- They use subtle tactics to charm, disarm, and take advantage of you
- They also enjoy pitting people against one another

Narcissists will claim righteous indignation

- But it is actually jealousy and envy at the root
- Narcissists don't often exist in a peaceful state

Contrary to popular belief

- It's not the person showing the selfie, sharing good news, or posting about their fun life.
- It's the bully in the comment section degrading others.

Those who enjoy trolling

- Have high levels of narcissism
- Trolls have the *cognitive* empathy to assess the hurt they inflict
- They don't have the *affective* empathy to care that others hurt.
- Therefore, **they do not have compassion.**

30 year study of narcissism and empathy

- NPI-Narcissistic Personality Disorder
- Correlates with real-world behavior
 - Overrate their own ability
 - Lash out angrily to slightest criticism
 - More likely than average to bully
 - Less likely to volunteer to help others

NPD

- Does not react well to criticism or critique
- Troubled relationships throughout life
- Goal to be more powerful, successful, desirable
- Manipulates others to gain success
- Jealousy is pervasive
- Obsessed with themselves
- Cannot set realistic goals
- Constant hunger for attention, admiration
- Easily hurt or feel rejected

Narcissism is marked by

- a sense of entitlement
- a sense of superiority
- a willingness to exploit
- impulsiveness
- a lack of empathy
- retaliatory aggression when the inflated ego is threatened

Narcissistic Injury

- Any threat (real or imagined) to the narcissist's grandiose self-perception
- Or anything less than the special treatment he or she believes is deserved.
- Even a slight disagreement can be perceived as a humiliation or rejection.
- The narcissist is constantly on the lookout for slights; is hypervigilant.

Narcissism has survival value



The self as world view—as an infant...

- Infants don't give thought to the convenience of others.
- Are programmed to think only of their needs and wants.
- Are not programmed to think of the needs of others.

Why are we talking about this?

- 70% of college students
- Score higher on narcissism and lower on empathy than did the average student 30 years ago.

Causes for rising scores?

- More honest? Researchers don't think so.
- Other assessment with robust lie scales also show increase in narcissism and decline in empathy.
- Increased pressure to achieve and achieve where beating others is required.
- Misguided “self-esteem movement”

Carte blanche esteem

- The current definition of self-esteem used by educators and psychologists seems to be...
- ***Feeling good about oneself regardless of social attributes.***

What caused this rise in narcissism?

- Far less social pressure to demonstrate character than in past generations.
- Children who once would have been disciplined for spoiled behavior are now allowed to dictate the dinner menu, or veto a family move.



When Success Leads to Failure—The Atlantic

- Are children sacrificing natural curiosity and love of learning at the altar of achievement?
- Are we training our kids to measure progress by means of points, scores, and awards versus learning?
- (And we don't care how they achieve them.)
- Are we sending the message that intellect and achievement are more important than character?
- Are we teaching them to fear failure?
- Fear of failure destroys the joy of learning!!

Probable causes

- Excessive praise fostering an unrealistic view of self
- Overindulgence and spoiling with the expectation of continuance from others
- Failing to impose adequate discipline which prepares one for maturity and adulthood
- Idealization of the child which sets unrealistic expectations

Free play versus “play dates”

- In free play children learn to control their own lives, solve their own problems and deal effectively with fear and anger—thereby **protecting themselves from anxiety and depression.**
- Learn how to win *and lose!*
- Free play expands options and creativity
- Free play overcomes narcissism, builds capacity for empathy.

In free play you can quit

- All kids have a biological drive to play with other children
- To keep fun going each child is motivated to keep the others happy
- They must learn to listen to one another, understand one another.
- If a child fails at understanding others, they will quit and the child won't be able to play.

Free play teaches

- Empathy
- Negotiation
- Cooperation
- Impulse control
- Emotional regulation

By depriving children of opportunities to play on their own away from adult supervision and control

- We are depriving them of opportunities to learn how to take control of their own lives

We may think we are protecting them, but...

- we are diminishing their joy.
- preventing them from developing self- control
- preventing them from discovering what they most love to do
- and increasing the odds they will suffer from anxiety, depression, and other disorders.

Children in free play

- Are rarely effusive in praise for one another
- Have little tolerance for special treatment or demands
- They are highly skilled at deflating an exaggerated ego

Children who engage in free play

- Demonstrate more empathy
- More ability to take other's perspective
- When play is added, these abilities increase and children get along better with others.

Probable causes of narcissism

- The combination of indulgence and coldness may be a potent brew for cultivating narcissistic personality disorder.

Merriam-Webster indulge

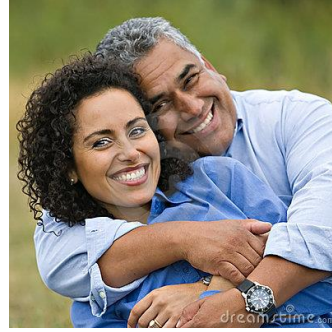
- To give free rein to...
 - To yield to the desire of...
 - To treat with excessive leniency
 - To pamper, humor, spoil
-
- Implies excessive compliance and weakness

In the US

- Young kids are learning to code
- But not contribute or cooperate

Subgroups of the family

- Executive



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- Parental



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- Sibling



The roots of narcissism

- **Placing momentary emotional needs over the feelings and wishes of others**
- Failure to play by accepted rules of the game
- Selfish behavior which defies logic

Self esteem

- Psychoanalytic theory: narcissists actually have low self-esteem and that their narcissism is just a cover.
- New research: narcissism actually correlates quite positively with positive self image.
- Deep down inside, narcissists think they're awesome!
- You cannot cure narcissism with greater self image.

School of hard knocks
("Psychology of Victimhood," 2003).

- "Psychotherapy sees many normal life events as trauma rather than as character building experiences.
- This has political consequences.
- Individuals are freed from moral responsibility for what they do or what happened to them and therefore are no longer citizens, but patients or victims"

Most charming person in the room.

- Narcissists tend to be quite charming initially, but once you get into the relationship you realize your attempts to do something other than what the narcissist wants are foiled.

Imperative clinical note!

- Narcissism thrives when people allow themselves to be scape-goated for the narcissist's bad behavior.
- *It is a condition that appears in relationship and not in isolation.*
- It takes more than one person for this pattern of behavior to continue.

Therapy goals: what you change

- ***is how people deal with NPDs, not the narcissist.***

The cheating narcissist research

- More likely to cheat on their partners
- Not very susceptible to guilt
- Tend to get a “thrill” from keeping their others guessing
- Like to feel in control of their relationships
- Simply feel entitled to things they want

What to do

- **Do not take it personally.**
- If someone you know talks with minimal listening, first and foremost do not take it personally.
- Dismissing what you say as wrong or irrelevant says more about that person than it does about you or what you have said.
- **Repeat what you said.**
- Just as you would repeat, perhaps more loudly, what you were trying to say to a hearing impaired person, find ways to repeat, tactfully, the message that you were trying to communicate.

Treatment in a nutshell

- *Respect*
- *Reality check*
- *Regulation of emotions*

Your best therapeutic tool:

- The truth
- You can continue to believe in your own entitlement...
- *But you will not be happy!*

Earn it to own it

- Entitlement is the feeling that we deserve something, whatever it may be, regardless of what we may or may not have done to earn it.
- People's lives become more meaningful when they have constructive goals that make a difference for others.

Compassion requires us

- To grow up
- To step out of self-as-context
- To have clear boundaries
- To be curious about others' experience
- To imagine yourself as the other
- To understand others enough to determine their needs

Daniel Goleman

- A 'reparative relationship' can be very beneficial in personality disordered individuals.
- True self esteem includes a deep-down self acceptance which includes one's flaws.