

# The Personality Disorders

Ten to thirteen percent of the world population suffers from some form of a personality disorder. These people lead lives that few can understand, or want to understand. The personality disorders are not only persistent and unrelenting, but also very hard to cure. Most people with personality disorders, unlike other psychological disorders, can function normally in every aspect of society outside their disorder. The character portrayed by Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* is a good example of a **Histrionic Personality Disorder**. Robert De Niro's role in *Cape Fear* is another example of the "villain" in movies having the characteristics of an **Antisocial Personality Disorder**. Many leaders of destructive groups (David Moses Berg, *Children of God*; Jim Jones, *People's Temple*; David Koresh, *Branch Davidians*, etc.) also appear to be examples of a particular personality disorder called **Narcissistic Personality Disorder**. Clearly, not all **Narcissistic Personality Disorders** are leaders of destructive groups. However, in our experience, all leaders of truly destructive groups, if not true **NPD's**, exhibit extreme narcissistic traits and/or tendencies. The above listed individuals, and many others, all share in common these characteristics in an uncanny way.

As the DSM IV states, "*Many highly successful individuals display personality traits that might be considered narcissistic. Only when these traits are inflexible, maladaptive, and persisting and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute **Narcissistic Personality Disorder**.*"

Personality disorders are stable and all-pervasive, not episodic. They affect most of the areas of functioning of the sufferer: his career, his interpersonal relationships, his social functioning. He does not like himself, his character, his (deficient) functioning, or his crippling influence on others. But his defenses are so strong, that he is aware only of the distress, not the reasons for it. In stressful situations he tries to pre-empt any real or imaginary threat, change the rules of the game, introduce new variables, or otherwise influence the external world to conform to their needs.

Society has little tolerance for such people with personality disorders because they rarely seek help on their own, and even when help is sought, long term cures are hard to come by.

# Narcissistic Personality Disorder: A Primer on Narcissism and the Destructive Group Leader's Personality

## Narcissism (n. sing.)

A pattern of traits and behaviors 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.

*“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, sadly, is a universal human behavior. By “abuse” we mean any refusal to acknowledge the emerging boundaries of the individual.*

*There are malignant narcissists among subsistence farmers in Africa, nomads in the Sinai desert, day laborers in East Europe, and intellectuals and socialites in Manhattan and London. Malignant narcissism is all pervasive and independent of culture and society.”* (Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited, Sam Vaknin, PhD.

## What is NPD (Narcissistic Personality Disorder)?

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD, 301.81) has been recognized as a separate mental health disorder since the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM), 1980.

It is described as an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy. It usually begins by early adulthood and is present in various contexts. Five (or more) of the following criteria *must* be met (all quotes are from Dr. Sam Vaknin's **Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited**):

1. Feels grandiose and self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents to the point of lying, demands to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements);

*“The narcissist is prone to magical thinking. He thinks about himself in terms of ‘being chosen’ or of ‘having a destiny’. ...He believes that his life is of such momentous importance, that it is micro-managed by God. ...In short, narcissism and religion go well together, because religion allows the narcissist to feel unique.”*

*“God is everything the narcissist ever wants to be: omniscient, omnipresent, admired, much discussed, and awe inspiring. God is the narcissist’s wet dream, his ultimate grandiose fantasy.”*

2. 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;

*“The narcissist is haunted by the feeling that he is possessed of a mission, of a destiny, that he is a part of fate, of history. He is convinced that his uniqueness is purposeful, that he is meant to lead, chart new ways, to innovate to modernize, to reform, to set precedents, to create. Every act is significant, every writing of momentous consequences, every thought of revolutionary calibre. He feels part of a grand design, a world plan and the frame of affiliation, the group, of which he is a member, must be commensurately grand.”*

3. 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);

*“The narcissist despises the very people who sustain his Ego boundaries and functions. He cannot respect people so expressly and clearly inferior to him, yet he can never associate*

*with evidently on his level or superior to him, the risk of narcissistic injury in such associations being too great.”*

4. Requires excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation – or, failing that, wishes to be feared and to be notorious (Narcissistic Supply);

*“A common error is to think that ‘narcissistic supply’ consists only of admiration, adulation and positive feedback. Actually, being feared, or derided is also supply. The main element is ATTENTION.”*

*“He feeds of other people, who hurl back at him an image that he projects to them. This is their sole function in his world: to reflect, to admire, to admire, to applaud, to detest – in a word, to assure him that he exists.”*

*“In short: the group must magnify the narcissist, echo and amplify his life, his views, his knowledge, his history...”*

5. Feels entitled. Expects unreasonable or special and favorable priority treatment. Demands automatic and full compliance with his or her expectations;

*“He considers his very existence as sufficiently nourishing and sustaining (of others). He feels entitled to the best others can offer without investing in maintaining relationships or in catering to the well-being of his ‘suppliers’.”*

6. Is “interpersonally exploitative”, i.e., uses others to achieve his or her own ends;

*“He will not hesitate to put people’s lives or fortunes at risk. He will preserve his sense of infallibility in the face of his mistakes and misjudgments by distorting the facts, by evoking mitigating or attenuating circumstances, by repressing the memories, or simply lying.”*

7. Devoid of empathy. Is unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of others;

*“But the narcissist does not care. Unable to empathize, he does not fully experience the outcomes of his deeds and decision. For him, humans are dispensable, rechargeable, reusable. They are there to fulfill a function: to supply him with Narcissistic Supply (adoration, admiration, approval, affirmation, etc.). They do not have an existence apart from the carrying out of their duty.”*

8. Constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about him or her;

*“First there is pathological envy. The narcissist is constantly envious of other people: their successes, their property, their character, their education, their children, their ideas, the fact that they can feel, their good mood, their past, their present, their spouses, their mistresses or lovers, their location.”*

9. Arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted.

*“That which has cosmic implications calls for cosmic reactions. A person with an inflated sense of self-import, reacts in an exaggerated manner to threats, greatly inflated by his imagination and by the application of his personal myth.”*

*“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, suspicious, scared and erratic.”*

## **Conclusion:**

*“NPD is a pernicious, vile and tortuous disease, which affects not only the narcissist. It affects and forever changes people who are in daily contact with the narcissist.”*

*“Sooner, or later, everyone around the narcissist is bound to become his victim. People are sucked, voluntarily or involuntarily, into the turbulence that constitutes his life, into the black hole that is his personality, into the whirlwind which makes up his interpersonal relationships. Different people are hurt by different aspects of the narcissist’s life and psychological make-up. Some trust him and rely on him, only to be bitterly disappointed. Others love him and discover that he cannot reciprocate. Yet others are forced to live vicariously, through him.”*