

Types of narcissistic personalities philosophy essay



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Like all of us, narcissists are human beings. As such, all narcissists are not alike. They are different among themselves. We take up Millon's report first.

In the year 1969, Millon has divided the narcissistic personalities into two subtypes: (1) Passive independent, or narcissistic personalities, who are confident of their self-worth and who feel they need to be merely themselves to justify being content and secure; (2) active-independent, or antisocial personalities, who struggle to "prove" themselves, who insist on their rights and will be harsh and ruthless when necessary to retaliate or gain power over others. For the narcissistic type, self-esteem is based on a blind and naïve assumption of personal worth and superiority. For the antisocial type, it seems from distrust, an assumption that others will be humiliating and exploitive. To these personalities, whose independence from others takes on an active and angry character, self-determination is a protective maneuver: it is a means of countering, with their own power and prestige, the hostility, deception, and victimization they anticipate from others. Although both passive narcissistic and active independents (antisocial) devalue the standards and opinions of others, finding gratification primarily within themselves. Their life histories and the strategies they employ for achieving their needs are potentially different. After intermittent interests in narcissism Millon (1977, 1987, and 1994) has presented the following four types of narcissistic personalities: (i) Unprincipled narcissist (ii) Amorous Narcissist (iii) Compensatory Narcissist (iv) Elitist Narcissist

i) The Unprincipled Narcissist

The unprincipled narcissist has been seen more often in drug rehabilitation programs, centers for youth offenders, and in jails and prisons. Although

these individuals often are successful in society, keeping their activities just within the boundaries of the law, they enter into clinical treatment rather infrequently.

The behavior of these narcissists characterized by an arrogant sense of self-worth, an indifference to the welfare of others, and a fraudulent and intimidating social manner. There is a desire to exploit others, to expect special recognitions and considerations without assuming reciprocal responsibilities. A deficient social conscience is evident in the tendency to flout conventions, to engage in actions that raise questions of personal integrity, and to disregard the rights of others. Achievement deficits and social responsibilities are justified by expansive fantasies and frank prevarications. Descriptively, we may characterize this narcissist as devoid of a superego that is evidencing an unscrupulous, amoral, and deceptive approach to relationships with others. More than merely disloyal and exploitive, these narcissists may be found among society's con men and charlatans, many of whom are vindictive and contemptuous of their victims. The features that are clearly seen in the unprincipled narcissist support the conclusion that these individuals are an admixture of both narcissistic and antisocial personality characteristics.

The unprincipled narcissist evidences a rash willingness to risk harm and is notably fearless in the face of threats and punitive action, Malicious tendencies are projected outward, precipitating frequent personal and family difficulties, as well as occasional legal entanglements. Vengeful gratification is often obtained by humiliating and dominating others. These narcissists operate as if they have no principles other than exploiting others for their

personal gain. Lacking a genuine sense of guilt and possessing little social conscience, they are opportunists and charlatans who enjoy the process of swindling others. In a game narcissists enjoy playing, they outwit others and hold them in contempt owing to the ease with which they can be seduced. Relationships survive only as long as the narcissist has something to gain. People are dropped with no thought to the anguish they may experience as a consequence of the narcissist's careless and irresponsible behaviors.

In many ways, the unprincipled narcissist is similar to the disingenuous histrionic. They share a devious and guileful style, plotting and scheming in their calculations to manipulate others. However, the disingenuous histrionic continues to pursue the strong need for attention and love, characteristics not present in the narcissist where there is a basic self-centeredness and an indifference to the attitudes and reactions of others. The unprincipled narcissist preys on the weak and vulnerable, enjoying their dismay and anger; the histrionic, by contrast, seeks to hold the respect and affection of those they dismiss in the pursuit of love and admiration.

Unprincipled narcissists display an indifference to truth that, if brought to their attention, is likely to elicit an attitude of nonchalant indifference. They are skillful in the ways of social influence, are capable of feigning an air of justified innocence, and are adept in' deceiving others with charm and glibness. Lacking any deep feelings of loyalty, they may successfully scheme beneath a veneer of politeness and civility. Their principal orientation is that of outwitting others, getting power and exploiting them " before they do it to you." They often carry a chip-on-the shoulder attitude, a readiness to attack those who are distrusted or who can be used as scapegoats. A number of

these narcissists attempt to present an image of cool strength, acting tough, arrogant, and fearless. To prove their courage; they may invite danger and punishment. But punishment only verifies their unconscious recognition that they deserve to be punished. Rather than having a deterrent effect, it only reinforces their exploitive and unprincipled behaviors.

ii) The Amorous Narcissist

The distinctive feature of this narcissistic personality type is an erotic and seductive orientation, a building up of one's self-worth by engaging members of the opposite gender in the game of sexual temptation. There is an indifferent conscience, an aloofness to truth and social responsibility that, if brought to the amorous narcissist's attention, elicits an attitude of nonchalant innocence. Though totally self-oriented, these individuals are facile in the ways of social seduction, often feign an air of dignity and confidence, and are rather skilled in deceiving others with their clever glibness. These narcissists are skillful in enticing, bewitching, and tantalizing the needy and the naive. Although indulging their hedonistic desires, as well as pursuing numerous beguiling objects at the same time, they are strongly disinclined to become involved in a genuine intimacy. Rather than investing their efforts in one appealing person, they seek to acquire a coterie of amorous objects, invariably lying and swindling as they weave from one pathological relationship to another. The qualities just outlined are strongly suggestive of the observation that these narcissistic types possess numerous characteristics that are primary among histrionic personalities.

Although a reasonably good capacity for sexual athletics sustains the vanity of many individuals, narcissists or not, the need to repeatedly demonstrate

one's sexual prowess is a preeminent obsession among amorous subtypes. Among these personalities are those whose endless pursuit of sexual conquests is fulfilled as effectively and frequently as their bewitching style "promises." Others, however, talk well, place their lures and baits extremely well-until they reach the bedroom door; maneuvering and seduction is done with great aplomb, but performance falls short. For the most part, the sexual exploits of the amorous narcissist are brief, lasting from one afternoon to only a few weeks.

Some amorous narcissists are fearful of the opposite sex, afraid that their pretensions and ambitions will be exposed and found wanting. Their sexual banter and seductive feelings of inadequacy. Although they seem to desire the affections of a warm and intimate relationship, they typically feel restless and unsatisfied when they find it. Having won others over, they seem to need to continue their pursuit. It is the act of exhibitionistically being seductive, and hence gaining in narcissistic stature, that compels. The achievement of ego gratification terminates for a moment, but it must be pursued again and again.

Not infrequently, amorous narcissists leave behind them a trail of outrageous acts such as swindling, sexual excesses, pathological lying, and fraud. This disregard for truth and the talent for exploitation and deception are often neither hostile nor malicious in intent. These characteristics appear to derive from an attitude of narcissistic omnipotence and self-assurance, a feeling that the implicit rules of human relationships do not apply to them and that they are above the responsibilities of shared living. As with the basic narcissistic pattern, individuals of this subtype go out of their way to entice

and inveigle the unwary among the opposite sex, remain coolly indifferent to the welfare of those whom they bewitch, whom they have used to enhance and indulge their hedonistic whims and erotic desires.

Caring little to shoulder genuine social responsibilities and unwilling to change their seductive ways, amorous narcissists refuse to “buckle down” in a serious relationship and expend effort to prove their worth. Never having learned to control their fantasies or to be concerned with matters of social integrity they will maintain their bewitching ways, if need be by deception, fraud, lying, and by charming others through craft and wit. Rather than apply their talents toward the goal of tangible achievements or genuine relationships, they will devote their energies to construct intricate lies, to cleverly exploit others, and to slyly contrive ways to extract from others what they believe is their due. Untroubled by conscience and needing nourishment for their overinflated self-image, they will fabricate stories that enhance their worth and thereby succeed in seducing others into supporting their excesses. Criticism and punishment are likely to prove of no avail since these narcissists quickly dismisses them as the product of jealous inferiors.

iii) The Compensatory Narcissist

Compensatory narcissists deviate in a fundamental way from other narcissistic subtypes as well as from the prototypical narcissist. The origins that undergird their overtly narcissistic behaviors derive from an underlying sense of insecurity and weakness, rather than from genuine feelings of self-confidence and high self-esteem. Beneath their surface pseudo-confidence, the posture they exhibit publicly, this narcissist is driven by forces similar to

those who overtly display characteristics more akin, to the negativistic and avoidant personalities.

The compensatory narcissist represents patients who are labeled “narcissistic” by those in the psychoanalytic community in that they have suffered wounds in early life. Many have been exposed to experiences akin to the negativistic, avoidant, and antisocial types. In essence, these personalities seek to make up or compensate for early life deprivations. They are similar to the antisocial, but compensatory narcissists seek to fill their sense of emptiness by creating an illusion of superiority and by building up an image of high self-worth, rather than by usurping the power and control that others possess or by accumulating material possessions.

Compensatory narcissists need others to fulfill their strivings for prestige. Their motive is to enhance their self-esteem, to obtain and to store up within the self all forms of recognition that will “glorify” their public persona. Much to the annoyance of others, these narcissists “act drunk” as they recount their successes and record for others to acknowledge all forms of even minor public recognition. In effect, these narcissists actively worship themselves; they are their own god. As this inflated and overvalued sense of self rises evermore highly, narcissists look down on others as devalued plebeians. More and more, they acquire a deprecatory attitude in which the achievements of others are ridiculed and degraded.

Life is a search for pseudo-status, an empty series of aspirations that serves no purpose other than self-enhancement. This search for these vacuous goals may begin to run wild, resting from its very foundation on an unsure

sense of self value that has but little contact with tangible achievements. Instead of living their own lives. they pursue the leading role in a false and imaginary theater. Nothing they achieve in this pursuit relates much to reality. Their tenacious aspirations for glory may impress the naive and the grateful, but they possess little of a genuine or objective character.

Should these pursuits lose their grounding in reality, becoming more and more an imaginary world, peopled with self and others as in a dream, compensatory narcissists begin to deceive themselves in a manner not unlike the fanatic paranoid. If we draw a line between these two personality subtypes, we would see that the compensatory narcissist strives for prestige in a world composed of real people. When reality recedes and fantasy comes more to the fore, we see the fanatic who acts out aspirations in solitude. One comes to the stage in front of others, be it in the form of exaggeration and boasting; the other stands alone in an inner world, a “pseudo-community,” as Cameron (1963) has phrased it, where imagination has substantially replaced reality.

Owing to the insecure foundations on which their narcissistic displays are grounded, compensatory narcissists are “hypervigilant,” to use a term employed by Gabbard (1994). What is meant here is they are exquisitely sensitive to how others react to them, watching and listening carefully for any critical judgment, and feeling slighted by every sign of disapproval. Although not delusional, as are their paranoid counterparts, these narcissists are prone to feel shamed and humiliated, especially hyperanxious and vulnerable to the judgments of others. They “know” that they are frauds at some level, pretenders who seek to convey impressions of being of higher

standing than they know is truly the case. Despite this awareness, they do not act shy and hesitant, as would seem likely. Instead, they, submerge and cover up their deep sense of inadequacy and deficiency by pseudo-arrogance and superficial grandiosity. .

iv) The Elitist Narcissist

Reich (1949) captured the essential qualities of what we are terming the elitist narcissist when he described the “ phallic-narcissist” character as a self-assured, arrogant, and energetic person “ often impressive in his bearing. . . . and are illsuited to subordinate positions among the rank and file.” As with the compensatory narcissist, elitist narcissists are more taken with their inflated self-image than with their actual self. Both narcissistic types create a false facade that bears minimal resemblance to the person they really are. Compensatory narcissists, however, know at some level that they are a fraud in fact, and that they put forth an appearance different from the way they are. By contrast, elitist narcissists, perhaps the purest variant of the narcissistic style, are deeply convinced of their superior self-image although it is grounded on few realistic achievements. To elitists, the appearance of things is perceived as objective reality; their inflated self-image is their intrinsic substance. Only when these illusory elements to their self-worth are seriously under mined will they be able to recognize, perhaps even to acknowledge, their deeper shortcomings.

As a consequence of their sublime self-confidence, elitists feel quite secure in their apparent superiority. They achieve this in part by capturing the attentions of others and making them take note of the supposed extraordinary qualities. Most everything these narcissists do is intended to

persuade others of their specialness, rather than to put their efforts into acquiring genuine qualifications and attainments. They feel privileged and empowered by virtue of whatever class status and pseudo achievements they may have attained. Most are upwardly mobile, seeking to cultivate their sense of specialness and personal advantage by associating with those who may possess genuine achievements and recognition. Many elitists will create comparisons between themselves and others, turning personal relationships into public competitions and contests. Unrivaled in the pursuit of becoming “number one,” the grounds for this goal are not determined by genuine accomplishments, but by the degree to which they can convince others of its reality, false though its substance may be.

As just described, many narcissistic elitists are social climbers who seek to cultivate their image and social luster by virtue of those with whom they are affiliated. To them, it is not the old chestnut of “guilt by association,” but rather that of “status by association.” Idolizing public recognition, narcissists of this type get caught in the game of one-upmanship, which they strive vigorously to win, at least comparatively. Status and self-promotion are all that matter to narcissistic elitists. To be celebrated, even famous, is what drives them, rather than to achieve substantive accomplishments. In whatever sphere of activity matters to them, they invest their efforts to advertise themselves, to brag about achievements, substantive or fraudulent, to make anything they have done appear to be “wonderful,” better than what others may have done, and better than it may actually be.

By making excessive claims about themselves, these narcissists expose a great distance between their actual selves and their self-presentations. In

contrast to many narcissists who recognize this disparity, elitists are convinced and absolute in their belief in self. Rather than backing off, withdrawing, or feeling shame when slighted or responded to with indifference, elitist narcissists speed up their efforts all the more, acting increasingly and somewhat erratically to exhibit deeds and awards worthy of high esteem. They may present grandiose illusions about their powers and future status; they may puff up their limited accomplishments; they may seek competitively to outdo those who have achieved in reality.

By the persistence and social intrusiveness of their behaviors, narcissistic elitists may begin to alienate themselves from others, and the admiration they seek. Insulating themselves from signs of painful indifference and psychic injury, they may try to distance or screen out negativistic and judgmental responses. Some may become overtly hostile, acquiring characteristics of the querulous paranoid, quickly losing the remaining elements of their former charm and cleverness, becoming increasingly contemptuous of those whom they feel are treating them so shabbily. Still believing themselves to be special persons, these elitists see little need to listen or follow the dictates of anyone else. They may begin to react with outright anger and irritability, convinced that they need no one. As these self-protective beliefs and actions gain in their defensive and negative tone, the elitist narcissist comes to be seen as an undesirable and embarrassing person, a touchy and inflated character whom others wish to shun.

Bursten's four personality variants

Bursten (1973-1982) presented four personality variants within the narcissistic grouping, speaking of them as the craving, paranoid, manipulative, and phallic types. He refers to the

Craving variety as “ changing, demanding, often pouting and whining.

These labeled paranoid narcissists correspond with general descriptions of the paranoid personality.

Manipulative narcissists encompass a large segment of what are referred to as antisocial personalities in the DSM

The fourth subtype, phallic narcissistic, describes patients who are exhibitionistic, reckless, cold, and arrogant. In seeking to contrast borderline from narcissistic personalities, Bursten makes references to the distinction as bearing on the cohesiveness of self. Elaborating this distinction, he speaks of the narcissistic personality as comprising (1982): a group of people whose sense of self is sufficiently cohesive that they do not suffer from these types of fragility problems. The striking feature of this cluster of personality types centers around self-esteem. They maintain an intense interest in themselves and harbor both grandiose fantasies, albeit not to a delusional extent, and the need to associate with powerful figures. When one frustrates their vanity or their need for an ideal “ parent”, they become dysfunctional they suffer severe disappointment depression, rage, and hypochondriacs. They may even have floating episodes of confusion, but such mental disintegration is very brief and does not have the prominence and the persistence of people whose personalities fall in the borderline cluster.

Cohesiveness of their sense of self is maintained by the intensity of their narcissistic focus on themselves. (p. 414)