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Narcissistic personality disorder is not harmless behavior

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WASHINGTON, November 1, 2012—Often undiagnosed and misunderstood, narcissistic personality disorder is a pathology that needs to be taken seriously.

Most of us understand what it means to behave narcissistically. We have a picture in our mind of a young, pretty girl who enjoys looking at herself in the mirror, wearing designer clothes, and having her nails done. The male equivalent also wears nice clothes, workouts religiously at the local gym, and spends more time in front of the mirror getting ready to go out than his girlfriend does.

These individuals are often young adults or teenagers with no responsibilities beyond school and a part-time job that pays for all of their clothes and make-up. Over time, their responsibilities change, and they begin experiencing life and work. They quickly outgrow their egotistical, narcissistic behavior. Their cognitive skills mature and they realize what is most important in life: friends and family. Their preoccupation with their looks dwindles and building and creating healthy interpersonal relationships become their focus and goal.

Unfortunately, not all of these individuals outgrow their childish narcissistic tendencies or mature cognitively. The lack/absence of neurological maturity often results in individuals who develop Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Individuals with NPD, as ironic as it may sound, do not love themselves. On the contrary, they lack self-love and self-worth, making them highly dangerous to themselves and others.

Many NPD individuals suffer from depression, thoughts of suicide, repeated failed relationship issues, and trouble at work or school. The majority of individuals with NPD in our society will never be officially diagnosed with the disorder. Therefore, learning to identify the traits and characteristics of individuals with NPD can help us protect our families and ourselves.

The DSM-IV-TR defines Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as “an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), 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. [Dr. Sam Vaknin in his book “Malignant Self-Love”](#) provides the following list of nine (9) narcissistic traits of which an individual needs to possess at least five (5) before being diagnosed with NPD.

1. 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);
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;
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);
4. Requires excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation or, failing that, wishes to be feared and to be notorious;
5. Feels entitled. Demands automatic and full compliance with his or her unreasonable expectations for special and favorable priority treatment;
6. Is interpersonally exploitative and uses others to achieve his or her own ends;
7. Devoid of empathy. Is unable or unwilling to identify with, acknowledge, or accept the feelings, needs, preferences, priorities, and choices of others;
8. 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;
9. 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.

Although NPD is predominantly associated with more men, anyone of any economic background, race, or sex can be affected by NPD. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, co-workers, and bosses. No one is immune to this disorder. Although many researchers and victims of individuals with NPD do not believe individuals with NPD can be treated or cured, NPD is a disease of the mind outside of the normal pathology of society, and serious education is necessary.

“Some of the most disturbing realities are not that pathology exists but that so little public pathology education for the general public exists,” notes [Sandra L. Brown of The Institute for Relational Harm Reduction and Public Psychopathy Education](#).

Unfortunately, in addition to the lack of public education about NPD and other pathological disorders, there is an abundance of misinformation and trivialization of NPD in the media.

Most recently, the Dr. Phil show aired an episode titled, “Confronting Narcissistic Personalities” leaving many well-educated viewers disappointed and reeling and demanding a re-do of the show. Many viewers felt the episode marginalized the negative impact

individuals with NPD inflict and seemed to simplify narcissistic disorders as a behavior that is more annoying than dangerous.

In an open letter to Dr. Phil and his producers published to her site [One Mom's Battle](#), Tina Swithin writes:

“There is an army of us who work tirelessly to educate the public, the media, and the courtroom about Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and [Dr. Phil] just set us back tremendously. I encourage [Dr. Phil] to speak to the women and men in my group who have been devastated by this personality disorder. I encourage [Dr. Phil] to do a show that takes a look at the reality of Narcissistic Personality Disorder and what it is like to divorce a narcissist.”

The website for The Institute for Relational Harm Reduction and Public Psychopathy Education concisely sums up why education is so vital when it comes to disorders like NPD:

“The truth is, nothing impacts non-pathological people as much as being in a relationship with someone who is pathological. Without the education of ‘what‘ the disorder is, ‘how‘ it came to be, ‘whom‘ it affects, and ‘why‘ it harms others, partners, family and children will continue living in the shadows of unspoken confusion and pain.