

The Shy/Covert Narcissist

In contrast to the [Arrogant/Overt Narcissist](#),¹ the Shy/Covert Narcissist is characterized by vulnerability and sensitivity which manifests itself in defensiveness and hostility. Like the Arrogant/Overt Narcissist, the Shy/Covert Narcissist has grandiose fantasies, feels a sense of entitlement, and is exploitive. However, the Shy/Covert Narcissistic personality is characterized by worry, ineffective functioning, unfulfilled expectations, and vulnerability to stress.

Cooper summarizes the distinguishing features of the Shy/Covert Narcissist as follows:



◆ Covert narcissistic individuals are those whose fantasies, whether conscious or unconscious, are indeed grandiose, inflated, unrealistic, and self-centered. They may be preoccupied with fantasies of grandiose achievements, imagining themselves as world heroes, centers of attention, and acclaimed by all. However, for one of several dynamic reasons, these fantasies are not expressed in overt behavior and are regarded by the individual consciously as beyond attainment. The grandiose desires are not matched by a conviction of personal efficacy. These individuals are conflicted and guilty over their overweening exhibitionistic, competitive, and aggressive desires, and their defensiveness often leads them to suppress or repress any awareness of the existence of these qualities. Most often, a barrier is imposed by a severe inner conscience that finds these fantasies unacceptable, demanding both that they should be suppressed and that the person should feel guilty for harboring unacceptable wishes. In effect, the superego accurately detects that within these self-inflating ideas lie



self-centered, aggrandizing desires to attribute all goodness and power to oneself and relegate all weakness and badness to others, an aspect of the angry envy that probably is involved in the genesis of all narcissistic pathology.



❖ . . . the patients, like the public at large, may see only the final defensive inhibitory behaviors and perceive themselves as shy and unassertive, unable to obtain what rightfully they deserve. Often, the first hint of their underlying grandiosity comes when one realizes that adolescent types of daydreams of being heroic and acclaimed have persisted into adult life with unusual intensity and frequency. . . . these individuals often think of themselves as ❖perfectionists❖ . . . their fantasy of what they ought to be or produce is so inflated and grandiose that no actual product ever meets their internal standard. This discrepancy between unconscious fantasy and reality leads to further guilt and merciless attack from the conscience for not meeting self-set standards as well as to feelings of worthlessness concurrent with grandiosity. These individuals often come to the attention of psychiatrists because of the depression and sense of inner deadness that they experience, as nothing in the world matches the thrill of triumphant achievement that they imagine is due them.❖²

A Covert/Shy Narcissist will have grandiose fantasies but will also be plagued by a feeling of unworthiness and thus shame for even having fantasized about his or her ❖greatness.❖ This type of narcissist, ❖is likely to be characterized by an incapacity to sustain ambitions or to pursue even attainable goals with full dedication, yielding to others rewards that he or she may legitimately deserve. The final result is often significant masochistic self-damage, self-pity, feelings of hurt, and depression.❖³

While feeling they deserve to be recognized for their specialness, unlike the Arrogant/Overt Narcissist, the

Covert/Shy Narcissist is plagued by self-doubts and thus does not as readily seek the affirmation from others he or she believes is due. Moreover, because of this strong sense of worthlessness, this type of narcissist often will not seek out appropriate friends or romantic partners because they fear exposure as frauds; for this reason their associates tend to be conspicuously inferior to themselves. Cooper observes that this narcissist,  secretly harbors fantasies that he or she is engaged in a heroic rescue of someone of lesser capabilities.⁴ And, when their friends and associates offer praise, the Shy/Covert Narcissist believes that this admiration is phony and insincere. They tend to devote a considerable amount of time ruminating over the unfairness of how little their true worth is appreciated and how others get the recognition for things that they themselves did.

According to Cooper, these people have  pathologically harsh consciences⁵ and indulge in self-talk that denigrates their sense of self-worth. In fact, instead of demanding special attention from others in recognition of their superiority, the Shy/Covert Narcissist may actually fawn over people whose accomplishments they envy while secretly harboring strong feelings of resentment and contempt.

For all these reasons, these people are  frightened to show their accomplishments and often fail to get credit for good work they have actually done. They procrastinate about accomplishing tasks that are well within their capacities but that they fear they cannot accomplish, and their overt demeanor is often excessively retiring, modest, and shy.⁶

For a chart comparing the features of Shy/Covert Narcissism with Arrogant/Overt Narcissism, click here 

 **Return to Associated Features**

HOME

¹[Ronningstam, 1999](#); [Cooper, 1998](#), [Wink, 1991](#)

²[Cooper, 1998](#), pp. 67-68

³[Cooper, 1998](#), p. 69

⁴[Cooper, 1998](#), p. 69

⁵[Cooper, 1998](#), p. 69

⁶[Cooper, 1998](#), p. 70