



# Throwing a pebble in the puddle: Has narcissism become a pandemic?

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# Narcissus in Greek mythology





# Narcissism...

- ▶ 'excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance' (Oxford languages)
- ▶ Selfishness, involving a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration, as characterising a personality type (psychology)
- ▶ Narcissism is a personality style characterized by an excessive preoccupation with oneself and a need for admiration, often to the detriment of others. It can manifest as a grandiose sense of self importance, a lack of empathy, and an entitlement to special treatment. (AI)

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# Key Characteristics


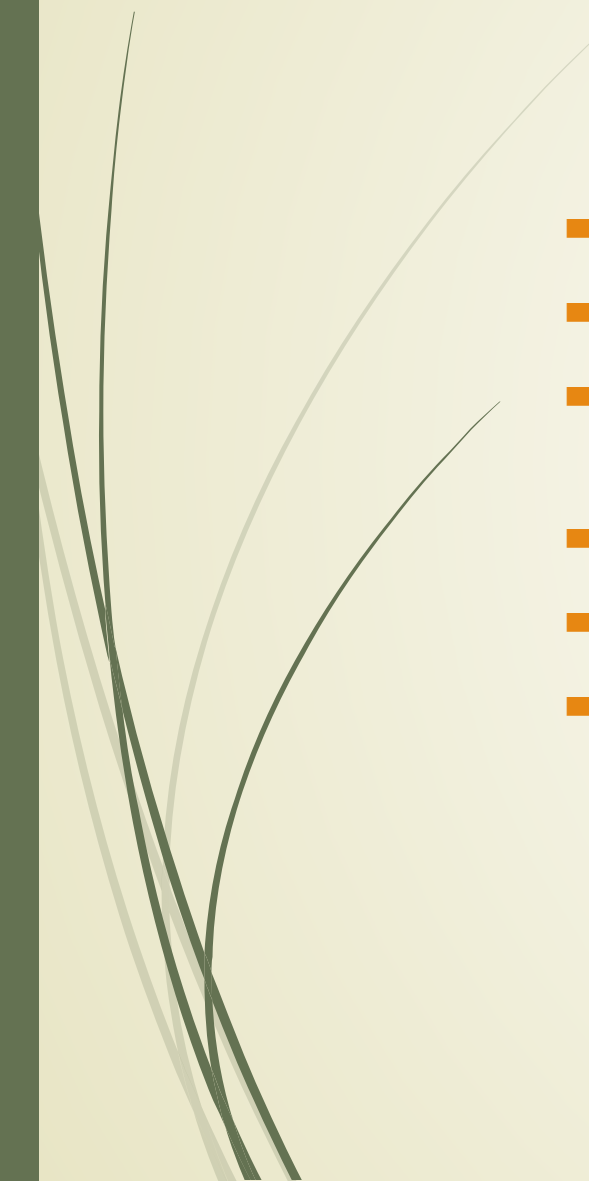
- ▶ Grandiosity
- ▶ Need for admiration
- ▶ Lack of empathy
- ▶ Entitlement
- ▶ Exploitative behaviour
- ▶ Arrogance

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# Narcissistic Personality Disorder (DSM V)

- ▶ Pervasive pattern of grandiosity in fantasy or behaviour, need for admiration, and lack of empathy
- ▶ Features are present in a variety of contexts
- ▶ **Criteria:**
- ▶ Grandiose sense of self-importance
- ▶ Fantasies of unlimited power, success, brilliance, beauty
- ▶ Belief that they are special / unique
- ▶ Requires excessive admiration
- ▶ Sense of entitlement
- ▶ Interpersonally exploitative
- ▶ Lacks empathy
- ▶ Envious of others / believes others envious of them
- ▶ Arrogant

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- ▶ Self esteem is fragile and they are vulnerable to criticism
  - ▶ Estimated prevalence ranges from <1% to 6% in community samples
  - ▶ May impart unrealistic sense of grandiosity, beauty or talent to their children – increases risk of disorder developing in children (nature vs nurture)
  - ▶ Susceptible to depression because of their fragile self esteem
  - ▶ Interpersonal difficulties, occupational problems, rejection, loss
  - ▶ Comorbidity with other cluster B personality disorders / traits

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# Grandiose narcissism vs vulnerable narcissism

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# Traits vs Disorder



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# The 'rise' of narcissism

- Narcissism has become a defining feature of the modern era. (1)
- The 1970's were referred to as the 'Me' decade by American journalist Tom Wolfe.
- Christopher Lasch (American historian and social critic) explored the rise of narcissistic entitlement and decadence in 'The culture of narcissism'.
- Narcissism came to be officially recognized in psychiatric symptomatology and categorized as a disorder. (DSM III 1980)

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- ▶ In individualistic cultures narcissistic scores are higher when compared to cultures that have a more collectivistic outlook. (2)
  - ▶ The question that arises is whether modern capitalistic, individual-centred societies are fostering narcissism and whether sociocultural changes are central to increasing narcissism? (2)
  - ▶ In individualistic cultures the presence of narcissistic expression has become more frequent.

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- ▶ The endorsement rate for the statement “I am an important person” has increased from 12% in 1963 to 77–80% in 1992 in adolescents (2)
  - ▶ In more recent publications the language used tends to reflect a more self-centred approach. “I” and “me” are used more frequently than “we” and “us”. (2)
  - ▶ Self-esteem (global evaluation of self) is related to narcissism.
  - ▶ However, narcissism differs from self-esteem in domains such as origin, development, phenotype and consequences.
  - ▶ The entitlement, exploitation, sense of superiority and negative view of others is not seen in someone with a healthy sense of self.



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# Healthy self-esteem...


Healthy self-esteem involves a view of self that is **positive** and **realistic**. It encompasses **both strengths and weaknesses**. The individual has **realistic** expectations for themselves and others.

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Grandiose and self-serving behaviours may be understood as enhancing an underlying depleted sense of self and are part of a self-regulatory spectrum of narcissistic personality functioning. (1)

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Is the 'rise' in number /prevalence real or spurious?

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# Communication...

Oral communication ->



Radio ->

Print Media ->


Television ->

Online Media

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- ▶ Casale S et al found in a systematic literature review that narcissism may be involved in problematic facebook use. This effect may not be consistent across different social media platforms.(3)
  - ▶ Communal narcissism is a grandiose manifestation of narcissism. Individuals high on communal narcissism value grandiosity and power in a communal domain. (3)
  - ▶ Various social media platforms provide the mechanism to command an audience.
  - ▶ Social media has revolutionized accessibility to a large number of people.

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- ▶ Communal narcissism shows a strong relationship with social media use.
  - ▶ There is a preference for a visual platform such as Instagram (TikTok??)
  - ▶ A visual format may have a stronger appeal to narcissism.
  - ▶ However, sharing content, wanting validation and quality ratings were prominent for text-based sites as well.

(4)

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- ▶ There has been an increasing focus on individualism and creating a personal brand.
  - ▶ Social media has greatly increased the ability to monetise a personal brand.
  - ▶ A desirable or perfect online brand may command more followers / subscribers. This translates to greater income. There is therefore an incentive to have a curated, polished image online in order to remain desirable.
  - ▶ Reward drives online activity.

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- ▶ The prevalence of narcissism currently can be described as a 'cultural pandemic'.
  - ▶ This is a metaphoric use of 'pandemic'. It emphasizes the prevalence of narcissistic attitudes and behaviours.
  - ▶ It is also important to recognize the impact of modelling behaviour on what is perceived and seen to enhance a personal brand.
  - ▶ Technology has increased accessibility to information and the pace at which this is consumed.
  - ▶ There is a constant demand for bigger and better.

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# GOAT



**Legacy:** *The long lasting impact of...a person's life.* (Oxford Languages)

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# Shelley's 'Ozymandias' ...

- ▶ Uses the statue of Rameses II as a symbol of the ephemeral nature of power and the eventual decay of even the grandest monuments of self-importance.
- ▶ It reflects the themes of vanity and the fleeting nature of human achievements.

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# The fallen statue of Rameses II



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# What fuels the narcissistic train?

- ▶ The need to be remembered
- ▶ The reward -> positive feedback
- ▶ Careers may be based on a strongly narcissistic drive. Livelihoods depend on 'more' and 'better'.
- ▶ There is a need to remain relevant.
- ▶ Celebrity culture and perfectly manicured public images drive the need to emulate and be desirable

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So, is there a pandemic?



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# Pandemic...

- ▶ “a **widespread occurrence** of an **infectious disease** over a whole country or the world at a particular time
- ▶ Widespread occurrence?
- ▶ Infectious disease?”

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*“Whoever loves becomes humble. Those who love have, so to speak, pawned a part of their narcissism.”* **(Sigmund Freud)**

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