

# SUMMARY

## THE NARCISSIST YOU KNOW

JOSEPH BURGO



# **Summary of “The Narcissist You Know” by Joseph Burgo**

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Unmasking the evil of the everyday narcissist.

Introduction

5

Narcissism is More Common Than You Think

6

The Different Types of Narcissists

8

The Seductive Narcissist

9

Grandiosity, Superiority, and Revenge

10

Final Summary

12



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# Introduction

We get the term “narcissist” from the Greek name Narcissus. In fact, you might even be familiar with the myth that documents the story of Narcissus: a young man who was so infatuated with himself that he couldn’t love anyone else. Because he was charming and physically attractive, person after person fell in love with Narcissus, only to be rejected in return. As soon as his lovers tried to get close to him or requested normal human affection and interaction, Narcissus ran for the hills. Eventually, one of his lovers got fed up with this arrangement and realized that Narcissus was never going to change. So, in a desperate act of salvation and revenge, he prayed that two things would happen to Narcissus: that he would never hurt anyone else again and that he would fall in love with someone who would never love him back.

The lover’s prayer was answered and, in a particularly ironic and appropriate twist of fate, Narcissus came across his own reflection in a stream. Mesmerized by the image of his own attractive face, Narcissus fell helplessly and hopelessly in love. He found that he wanted to spend every moment with the object of his affection. He was desperate for the young man in the stream to speak to him, to return his adoration. He found that he could not eat, could not sleep, and could not leave. And as he wasted away by the bank of the stream, pining over someone who would never love him back, he eventually died. The gods then metamorphosed his essence into a pure white, beautiful flower: the Narcissus that we see today.

This makes for a compelling myth, but does it accurately reflect the experience of interacting with a narcissist in our own daily lives? The author argues that it does and over the course of this summary, we’ll explore the dangerous reality of the narcissist and what we can do to avoid them.



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# Narcissism is More Common Than You Think

When you think of a narcissist, what comes to mind? Do you envision someone gregarious and attention-seeking like Donald Trump or Regina George from Mean Girls? Both of these examples would be correct because many narcissists are extroverted manipulators who need to be in the spotlight. But would it surprise you to learn that narcissism actually exists on a wide spectrum? Would it surprise you to learn that it's not quite so clear-cut as "narcissists" and "non-narcissists?" In fact, all of us have a little bit of narcissism in us! That's right-- every single person out there. But if narcissism is such a dangerous and abusive trait, why aren't we all narcissistic abusers? Well, that's where the spectrum kicks in.

You see, narcissism is characterized by a desire for attention and affirmation. And everybody has that desire in common. We all want to feel like people like us. We all want to feel valued and important. That's one reason that social media is so important to many people; we crave the validation of likes and comments on our selfies. But most of us aren't willing to go to dangerous lengths to procure that validation. Most of us don't hurt others in an attempt to keep the spotlight on us. And that's what differentiates Extreme Narcissists from the "garden variety narcissists" like you and me. Extreme Narcissists are often able to pass undetected in society because they appear to embody a number of desirable traits. They might be attractive, successful, talented, or all of the above. But at the core, they are terrified of losing this image and they employ a wide range of sadistic techniques to keep themselves in the spotlight.

That's because narcissists need to feel valued and superior in the same way that we need air. When that sense of superiority is challenged, they can't cope with the shame, pain, or humiliation of feeling like a loser and they lash out in vindictive ways. The author affirms that this is due to a psychological concept known as "core shame." Everyone is familiar with shame; we've all felt stupid, embarrassed, or humiliated at times. We've all felt as though something is wrong with us or as though someone else's

wrong actions are our fault. The difference, however, is that for most of us, that sense of shame doesn't fuse with our identities. We understand that shame and embarrassment are natural yet unpleasant parts of life and that we're probably going to feel it at some point. As a result, we mature and cultivate our confidence and self-esteem so that we can withstand small hits to our ego.

The narcissist, by contrast, has never developed this coping mechanism. So, when someone hurts or insults them in even the smallest of ways, they cope by blaming all their problems on another person. To put this into perspective, let's imagine that your romantic partner is a narcissist. And let's say that, one night, you order takeout online. However, your phone has been on the fritz for the past couple of days, so you put your partner's phone number on the order. When the delivery guy calls, he makes a joke about your partner's voice. Is it rude? Absolutely. Is it upsetting? Sure. But is it a big deal that you should get really upset about? Of course not. However, your narcissistic partner doesn't see it that way. She's hurt and embarrassed but instead of being annoyed at the delivery guy, she takes out her anger on you. She insists that you're selfish for getting takeout and that you deliberately ordered it to hurt her. She doesn't speak to you for three days.

This is a classic example of the aggressive and manipulative behavior employed by Extreme Narcissists in everyday life. Shockingly, however, Extreme Narcissists are still different from those who could actually be diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder. These individuals are truly devoid of conscience and they're likely to commit appalling crimes that may eventually get them caught. Extreme Narcissists, by contrast, can get through life without doing things that are outright illegal, but they still cause irreparable psychological and emotional damage to their victims. So, now that we've covered a basic overview of narcissism, let's dive in and explore this condition in a little more detail. In addition to learning about the different types of narcissists, we'll examine tips for protecting yourself. We'll also learn more about "garden variety narcissism" and how you can avoid hurting others.



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# The Different Types of Narcissists

In the previous chapter, we examined the difference between people who are classified as Extreme Narcissists and the 1% of those who are viable candidates for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. But now it's time to explore the spectrum of narcissism and discover the variety of narcissists you can encounter. We'll start with Bullying Narcissists. Bullying Narcissists are exactly what they sound like: this category of Extreme Narcissist uses aggression, coercion, and intimidation to manipulate and control their victims. Bullying Narcissists are also driven by core shame, but they are also strongly motivated by the desire to win at all costs.

If you've ever played board games with an overly competitive friend or family, you might have scratched the surface of what it's like to deal with a Bullying Narcissist. For example, you might have witnessed your usually kind and compassionate friend become ruthless in their attempts to win at Monopoly. You might feel as though they would trick you, lie to you, or sell you out just to get the upper hand. And in the context of a friendly game of Monopoly, this might be laughable or at least somewhat acceptable. But no one's laughing when a Bullying Narcissist carries out their entire life in this fashion.

And God help you if you happen to be the successful friend or partner of a Bullying Narcissist! Because a Bullying Narcissist is driven by a core fear of looking like a loser, they are enraged by others' success. No matter how successful they are or are not, any glimmer of success is a reminder of what they don't have. And they can't deal with that. So, they will go out of their way to humiliate you, embarrass you, or even sabotage your career. They will cut you down with hundreds of belittling comments that invite you to doubt yourself and your abilities. They will draw attention to your every failure or manufacture weaknesses that do not exist just to cripple your self-esteem. If they can leave you too broken and insecure to accomplish anything, they'll consider their mission a success.



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# The Seductive Narcissist

If a Bullying Narcissist aims to attack and humiliate you, the Seductive Narcissist takes an entirely different approach. Rather than cutting you down, a Seductive Narcissist lures you in, beginning with a practice that psychologists refer to as “love bombing.” The popular website Psychology Today defines love bombing as “the practice of overwhelming someone with signs of adoration and attraction — think flattering comments, tokens of affection, or love notes on the mirror, kitchen table, or windshield, and cause our society is overly saturated with media portrayals of fairytale romances and exciting sex lives, many people internalize the idea that if you want to be “normal,” you have to have those things too. So, when someone makes us feel special and presents us with all the things we think we’re supposed to have, it’s understandable that we fall for it. Unfortunately, however, this only leads to a very rude awakening. Because love bombing is only one phase of the narcissist’s grand scheme. Love bombing is how they lure you in before the attention turns to abuse. Or before you realize that their “love” is only made of smoke and mirrors; they don’t love you back because they literally can’t. And before you know it, you’re trapped in a relationship with someone you don’t recognize.



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## Grandiosity, Superiority, and Revenge

In this chapter, we're going to explore a few more narcissistic sub-types that you're likely to encounter in your daily life. These include Grandiose Narcissists, Know-it-All Narcissists, Self-Righteous Narcissists, and Vindictive Narcissists. We'll start by diving into an examination of the first two categories: Grandiose Narcissists and Know-it-Alls. If you've ever met someone who thinks they're an undiscovered genius (and has absolutely no evidence for that belief), chances are, you know a Grandiose Narcissist. As is the case with all other narcissistic subtypes, a Grandiose Narcissist is driven by core shame-- specifically, the core shame of being seen as inferior or unremarkable. So, even if they have absolutely no proof to back up the belief that they're special, they spin a story that presents them as a maligned and undiscovered genius (and count on everyone around them buying into this lie).

For example, let's say that they graduated at the bottom of their class in high-school, dropped out of college very quickly, and now work as a dishwasher at a local cafe. They have never won any academic awards or been identified as gifted. At best, they can boast grades that are merely average. But they insist to anyone who'll listen that they are ahead of their time, too intelligent to be confined by mainstream academia. Similarly, Know-it-All Narcissists are the exaggerated version of everyone you've ever met who thinks their opinion is always right. We all know someone who insists on being the cleverest person in the room (whether they really are or not), and Know-it-All Narcissists are the worst of the worst. Like their Grandiose counterparts, they are overwhelmingly arrogant and become aggressive and manipulative when challenged on any topic.

Likewise, Self-Righteous Narcissists are exactly what they sound like: people who are absolutely convinced that they hold the moral high ground. However, just as Bullying Narcissists are only interested in winning and Seductive Narcissists don't really love you, Self-Righteous Narcissists are also incapable of truly believing in the values they claim to uphold. Whether

they are advocates for social justice or zealous believers in a certain religion, they care less about the causes they allegedly support than they do about their public perception. They know that a certain level of status and affirmation is associated with “being a good person” and so this is what they covet. As a result, if you dare to attack or disagree with their beliefs, they ultimately feel as though you are challenging their identity. They also take this as your attempt to unmask their core shame and thus they will react with extreme aggression when challenged. This might mean that they try to “cancel” you on social media, get you fired from your job, or twist your words to accuse you of a number of things you didn’t say.

And when you tangle with a Vindictive Narcissist, this behavior is exaggerated a thousandfold. We’ve all met someone with a mean streak or someone who pulled a nasty prank in an attempt to get revenge. But in most cases, that type of immaturity was left behind in high school. Not so for the Vindictive Narcissist! The typical narcissistic tactics listed above will be severely amplified when you make the mistake of “attacking” a Vindictive Narcissist. To return to our previous example from chapter one, even a small disagreement-- like putting their number on a takeout order-- can be taken as an extreme attack. The narcissist will then retaliate with the level of outrage they believe you deserve and may spread rumors about you or attempt to get you arrested or fired.



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## Final Summary

Narcissists are everywhere. And because narcissism exists on a spectrum, it's highly possible that you may often interact with narcissists of varying degrees. For example, your own core shame might drive you to pursue the spotlight a little more aggressively than most. Your friend might be a little too zealous in her crusade for social justice because she believes that her opinion is the only one that's right. We all have a few narcissistic tendencies but that rarely makes the average person dangerous. Rather, it just means that you might be a little too selfish at times.

However, for Extreme Narcissists and those diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, it's a different story. These dangerous narcissists can be categorized by a variety of subtypes, including Bullying, Seductive, Grandiose, Self-Righteous, and Vindictive. Extreme Narcissists can be dangerous and will stop at nothing to get what they want or avoid interacting with their core shame. As a result, they often leave a trail of emotional devastation in their wake. To protect yourself from Extreme Narcissists, it's important to identify the signs, be suspicious of love bombing, and take steps to distance yourself from the narcissist you know.



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