

NARCISSISTS

Among

Us

JOE NAVARRO

FBI Special Agent (Ret.)
Author of *What Every Body is Saying* and
Louder Than Words

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NARCISSISTS AMONG US

BY JOE NAVARRO M.A.

Narcissism is a term everyone has heard of but few people actually know what it really means. Most people have some awareness that it comes to us from Greek mythology (Narcissus loved himself so much that he abandoned all pursuits, including eating, in order to admire himself), but beyond that the meaning is vague. It is true Narcissism is associated with self-centeredness, haughtiness, and arrogance, but that is just a small part of it, for in fact Narcissists take a terrible toll on society.

Narcissistic individuals stand out because they have inflexible personality traits that make them irritating at best and dangerous at worst. They believe themselves to be special, gifted, talented, superior, or deserving of special treatment, which compels them to treat others as inferior, or objects to be used. They often seek to control or rule others, or to be in positions of superiority. With a high sense of entitlement, the Narcissist often takes advantage of positions of trust (e.g., finance, religion, governance) for his own benefit. Lacking empathy for others (a common Narcissistic trait), they come across as cold, calloused, or insensitive. Combined, these traits make for uncaring individuals who are at the core unethical and who are only interested in themselves. That in a nutshell is a Narcissist – they aren't just infuriatingly self-absorbed they are a dangerous.

Thirty plus years ago when I started in law enforcement there wasn't much talk about Narcissists. Even today, when we know so much more about this pathology, it is hardly mentioned in the law enforcement arena. And yet when we look at individuals who cause us the most harm day-to-day or even in a historical context, it has to be the Narcissist. I don't say that carelessly, but rather after much study and interaction with these individuals over a twenty-five year career in the FBI. When we look at the priests who repeatedly violated children, convicted war criminals at The Hague, psychologically abusive husbands, or incarcerated government officials, what we are looking at first and foremost are Narcissists.

As a criminal profiler in the FBI, I quickly learned that Narcissists cause us harm on a much larger scale than most people realize: physically, psychologically, emotionally, even financially. They destroy businesses, ruin reputations, hurt others with impunity, and are at their core unethical. They are harmful precisely because they often go undetected until it is too late. But there should be no question as to their ability to hurt others either directly or indirectly.

Does the name Bernard “Bernie” Madoff have any significance to you? How about the late Leona Helmsley (“Queen of the Palace” fame)? Does Jeffrey Skilling

(Enron fame) or L. Dennis Kozlowski (Tyco International fame) ring a bell? How about former Illinois Governor, now incarcerated, Rod Blagojevich? These are all Narcissists and yet they were never called that even after making the front pages of newspapers. They all had similar traits – a sense of entitlement, the rules did not apply to them, and the only people that mattered were themselves. If these individuals no longer resonate with you it is because they have been replaced by yet another fresh batch of Narcissists – who can easily be found on the front page of a major newspaper today.

These unethical individuals join many other famous individuals in history who were also pathologically Narcissistic but who went beyond financial greed such as: Slobodan Milošević (notorious Serbian leader), Pol Pot (famed leader of Cambodia’s “killing fields”), Adolf Hitler, Fidel Castro, Theodore Kaczynski (Unabomber), David Koresh (cult leader of Branch Davidians), Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma Bomber), Jim Jones (cult leader Jonestown Guyana), Muammar Gaddafi (Libya), Manuel Noriega (machete wielding leader of Panama), and even the late Usama Bin Laden (al-Qaida) to name a few. These are the Narcissists that make the papers and the history books. Sadly, there are far more Narcissists out there who never rise to public prominence or infamy, who nevertheless ruin lives by other and varied means.

Prevalence

How prevalent are Narcissists? That depends on who you talk to. According to the clinical literature (DSM IV-TR) they account for 1% of the American population but may be seen as high as 12% in certain occupations such as politics, medicine, law, and in CEOs. So as few as one in a hundred or as many perhaps as much as one in ten, depending on their occupation may be afflicted with this disorder. What that translates into is a significant number of people who are only thinking of themselves, who care only about their own interests, and who don’t have a deep regard for others. These individuals are social or moral bullies and you will interact with them everyday.

The problem with the research on Narcissists and available statistics is that a lot of Narcissism goes undetected for a variety of reasons. It may be missed because Narcissism is more cloistered in certain professions or it is not detected because it doesn’t end up in the legal system or in a clinical or therapeutic setting. Which is why it matters more what a person is like, how they behave and comport themselves than how they generalize over a total population. You may be the lucky person to have just five of these individuals in your life, or none at all. But if you have a pathological Narcissist as a prime minister, president, or national leader—then one flawed individual is enough. That is exactly what happened to the Italian people under Mussolini, a pompous Narcissist of the highest order in both his actions and

demeanor. Millions of Italians died needlessly because of him and many more suffered tragic losses.

When we see politicians break the law, managers that treat employees as if they were chattel, or heads of state who engage in dangerously adventurous actions, we should immediately recognize that what we are often actually seeing is Narcissism at work. People who only care about themselves at the expense of others. This is why I wrote this book, to shed light on a phenomenon that most people are not aware of. These individuals are highly toxic, they are responsible for many crimes, and the harm they cause has no equal – that’s why it is important to identify them early on – be they criminals or national leaders, a new friend or your boss.

Because the Narcissist sees himself as special and entitled, he will act out in ways that, in time, will cause you undue pain and suffering. It is their torment that I want you to avoid.

Life is not television. We don’t have a camera following us at all times recording what we experience so that someone will come to our rescue. We are the only people that can rescue ourselves from the Narcissist. We don’t have a police officer at our side to step in every time we have to deal with a Narcissist. Nor will you have a psychologist or a psychiatrist holding your hand when you enter into a personal or business relationship with one of these individuals. They won’t be there when the Narcissist scams you out of your money or devalues you incessantly. We know this just as surely as we know there was no one to warn the innocent about Jim Jones and the danger his Narcissism posed – before the Jonestown, Guyana mass suicide. But what if they or their families knew what you are about to learn? I think knowledge can make a difference.

The reality is that you are the only one that can defend yourself against the Narcissist, but in order to do that, you must have the requisite insight. So we begin to build that knowledge base by understanding what these individuals are about, what behavioral characteristics Narcissists share, and by having strategies to effectively deal with them.

The sole purpose of this book is to save you from these toxic individuals. I want to show you precisely what to look for so you are able to identify these individuals before they act out against you. I want you to be able to assess others for traits of Narcissism, the same way I was taught in the FBI – because no one will do it for you. Chance favors the prepared mind as Luis Pasteur once said, and that is what I hope to achieve here – to prepare your mind by showing you what to look for.

The Nature of the Narcissist

There is probably no better example of Narcissism than the story of Cinderella. We are all familiar with the tale from books or movies: a beautiful child with a kind heart is tormented daily by her stepmother. This is a story (there are many