

# Me, Myself and I



## Narcissistic Personality Disorder

by Lilian Wu

“Mirror mirror on the wall. Who is the fairest of the all?” is an oft-repeated phrase in the popular fairy tale “Snow White”, a German cautionary story that was collected by the Brothers Grimm. Most people will probably see the evil queen as simply vain, obsessed by her appearance as many women (and men) are wont to do.

But is the reason as simple as that? Our expert from the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) thinks otherwise. In fact, the queen just might be suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) because she displays more than a few traits that are unique to this behavioural disorder.

### The World Revolves Around Me

Dr Gwee Kok Peng (above right), Senior Consultant from General Psychiatry at IMH, defines NPD as a type of personality disorder, which “are severe disturbances in characterological constitution and behavioural tendencies, usually involving several areas of the personality, and nearly always associated with considerable personal and social disruption.”

(See the ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders, WHO Geneva 1992)

Basically, an individual who suffers from NPD exhibits abnormal behaviour because they are extremely preoccupied with themselves and have an inflated sense of importance, leading them to believe that they deserve special treatment. Often arrogant and self-centred, they have a lack of empathy for other people - especially devastating to children who have narcissistic parents. It becomes emotionally stressful to be in a close relationship with narcissistic people for they are only interested in fulfilling their own needs and wants. In more severe cases, a narcissist is not above exploiting or putting down others for their benefit.

Even if their behaviour distresses others, narcissists are unlikely to change for the better for



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## MENTAL HEALTH

*You And Your Brain*

they sincerely believe that the problem originates from other people instead of them.

### It All Begins At Home

Some people believe that NPD is caused by the modern culture that encourages self-centred thinking, but it is generally recognized that NPD is cultivated in un-empathetic environments from childhood. Children whose needs are ignored by narcissistic parents may eventually grow up to be narcissists themselves or suffer from an acute sense of inferiority, thanks to the frequent put-downs at home or uncaring dismissals of their achievements. They are known as the “Scapegoats” of the family - the child on which to project all ill feelings and blame.

On the other end of the narcissistic spectrum is the “Golden Child” who receives excessive pampering from an early age. Such a child could do no wrong; their faults often glossed over - a mere extension of the narcissistic parent. The parent will project all their “wonderful” traits onto the Golden Child, so the child is unable to form their own identity properly and thus becomes the narcissistic parent’s puppet.

“Schoore hypothesised that NPDs are caused by misattunements and stressful transactions between caregivers and infant during the practicing period and rapprochement crisis...The CNS and limbic system develop coping mechanisms to abate the disorganizing influence of shame; thus returning the person to a more assertive state. The coping mechanisms can preposition the individual for a number of unwanted behaviours,” Dr Gwee said.

(American neuropsychanalyst Allen N. Schoore authored the 1994 monograph *Affect Regulation - Origin of Self*, which argues that infant neural development is influenced by the early social environment.)

### Traits of a Narcissist



*"Aren't I cute?"*

A narcissist frequently has two faces: a public face that is meant to be endearing and a private one that they only display in front of family or colleagues, much to their distress. Narcissism exists in varying degrees, but their traits typically include the following:

**Illusions of grandeur:** narcissists are arrogant and tend to embellish their achievements, importance or talents.

**Egotistical need for admiration:** expects unwarranted admiration without proportionate achievements, in fact the more the merrier whether it's sincere or not.

**Inflated sense of entitlement:** wants favourable treatment or automatic compliance with their wishes.

**Obsessed with self-aggrandizing fantasies:** often fixated on grand fantasies of infinite success, power, cleverness, beauty etc that are far beyond their talents.

**Thinks that others are envious of them or is frequently envious of others:** constantly compares or projects such comparisons.

## MENTAL HEALTH

**Lacks empathy:** ignores the fact that other people have feelings and needs as well, devalues other opinions other than their own.

**Makes use of others:** does this in order to get ahead at other people's expense.

**Selected association:** only hangs out with people they deem to be as "special" as themselves or who have a premium status.

Although NPD accounts for less than 1% in countries like USA and in Europe, it's clear that narcissism has unhealthy long-term effects such as stress or succumbing to addictions. But it can be treated; children of narcissistic parents can be counselled to learn how to respect their own needs while narcissists can undergo treatments like environmental manipulation, psychotherapy or medication to control the unstable and aggressive aspects of personality disorders.

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### Seen on Facebook

**Larry Haydn**

Archery for fun! — on 16 September.

*Kevin Chung, Jessica Ngieng and 2 others like this.*

**Celine Tan-Lee** I might persuade my hubby to join. Apparently he seems to feel "intimidated" by mensans....hahaha

**Ian Eio** No need to be intimidated. We promise not to shoot him.  
*4 people like this.*

**Wong Kee Wee** why intimidated?  
we are all normal human beings afterall  
I breathe the same air as him, you know  
haha

**Celine Tan-Lee** He seems to think we are too smart....lol....

**Ken Ng Shijie** dun be intimidated by us.. we may not be as good in using our limbs as we are in our brains haha.. \*clumsy me\*

*(Editor: In other words, don't be afraid of Mensan brains. Be afraid of their bad aim. Oh, and Larry looked awfully cool in the photos of the last session.)*