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# PERSONALITY DISORDER MORE THAN BUZZWORD

BY MICHAELA BRADY

ENOUGH about me, let's talk about you. What do you think of me?

Welcome to the world of narcissism. It's the buzzword of our era, used to label public figures from Donald Trump to Amber Heard. All kinds of obnoxious behaviour is routinely explained away on the basis that the person is a "narc".

It's understood to be on the rise - influenced, no doubt, by a culture of social media, selfies, Photoshopping and plastic surgery.

The term conjures up notions of what we refer to in Ireland as the Me Feiner, with that need to be noticed. Someone who constantly boasts and posts about who they are, what they do and who they know.

Although, we might be somewhat familiar with that self-indulgent sort, most of us are not really clued into how dark and damaging the real Narc can be.

As a psychotherapist with 20 years clinical experience I am no stranger to the devastating effects of narcissistic abuse and have supported many on their healing journey.

My aim is to share this insight so you can know what to watch for, recognise the impact, stay safe and learn tips for recovery.

### WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Have you ever experienced "the ex" who left you crippled with confusion, or frustration over fluctuations between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde? The colleague who is a master manipulator and thrives on creating conflict?

Or perhaps your relative, who bulldozes boundaries and blatantly refuses to take any responsibility. You may even know the Pinocchio type, who continues to fabricate and exaggerate despite their fibs being exposed.

If you are nodding, you might just be entangled with a narcissist. Not that I am diagnosing - or suggesting you do either - just maybe some food for thought. After all information is power so let's get informed.

According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders "narcissism is a personality disorder with specific patterns of behaviour" which include:

- An attitude of grandiosity and a need for excessive admiration;
- A complete lack of empathy and refusal to take responsibility or accountability;
- A preoccupation with unlimited success, brilliance and beauty; and
- A high tendency to deceive, manipulate and cheat - with little remorse.

A relationship with a narcissist, whether romantic, platonic or professional, tends to follow a specific pattern of highs and lows that renders the victim confused as they fall prey to a set of calculated tactics.

These tend to unfold through the following three stages:

### THE IDEALISATION STAGE

Otherwise known as Love Bombing, this is the honeymoon phase of a normal relationship on steroids.

Clients have confided: "It was amazing initially, we had an instant connection and chemistry - they were so attentive, supportive and thoughtful."

"They were besotted and declared I was the one, their soul mate. I was

showered with lavish gifts, adventurous trips, ongoing texts and sex. It was a whirlwind romance with an almost premature planning of our happy ever and then, gradually, it started to change."

### THE DEVALUE STAGE

I call this the Plunder from the Pedestal Phase and the higher the pedestal, the harder the fall. Of course all relationships encounter challenges, but we can overcome these and deepen the connection by open communication, compromise, flexibility and respect.

Not the narcissist though. Due to their extreme low self-esteem, and lack of self-awareness, they are unwilling or unable to do this and here's where the confusion and heartbreak begins.

Clients have shared: "They became distant by times. I just got a sense

something was off. I thought - and was told - that I was the problem. I was too paranoid, too possessive, too insecure and too needy."

You'll likely experience increased criticism, blame shifting, disrespecting of boundaries, ghosting, silent treatment, unreliability, gaslighting, and a reduction in physical and emotional intimacy.

### THE DISCARD PHASE

I also refer to this stage as Public Enemy No1 Phase. The mask completely slips to reveal a monster and the "love of

your life" has become unrecognisable. Treatment may include expressions of contempt, zero flexibility, cheating, playing the victim, smear campaigns, psychological, emotional or even physical abuse.

The relationship often ends suddenly, with little or no explanation, and you will most likely be replaced quickly by the next conquest.

### THE IMPACT

Having had the misfortune to be in a relationship with a narcissistic can

render you a shadow of your former self. The level of betrayal experienced can be incomprehensible. Those I have helped presented with anxiety, addictions, confusion, depression, insomnia, self-doubt, trauma, and paranoia.

### THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

In an ideal world you could completely remove the narcissist from your life. In reality, they may be your parent, your boss or you may share children together.

The following are some tips to help you to stay safe and begin your healing.

### RECORD INCIDENCES

Keep a record of encounters. I guarantee if you try to highlight a pattern of behaviour they will either deny, lie, blame shift or minimise it - textbook gaslighting.

### ASSERT YOURSELF

Communicate your needs in a calm, clear and respectful way. If you struggle with this, do an Assertiveness Course. If behaviour doesn't change, they aren't listening, don't care or it's deliberate.

### BE AWARE OF BOUNDARIES

Give yourself permission to have separate emotions and thoughts. The narc may comment that you are too sensitive or dramatic. Learn to leave it with them. Don't internalise hurtful comments.

### GET SUPPORT AND DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH

Find a therapist with specific training in narcissistic abuse, learn as much as you can, to stay protected. Lastly be kind, compassionate and patient with yourself.

The treatment you have endured is not your fault. It is as the result of someone who is very damaged themselves. Learn to leave it with them and focus on setting yourself free.

■ Michaela Brady is an Irish psychotherapist, training consultant and international speaker with 20 years' experience improving mental health, wellbeing, engagement and performance. She is the founding director of *Aspire Counselling*. See [aspirecounselling.com](http://aspirecounselling.com).

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Actress Heard has been accused of narcissism

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“They will deny, lie & shift blame...classic gaslighting”  
MICHAELA BRADY  
YESTERDAY