

## Review on Narcissism and Social Media.

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### ABSTRACT

It seems there is more armchair diagnosing of narcissism and calling people “narcissists” than ever before and social media is often the trigger of it and takes the blame. Narcissistic Personality Disorder is defined by the symptoms of behaviours of grandiosity and lack of self-awareness, an abnormal need for admiration, and often a lack of empathy toward others. While even a cursory look at one’s social media feed will show posts which seem to promote (and perhaps exaggerate) achievements and certainly the visual aspects of social media are preoccupied with appearance, beauty, status and success. While celebrity news and popular culture has for some time been permeated with these characteristics, this last decade has offered celebrity in the suburbs where everyone on YouTube can “broadcast yourself”, personal websites and blogs are de jure, and to exist without social media is seemingly to not exist at all. This review article will highlight the important of how social media can promote narcissism in association to age.

Keywords: Narcissism, Social media, behaviors, and people.

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### INTRODUCTION

Social media is ubiquitous in our lives. People can spend hours posting and scrolling on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and a host of other platforms [1]. You may know people who are especially absorbed in the social media frenzy, including those who seem to post everything online. A major component of social media is the ability to display one’s own life to the world, which may lead some people to post an inordinate amount of information about themselves [1]. Perhaps because posting on social media involves some degree of seeking attention, people have wondered how social media use may relate to narcissism, a personality trait that is often tied to self-absorption. Narcissism is the pursuit of gratification from vanity or egotistic admiration of one’s idealised self image and attributes. Narcissism is also considered a social or cultural problem. It is a factor in trait theory used in various self-report inventories of personality such as the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory. It is one of the three dark triadic personality traits (the others being psychopathy and Machiavellianism). Except in the sense of primary narcissism or healthy self-love, narcissism is usually

considered a problem in a person’s or group’s relationships with self and others [2]. Narcissism is not the same as egocentrism or egoism. Researchers agree that there are three dimensions of narcissism. Each dimension is characterized by a heightened sense of self-importance, but they differ from each other in important ways. If you were to ask most people to define narcissism, they would probably emphasize the dimension of narcissism that psychologists conceptualize as grandiosity. People higher in grandiosity put themselves out there: they are bold, extraverted, assertive, and overconfident. They believe they are the best and often try to seek power over others [3].

On the other hand, vulnerability is characterized by being shy, inhibited, and anxious. People higher in vulnerability desire success and admiration similar to those higher in grandiosity but have difficulties in achieving these goals. Although it is not always obvious, some people with narcissistic tendencies score quite high in vulnerability [4].

#### **Narcissistic personality disorder**

Narcissistic personality disorder affects an estimated 1% of the general population

[5]. Although most individuals have some narcissistic traits, high levels of narcissism can manifest themselves in a pathological form as narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), whereby the individual overestimates his or her abilities and has an excessive need for admiration and affirmation [6]. NPD was revised in the DSM-5. The general move towards a dimensional (personality trait-based) view of the Personality Disorders has been maintained. Some narcissists may have a limited or minimal capability to experience emotions. The word narcissism gets tossed around a lot in our selfie-obsessed, celebrity-driven culture, often to describe someone who seems excessively vain or full of themselves. But in psychological terms, narcissism doesn't mean self-love at least not of a genuine sort [7]. It's more accurate to say that people with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) are in love with an idealized, grandiose image of themselves. And they're in love with this inflated self-image precisely because it allows them to avoid deep feelings of insecurity. But propping up their delusions of grandeur takes a lot of work and that's where the dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors come in. Narcissistic personality disorder involves a pattern of self-centered, arrogant thinking and behavior, a lack of empathy and consideration for other people, and an excessive need for admiration. Others often describe people with NPD as cocky, manipulative, selfish, patronizing, and demanding. This way of thinking and behaving surfaces in every area of the narcissist's life: from work and friendships to family and love relationships [8]. People with narcissistic personality disorder are extremely resistant to changing their behavior, even when it's causing them problems. Their tendency is to turn the blame on to others. What's more, they are extremely sensitive and react badly to even the slightest criticisms, disagreements, or perceived slights, which they view as personal attacks. For the people in the narcissist's life, it's often easier just to go along with their demands to avoid the coldness and rages. However, by

understanding more about narcissistic personality disorder, you can spot the narcissists in your life, protect yourself from their power plays, and establish healthier boundaries [9].

#### **Signs and symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder**

- **Grandiose sense of self-importance**

Grandiosity is the defining characteristic of narcissism. More than just arrogance or vanity, grandiosity is an unrealistic sense of superiority. Narcissists believe they are unique or "special" and can only be understood by other special people. What's more, they are too good for anything average or ordinary. They only want to associate and be associated with other high-status people, places, and things [10]. Narcissists also believe that they're better than everyone else and expect recognition as such even when they've done nothing to earn it. They will often exaggerate or outright lie about their achievements and talents. And when they talk about work or relationships, all you'll hear is how much they contribute, how great they are, and how lucky the people in their lives are to have them. They are the undisputed star and everyone else is at best a bit player.

- **Lives in a fantasy world that supports their delusions of grandeur**

Since reality doesn't support their grandiose view of themselves, narcissists live in a fantasy world propped up by distortion, self-deception, and magical thinking. They spin self-glorifying fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, attractiveness, and ideal love that make them feel special and in control [11]. These fantasies protect them from feelings of inner emptiness and shame, so facts and opinions that contradict them are ignored or rationalized away [12]. Anything that threatens to burst the fantasy bubble is met with extreme defensiveness and even rage, so those around the narcissist learn to tread carefully around their denial of reality.

- **Needs constant praise and admiration**

A narcissist's sense of superiority is like a balloon that gradually loses air without a steady stream of applause and recognition to keep it inflated. The occasional compliment is not enough. Narcissists need constant food for their ego, so they surround themselves with people who are willing to cater to their obsessive craving for affirmation. These relationships are very one-sided [13]. It's all about what the admirer can do for the narcissist, never the other way around. And if there is ever an interruption or diminishment in the admirer's attention and praise, the narcissist treats it as a betrayal.

- **Sense of entitlement**

Because they consider themselves special, narcissists expect favorable treatment as their due. They truly believe that whatever they want, they should get. They also expect the people around them to automatically comply with their every wish and whim. That is their only value [14]. If you don't anticipate and meet their every need, then you're useless. And if you have the nerve to defy their will or "selfishly" ask for something in return, prepare yourself for aggression, outrage, or the cold shoulder.

- **Exploits others without guilt or shame**

Narcissists never develop the ability to identify with the feelings of others to put themselves in other people's shoes. In other words, they lack empathy [15]. In many ways, they view the people in their lives as objects there to serve their needs. As a consequence, they don't think twice about taking advantage of others to achieve their own ends. Sometimes this interpersonal exploitation is malicious, but often it is simply oblivious. Narcissists simply don't think about how their behavior affects others. And if you point it out, they still won't truly get it [16]. The only thing they understand is their own needs.

- **Frequently demeans, intimidates, bullies, or belittles others**

Narcissists feel threatened whenever they encounter someone who appears to have

something they lack especially those who are confident and popular. They're also threatened by people who don't kowtow to them or who challenge them in any way. Their defense mechanism is contempt [17]. The only way to neutralize the threat and prop up their own sagging ego is to put those people down. They may do it in a patronizing or dismissive way as if to demonstrate how little the other person means to them. Or they may go on the attack with insults, name-calling, bullying, and threats to force the other person back into line.

### **Self-consciousness and Social Media**

Self-consciousness is a personality variable relevant to understanding self-presentation behaviors in SNS use [18].

#### **Types of self-consciousness**

There are two types of self-consciousness [19]:

##### **1. Private vs. public.**

This is a self-relevant awareness, introspection, and tendency to examine one's inner self and feelings. Those with high private self-consciousness tend to be more concerned about their own inner states and feelings and use those impressions to influence their behaviors.

##### **2. Public**

This is an awareness of the self as it is viewed by others. As might be assumed, individuals with high public self-consciousness are not only aware of how others view them, they are concerned about how others view them.

In an early study linking self-consciousness to online behaviors in college students, [20] studied the relationship between Internet use and dependency and how those behaviors relate to both public and private self-consciousness across two time periods. While [21] initially hypothesized that Internet use and dependency would be positively related only to public self-consciousness, she initially found that private self-consciousness at time was predicted by Internet use and dependency levels. However, when extreme outliers in private SC score were removed from the analysis, the relationship went away. [22] did find, however that only time 1 levels of public SC predicted later levels of

public SC, and that public SC at time was not predicted by Internet use or dependency. A literature search revealed only two other studies relating self-consciousness to social media use. [23] conducted research on social compensatory friending on SNS by investigating the effects of self-esteem and self-consciousness on number of friends on Facebook. The results did not reveal a significant association between private SC and number of Facebook friends. In contrast, public SC showed a significant positive association with number of Facebook friends. These findings were consistent with what [24] demonstrated in their research on photograph posting in the context of SNS use. Shim et al. found only public SC was a significant positive predictor for photograph posting, and private SC did not have a significant effect on the frequency of photo posting [25]. From the limited work examining self-consciousness and social media use, what can be concluded? Work by [10] and [11] found that public self-consciousness influenced social media behavior, while [8] found no relationship. As it relates to the present study, it can be argued that the two later works are more in line with behavior related specifically to social media, while [8] examined general amount of Internet use, rather than focusing on social media. In fact, Facebook, the most used social media application, was not even launched until 2004 [12], so Internet-based, social media use only developed and flourished after this time. In the present study, it is hypothesized that one's type of self-consciousness, may play a mediating role in the relationship between social media use and narcissism. While no other study has specifically examined this hypothesis, it is rational and consistent with theory. Social media use using SNS focuses on developing and fostering relationships with others, while portraying oneself in a socially desirable manner [13]. [14] describe social media use as egocentric, in that is very much about how a user presents the self in order to gain friends or status. The

egocentric nature of social media use would likely appeal to those with narcissistic qualities, and this is supported by research [18]. In contrast, self-consciousness relates to social media use in different ways. High public self-consciousness does seem to relate to social media use, as indicated by [16] and [15], while private self-consciousness was unrelated to social media use. It is possible that when examined in conjunction with narcissism type of self-consciousness mediates the relationship between narcissism and social media use. Higher levels of private self-conscious, regardless of narcissism level, may lead to lower use of social media or a tendency to use social media but not post to sites, because behavior is more driven by inner needs and states and not by concern over what others are thinking or feeling about oneself [17]. On the other hand, public self-consciousness may lead to greater social media usage, as well as postings, due to concern over and a desire to know what others think of oneself. The present study will examine the relationships between narcissism, self-consciousness and social media use, as well as explore whether type of self-consciousness may mediate the relationship between narcissism and social media use [19].

#### **How to leave a narcissist**

Ending an abusive relationship is never easy. Ending one with a narcissist can be especially difficult as they can be so charming and charismatic—at least at the start of the relationship or if you threaten to leave. It's easy to become disoriented by the narcissist's manipulative behavior, caught up in the need to seek their approval, or even to feel "gaslighted" and doubt your own judgement [22]. If you're codependent, your desire to be loyal may trump even your need to preserve your safety and sense of self. But it's important to remember that no one deserves to be bullied, threatened, or verbally and emotionally abused in a relationship. There are ways to escape the narcissist and the guilt and self-blame and begin the process of healing [16].

- I. **Educate yourself about narcissistic personality disorder.** The more you understand, the better you'll be able to recognize the techniques a narcissist may use to keep you in the relationship. When you threaten to leave, a narcissist will often resurrect the flattery and adoration ("love bombing") that caused you to be interested in them in the first place [20]. Or they'll make grand promises about changing their behavior that they have no intention of keeping.
- II. **Write down the reasons why you're leaving.** Being clear on why you need to end the relationship can help prevent you from being sucked back in [22]. Keep your list somewhere handy, such as on your phone, and refer to it when you're starting to have self-doubts or the

- III. **Seek support.** During your time together, the narcissist may have damaged your relationships with friends and family or limited your social life. But whatever your circumstances, you're not alone [23]. Even if you can't reach out to old friends, you can find help from support groups or domestic violence helplines and shelters.
- IV. **Don't make empty threats.** It's a better tactic to accept that the narcissist won't change and when you're ready, simply leave. Making threats or pronouncements will only forewarn the narcissist and enable them to make it more difficult for you to get away.
- V. **Seek immediate help if you're physically threatened or abused.** Call 911 in the U.S. or your country's local emergency service.

#### CONCLUSION

Most behavioural experts agree that narcissism is a condition not of biology but society- it is the social context not the genetic factors that are causal. In a world of always-connected, app-ready, mobile device saturated living, where every phone is a camera and we are ever just a few clicks away from posting our next contribution it is clear that social media has created an environment conducive to the growth of narcissism. However the apparent rise of narcissism may be more a factor of social media highlighting its existence and narcissistic-type behaviours rather than of itself creating more narcissism. Indeed some of the negative press social media receives is

unwarranted. Selfies are given as the ultimate sign of narcissistic times, and combined with today's must-have item- the selfie stick, an indicator of self-obsession. However most selfies are more "groupies" not photos of oneself by oneself, but of a group and sent to other friends. Leaving a narcissist can be a huge blow to their sense of entitlement and self-importance. Their huge ego still needs to be fed, so they'll often continue trying to exert control over you. If charm and "love bombing" doesn't work, they may resort to threats, denigrating you to mutual friends and acquaintances, or stalking you, on social media or in person.

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