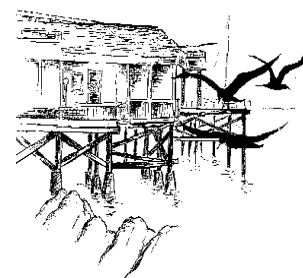




The Monterey County Chapter
California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists

May / June 2021 Newsletter



Benefits to MC-CAMFT Membership:

- Reduced fees at our events
- Invitation to our Members only annual gatherings
- Access to Members only Salons, which are intimate workshop offerings taught by fellow Members
- Periodic Newsletter with relevant CAMFT information and Member created writing
- Opportunity to contribute your writing to our Newsletter, including things such as a column, book review, workshop or conference review, poem, opinion piece or article
- Free advertising in our Newsletter and “Classifieds” section of our website
- Inclusion in our “Find a Therapist” website directory
- Access to Member and Announcements Forum on our website where you can seek feedback from other members and post things to the community
- Opportunity to submit a proposal to host a Salon for our Members
- Option to join us on the Board as a volunteer committee chair or ad hoc committee member
- Opportunity for MC-CAMFT to co-sponsor your workshop, so you can offer CEUs to your attendees
- Free Mentoring by experienced clinicians
- Invitation to suggest any member activity you find interesting, and we’ll consider it!

Benefits to MC-CAMFT Website:

- ◇ Current Member Directory
- ◇ Classifieds Page for Members
- ◇ Chapter Board Contact
- ◇ Specialized Forums
- ◇ Online Newsletter
- ◇ Networking Opportunities
- ◇ Chapter Documents Access
- ◇ Sponsorship Opportunities
- ◇ Membership Information

MC-CAMFT CALENDAR

MAY : VIRTUAL C.E. WORKSHOP

Title: Integrating Social Justice into Clinical Practice

Presenter: Kaethe Weingarten, Ph.D.

Date/Time: Saturday, May 15, 2021 9:30-12:00

**Schedule: 9:30-10:00 Announcements,
10:00-12:00 Speaker Presentation**

Pricing Categories/Respective Prices:

Licensed MC-CAMFT Member \$25

Pre-Licensed MC-CAMFT Member \$15

Non-Members \$40



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2021 MC-CAMFT Board Roster

2021 Board of Directors - Officers -

President:

Jennifer Farley
jennifer@shamanhealingmonterey.com

Treasurer:

Susan West
831-206-7639

Secretary:

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2021 - Committee Chairs -

Membership Chair: OPEN

Public Relations: OPEN

Programs Chair: OPEN

Pre-Licensed 3000 Hour Club Chair: OPEN

Legislative & Ethics Chair:
Michael Newman

Mentorship Chair:
Pat McDermott, LMFT
patmcdermft@comcast.net

Newsletter Editor:
Ross E. Farley III
ross@shinealight.info

Hospitality Chair:
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olivia.stadler@yahoo.com

Continuing Education Chair:
Raceal McWhorter, LMFT
racealarttherapist@gmail.com

Member-At-Large:
Carmen Martin, LMFT
lovehealing@me.com

Member-At-Large:
Sarah Lauterbach, LMFT
sarahlauterbach.lmft@gmail.com

Jennifer Farley



2021 Board President

As we pass the one year mark of the COVID pandemic, I'd like to take a moment to express my gratitude to our membership who have continued to participate in our Chapter offerings while it has been necessary to go virtual. I know from my own personal experience that the increase in screen time takes a toll on one's energy and body. I also know that gathering together in the virtual world doesn't provide quite the same social experience as when we can get together in person. And yet, we have continued to have robust attendance for both our CE workshops and for our Staying Connected salons. We've also continued to welcome a good amount of new members to our Chapter during this time, and it has been wonderful to see them at our events as well! I truly appreciate this continued active participation from our Chapter Members!

As vaccinations continue to be administered, some of you perhaps have been returning to seeing people in person. Others perhaps are starting to consider it, and others may have decided to stay virtual. Wherever you are with how you are deciding to approach your work, please don't forget that CAMFT has a COVID resource page that could help to support you as you make these decisions: <https://www.camft.org/Resources/Support-Resources-for-CAMFT-Members>

Lastly, our May event is approaching soon! Please join us on May 15th with Kaethe Weingarten, Phd, as she speaks on Integrating Social Justice Work into Clinical Practice. There is more information about this event in this newsletter and registration is currently open through our website.

Spring is in the air!!

May You Be Well,

Jennifer Farley

Chapter Events & News Cont'd...

May 15th, 2021 - Online C.E. Workshop with Kaethe Weingarten, PhD



Integrating Social Justice Work into Clinical Practice

Description:

The Witness to Witness Program (W2W), based on Weingarten's witnessing model, began in July 2018 and originally was established to support health care workers and attorneys who were experiencing empathic distress working with people involved in various stages of the immigration detention process. In this workshop, we will describe how W2W evolved to respond to the needs of the communities we served both before and after the coronavirus pandemic. The form and content of our programming needed to meet the criteria that they be both clinically sound and socially just. We wanted people to leave our sessions – whether individual, group or webinar – feeling more aware and empowered. The presenter will discuss programming for people working in the immigration sector and community health workers based in the 50 Mexican Consulates in the US. W2W creates virtual communities of support as a way of strengthening individual and organizational resilience and as a way of doing reasonable hope together.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- Describe the four positions of Weingarten's witnessing model
- Discuss how to connect social justice values to direct service applications
- Identify a concrete action they can take now to enact social justice in their practice
- Analyze where their community falls on the disaster trajectory

Presenter Bio:

Kaethe Weingarten, Ph.D., directs the Witness to Witness (W2W) Program for MCN.

The goal of W2W is to help the helpers, primarily serving health care workers, attorneys and journalists working with vulnerable populations. She received her doctorate from Harvard University in 1974. She has taught at Wellesley College (1975-1979), Harvard Medical School (1981-2017), where she was an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Children's Hospital Boston and then Cambridge Health Alliance, and at the Family Institute of Cambridge (1982-2009). She founded and directed the Program in Families, Trauma and Resilience at the Family Institute of Cambridge. Internationally, she has taught in Africa, Australia, Canada, Europe and New Zealand, where she was a Fullbright Specialist.

She has given over 300 presentations and been a keynote speaker at numerous local, national and international conferences. She serves on the editorial boards of five journals. In 2002, she was awarded the highest honor of the American Family Therapy Academy: the award for Distinguished Contribution to Family Theory and Practice. She has written about her work in six books (which she has authored or edited) and over 100 articles, chapters and essays. Her most recent book, *Common Shock: Witnessing Violence Every Day- How We Are Harmed, How We Can Heal* won the 2004 Nautilus Award for Social Change.

Dr. Weingarten's work focuses on the development and dissemination of a witnessing model. One prong of the work is about the effects of witnessing violence and trauma in the context of domestic, inter-ethnic, racial, political and other forms of conflict. The other prong of the witnessing work is in the context of healthcare, illness and disability. Her work on reasonable hope has been widely cited.

In 2013, Dr. Weingarten and her husband moved to Berkeley, CA to be near their children and five grandchildren. There she resumed a dance and choreography practice she had let lapse for fifty years. Since moving to Berkeley, she and her dance collaborator have been awarded five grants for their choreography with elder dancers applying a witnessing model in public spaces. In 2018 they performed at the Oakland Museum of California. In her spare time she enjoys hiking, baking and crocheting afghans.

Course meets the qualifications for 3 hours of continuing education credits for LMFTs, LPCCs, LEPs, and/or LCSWs, as required by the California Board of Behavioral Sciences.

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION, SPECIAL NEEDS, ADA ACCOMMODATION OR GRIEVANCES : Please contact Jennifer Farley at jennifer@shamanhealingmonterey.com

CE CERTIFICATES : Please Note: Certificates of completion will be awarded at the completion of the workshop to those who attend the workshop in its entirety, sign in and out, and complete the course evaluation form.

MC-CAMFT is approved by the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists to sponsor continuing education for LMFTs, LCSWs, LPCCs and LEPs and maintains responsibility for this program and its content. Provider# 050097.

Information on Continuing Education Credit for Health Professionals

CE credits for psychologists are provided by the Spiritual Competency Resource Center (SCRC) which is co-sponsoring this program. The Spiritual Competency Resource Center is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. The Spiritual Competency Resource Center maintains responsibility for this program and its content. The California Board of Behavioral Sciences accepts CE credits for LCSW, LPCC, LEP, and LMFT license renewal for programs offered by approved sponsors of CE by the American Psychological Association. LCSWs, MFTs and other mental health professionals from states other than California need to check with their state licensing board as to whether or not they accept programs offered by approved sponsors of CE by the American Psychological Association. SCRC is approved by the California Board of Registered Nursing (BRN Provider CEP16887) for licensed nurses in California. For questions about receiving your Certificate of Attendance, contact Pamela Hughes from Monterey County California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists at pam@pamhughestherapy.com. For questions about CE, visit www.spiritualcompetency.com or contact David Lukoff, PhD at CE@spiritualcompetency.com.

REFUND/CANCELLATION POLICY:

You may cancel for a full refund up to 15 days in advance of the event, or a 50% refund between 5 and 14 days in advance of the event. No refunds for cancellations within 4 days of the event or for no-shows or failure to attend due to emergencies. Unused funds cannot be applied to future workshops. All requests for refunds must be submitted to Jennifer Farley by email at jennifer@shamanhealingmonterey.com.

Couples Corner

offered by EFT trained therapist **Amy Somers**

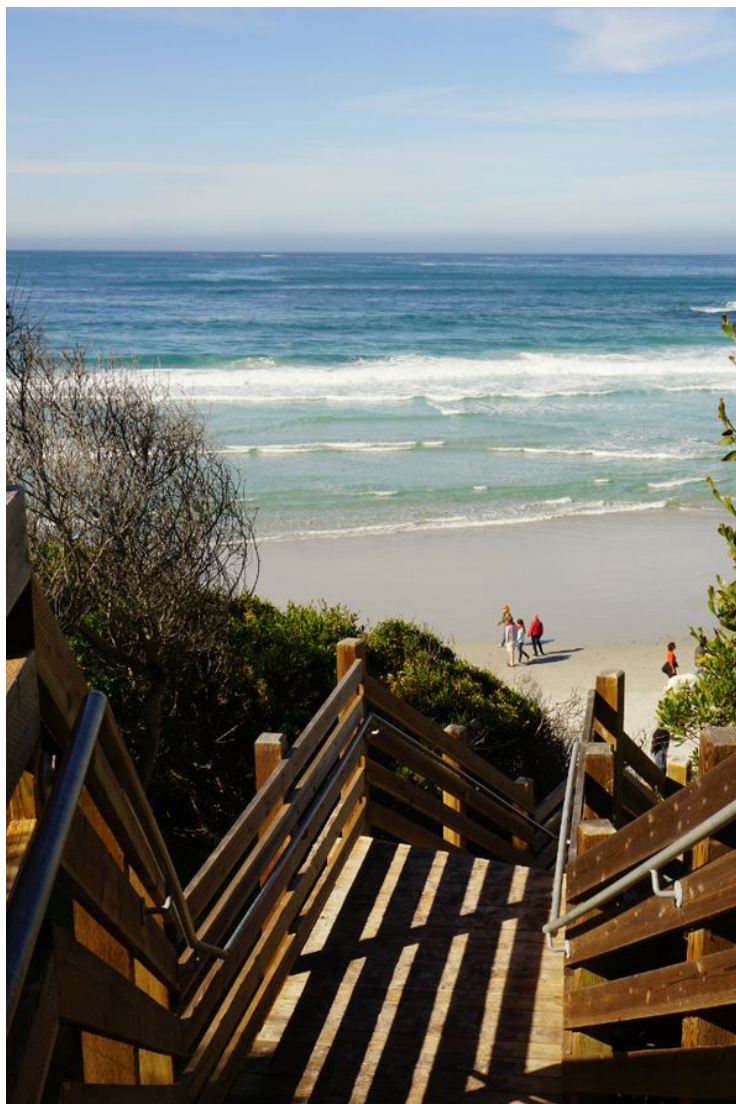
Couples in distress find their way to therapy seeking answers, oftentimes with blame and accusations against their partners. Wanting to know: Why? What's wrong? Who's to blame? Our brains are wired for survival; two-thirds of the amygdala neurons are constantly scanning for threats. This "negativity bias" encodes negatives much more easily than positive, always looking for warnings. This can translate in partnership, looking for confirmation that someone is doing something to us, seemingly intentionally. From this perspective, fights ensue (fight-or-flight), grooving the pattern, both partners camping out in the rut.

"Distressed partners no longer see each other as their emotional haven. Our lover is supposed to be the one person we can count on who will always respond. Instead, unhappy partners feel emotionally deprived, rejected, even abandoned. In that light, couples' conflicts assume their true meaning: They are frightened protests against eroding connection and a demand for emotional reengagement."

- Sue Johnson, Love Sense

I love this perspective: frightened protests against eroding connection. We all get busy, we all get side-tracked, especially in the latter side of post-pandemic let down. We're all tired, let's face it. But what do we really want? What are we also wired for, the greatest predictor of happiness? Connection. Neuroscience, Maslow, Dr Matthew Lieberman, Dr Dean Ornish, Dr. Brene Brown; they all suggest the brain is hard-wired for connection. We seek connection as a fundamental human need and when we don't have it, don't feel it, we simply protest. When we fight with our partner, we just want to connect. Imagine if we reframed fights in this way? "I'm scared," "I feel disconnected," "Are you there for me?" are all alternatives to attack and protect modes. If we didn't want to connect, we wouldn't even bother. Silence and disconnection are far more dangerous than a couple who is attempting to connect, albeit negativity.

A demand for emotional reengagement is an urgent call to reconnect, a fiery S.O.S. To notice frequent fights as a sign of disconnect and instead translate this as a passionate plea for love may be the waving white flag for couples, for ourselves. Sue Johnson's EFT says it's never about the content (this still blows my husband and my minds, especially when we are hyper-focused on the reason, I am right and you are wrong); it's only a lack of connection. Ergo, the solution is to connect. To find your way back to love. If both partners are fighting, both are interested. It's just a matter of how. Stay tuned to explore ways to move into secure adult attachment next time, finding the way back home from feeling alone and scared. Until then try and watch for frightened protests, attempt to reframe these as a desire to connect instead. Good luck and happy awareness.



Navigating Narcissism: *The What, Why, and How* *Part 1 of a new series that dives deeper into understanding narcissism.*

By Wendy Boring-Bray, DBH, LPCC

“He only thinks about himself!”

“Wow, she really loves herself...”

“Why are they so entitled?”

At some point in our lives, the majority of people will interact with somebody who makes them think something along those lines. Somebody who thinks the world of themselves, constantly needs attention from others, and maybe even totally disregards the feelings of other people in favor of their own.

These people are often identified with a very common label: narcissists.

Narcissists can be very difficult to be around, whether we know we are interacting with one or not. But what exactly is a narcissist? More specifically, what does it mean to be narcissistic, why does the trait exist, and how can we manage when we are dealing with somebody in our lives who is considered to be a narcissist?

Over the next few months, A New Beginning will be taking a closer look at narcissism to try and help answer some of those questions. Today, we will be focusing on the basics: What is narcissism?

What Is Narcissism?

Over the years, psychologists and researchers have sought to define what we refer to as narcissism, but sometimes all of the different terms, similarities, definitions, and so on can get pretty confusing.

According to Merriam-Webster, narcissism means acting “extremely self-centered with an exaggerated sense of self-importance, marked by or characteristic of excessive admiration of or infatuation with oneself.” The term narcissism comes from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a young man who falls in love with his own reflection and ultimately perishes by the pool he is unable to draw away from.

In other words, a person with narcissistic traits or tendencies has an incredibly inflated view of themselves, which often leads to a significant sense of entitlement and behaviors that disregard the needs/wants/feelings of others around them.

When reading that general definition, it isn’t unusual for someone to immediately pop into our minds; maybe a significant other, a co-worker, or a family member. Narcissism, like all traits or behaviors, is far more complicated than the dictionary definition leads on. It exists on a spectrum, so it isn’t a surprise that most of us have encountered—or even demonstrated ourselves—narcissism in one way or another. While these traits can be frustrating for those around them, they are considered to be relatively harmless.

So, how can we start to tease apart the various aspects of narcissism, especially when the narcissism in question is something to be concerned about?

Types of Narcissism

When a person is considered narcissistic—that is, they have narcissistic traits or tendencies—this already poses a specific question: What kind of narcissist are they?

Researchers have begun to identify two types of narcissistic traits. These two types essentially describe what is underlying various narcissistic traits. The first type, grandiose narcissism or overt narcissism, is when a person has a superior image of themselves, and has a desire to maintain that image, gain admiration and attention from others, and demonstrate a sense of dominance or power.

The second type, vulnerable narcissism or covert narcissism, is categorized more by fragile self-confidence, and their inflated self-image is often a coping mechanism for low self-esteem. Vulnerable narcissists often also have a deep fear of rejection or criticism as a result of these challenges.

Where Does Narcissism Come From?

Psychologists and researchers over the years have pondered the question of narcissism just as they have with all other forms of human behavior, beliefs, and personality: that is, what causes somebody to develop narcissistic traits?

The short answer is, it’s complicated.

The longer answer is that psychology research is still unpacking all of the different factors that could potentially play a role in the development of narcissistic personality traits. But they’ve begun to identify a few key players so far.

Some research is beginning to come forward suggesting that narcissistic personality begins to manifest at around 8 years old, as children are beginning to develop a sense of themselves and a sense of others.

As for where narcissism comes from, it appears to be a combination of biological temperament (inherited differences in how someone reacts to their environment, and how they control those reactions), early social interactions, and the resulting psychological systems. One study, in particular, provides evidence that avoidance (strong reaction to negative stimuli) and approach (strong reaction to positive stimuli) temperaments can play a large role in the development of narcissism.

At the same time, they argue that parents who are overindulgent toward their children, as well as parents who are considered cold/unsupportive of their children, could be a significant factor in emerging narcissistic traits.

Long story short, while researchers have an idea as to where narcissism comes from, there is still much to be done before we can say for sure. We also know that a lot of different factors can lead to the same outcome—which is why it’s important for us to be able to identify narcissistic traits no matter what the context is.

Narcissistic Traits vs. Narcissistic Personality Disorder

As mentioned above, narcissism exists on a spectrum from occasional displays of superior views of self to behaviors and traits that can warrant a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

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Navigating Narcissism: *Narcissism at Work*

Part 2 of our series seeking a deeper understanding of narcissism.

By Wendy Boring-Bray, DBH, LPCC

Whether we are working in an office, in the community, or via Zoom, work environments can be home to an endless range of personalities—some may add a positive boost to the office atmosphere, while others quickly become the reason we may start to dread each workday.

In Part 1 of the Navigating Narcissism series, I ran through some of the basics of a narcissistic personality. Here, I am hoping to dive into a common place where we might encounter narcissistic individuals: the workplace.

How Do We See Narcissism in the Workplace?

Many of us have encountered narcissism at work, but it can sometimes be difficult to actually identify that we are working with a narcissist in the moment. We might even recognize our own reactions—frustration, exhaustion, maybe awe—before we can label somebody with narcissistic tendencies as such.

So, how exactly does narcissism show up in the workplace? What should we be on the lookout for?

While diving into the literature is an important tool in any case, sometimes the best evidence can be our own experiences, so I want to start off this conversation by sharing a few real-life stories of workplace narcissism, generously donated by friends and colleagues (pseudonym names in place for confidentiality, of course!).

Mike: “Oh, I remember this one boss I had early on at one of my first jobs out of school, he was absolutely a narcissist. It’s funny, because the firm was really successful, like, he got the job done—I always describe him as similar to Leo DiCaprio’s performance in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, because when you first come on, you’re like, ‘Wow, this guy really knows what he is doing.’

But the reality of it was that he needed everything to be exactly to his standards, because he was always right, so it was his way or the highway. Being on his marketing team was a nightmare; we could barely make suggestions, and if we messed something up or tried to change an idea, he talked to us like we had no idea what we were doing, just blatantly condescending. Some people thrive in that environment I think but, it really wasn’t for me.”

Jennifer: “While this isn’t necessarily ‘the workplace’ as much as, say, an academic setting, I remember this one guy in graduate school who just needed the spotlight on him 24/7. It was a counseling program, so all of us were there to help one another and learn how to best serve our clients, but he dominated every conversation—he would speak over others, constantly brag about how well he was doing in his internship.

cont’d on pg. 8

While somebody with narcissistic traits may often feel intense admiration for themselves or a sense of entitlement, NPD is one of several personality disorders recognized by the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM-5).

The DSM-5 defines NPD as “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts...,” where at least five of nine potential criteria are present (i.e., lacks empathy, is interpersonally exploitive, etc.).

As with all personality disorders, the important thing to note is that these traits are persistent, cause significant distress to the person or those around them, and impair their day-to-day functioning.

It should also be mentioned that reading symptoms of NPD or narcissistic traits on paper and interacting with a narcissistic person in real life are totally different experiences—teasing these apart can prove to be a challenging task without professional help. Don’t be afraid to seek guidance from a mental health professional if you or someone you know is looking for clarification.

Knowing the basics of narcissism, having an idea of where it may come from, and recognizing the difference between narcissistic traits and someone with NPD is incredibly important, especially as we navigate interactions with people in our lives that display narcissistic behaviors.

Want to learn more about narcissism, as well as some helpful tips for navigating the people in our lives with narcissistic traits? Keep a lookout for the next post in our narcissism series, here on A New Beginning!

References

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[Rohmann, E., Neumann, E., Herner, M. J., & Bierhoff, H. W. \(2012\). Grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. *European Psychologist*, 17\(4\), 279-290.](#)

[Thomaes, S. C. E., Bushman, B. J., Orobio de Castro, B., & Stegge, H. \(2009\). What makes narcissists bloom? A framework for research on the etiology and development of narcissism. *Development and Psychopathology*, 21, 1233-1247.](#)

Even after I would bring up a question about my own clients, suddenly the discussion was about his successes again, almost like he could never possibly have had that issue if he was in my shoes.

The most frustrating part was that we tried once to bring these things up to him, and it was like we'd accused him of murder. He was so defensive that we ended up just dropping the subject altogether. It definitely made the class more challenging than it had to be."

Tina: "Actually, one of my current coworkers has so many of those behaviors, but it's mainly that she is just constantly trying to show off just how good she is at her job. She's one of the other consultants and she is always going out of her way to tell me about how grateful this or that client is or how much she helped someone, and at the same time, she just seems to be waiting for us to like, agree you know? Like, she will continue to bring it up until I've complimented her on what a great job she did after she had already told us herself."

Do any of these stories resonate?

These examples highlight just a small snapshot of what are considered narcissistic traits—grandiose view of self, intense need for validation from others, inability to take criticism, etc.—and yet they describe individuals that so many of us have dealt with in our work lives.

As discussed in Part 1 of our narcissism series, narcissism is typically characterized by an overblown view of self, a sense of entitlement or importance, and a significant need for power or praise.

In a work setting, this may look like Tina's case, where co-workers are constantly needing compliments on their work from colleagues, or in Jennifer's case, where someone has to dominate every discussion and refuses to accept critique from others.

Narcissistic people will engage in behaviors to maintain their beliefs—about themselves or others—so if someone at work is only ever discussing their wins, is lashing out at criticism, or is persistently asserting that they are the most competent person in the room, there is a chance that narcissism may be playing a role.

How Does the Research See Narcissism in the Workplace?

Now that we've heard some first-hand accounts, what does the literature have to say about how narcissism presents in the workplace?

One area of the workplace, however, has been the real target for research on narcissism; whether this is surprising to some or not, research shows that leadership positions like managers or CEOs quite often go hand in hand with narcissism.

This is because, while we often look at the way narcissistic traits negatively impact the individual or others around them, many narcissistic traits line up exactly with what many positions of leadership require.

Take a moment and consider some traits you may look for in a boss: Is confidence on your list? Would they be outgoing and ambitious, maybe charismatic? Individuals with narcissistic tendencies routinely present with these characteristics, and therefore often emerging into leadership roles.

How to Navigate Narcissism in the Workplace

It is one thing to be able to identify narcissism in the workplace, but the next question is how to deal with having to work with somebody narcissistic.

As we've mentioned, and as many of you have certainly seen for yourselves, working with a narcissistic person can be incredibly frustrating. Let's talk about some ways to go about working with narcissism:

Research, Research, Research. It can be tough to differentiate when a colleague or boss simply has a big ego, or if they are considered a narcissistic personality. This difference is incredibly important and can guide your choices on how to proceed. Once you've identified someone in your workplace that may fit the label of narcissism, continuing to learn more about what narcissism is/is not will be a big help.

Recognize Their Perspective. If you are somebody who has been negatively impacted by narcissistic individuals, empathizing with their behavior can be extremely challenging! However, when we recognize that narcissistic behavior often has roots in low self-esteem and fear of vulnerability, it may make the comments or actions by those individuals feel less malicious or personalized.

Avoid Confrontation Whenever Possible. One of the biggest pieces of advice out there for dealing with narcissism at work is to try and avoid confronting them about their behaviors, especially in front of others.

Since we know that narcissistic people are subject to act with anger or hostility toward individuals that challenge their views of self, approaching a narcissistic person about their shortcomings may make the situation worse.

Set Boundaries for Yourself. Narcissistic people may try to work around someone's personal boundaries or limits in order to further their goals or boost their self-esteem.

If this occurs, be firm in your boundaries—while they may react negatively, this does not change the fact that you have a right to say no and to protect yourself first.

Take It to HR. If the individual in question becomes too disruptive for you to work safely and effectively, bringing the issue to HR can be a necessary step, as opposed to trying to handle the situation yourself or struggling each day as a result.

cont'd on pg. 9

Work-life can be stressful, especially these days, so having to work alongside an individual with a narcissistic personality can most certainly add a lot of weight to that stress. Continuing to stay informed and learning to recognize narcissism at work can hopefully help you approach these behaviors in a way that is best for you, and for others around you.

Want to know more about navigating narcissism in day-to-day life? Keep checking in here on A New Beginning for Part 3 in the narcissism series!

References

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Guest Article

Navigating Narcissism: *Dating a Narcissist* *Part three of our series on seeking a deeper understanding of narcissism.*

By Wendy Boring-Bray, DBH, LPCC

A lot goes into finding a significant other – maybe it's trial and error, maybe it's a chance meeting at a coffee shop, or maybe, in today's era of technology, it's from swiping right at just the correct time.

However you go about finding that special someone, it is not uncommon to hear things like "I'm trying to find my other half," or "I want a person who will see me as their equal." Wanting a romantic relationship that is mutually beneficial is by no means a big ask, and yet that is not necessarily what we always end up with.

Any kind of relationship can have its ups and downs, but at the end of the day, be it romantic, platonic, or otherwise, a relationship is all about collaboration and communication between different individuals.

In fact, some early writings by psychologists like Sigmund Freud thought of human beings as having a certain type of energy that we give toward love.

So, what happens when someone turns that energy dedicated to love entirely toward themselves?

So far in our series on Navigating Narcissism, we've introduced the reality of being around narcissistic people, and taking a closer look at narcissism in the workplace. Now, we're getting a little bit more personal – what happens when your significant other is a narcissist?

Spotting a Narcissistic Partner

As mentioned in the first part of our Navigating Narcissism series, narcissism can take on quite a few different forms. Does the person only exhibit narcissistic traits, or do they potentially have Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)? Are they someone who could be described as a grandiose narcissist, driven by a superior perception of themselves, or are they more of a vulnerable narcissist, who is fueled by a powerful sense of insecurity?

Regardless of what their label is, narcissism in romantic relationships tends to pop up in a few significant ways. For some of you, hearing the phrase "narcissistic partner" might have even brought a certain someone immediately to mind!

Recognizing that you are in a relationship with a narcissist is not always easy, but it can be extremely important to identify narcissistic partners as quickly as possible. Here are a few things to keep an eye out for:

Problems with Commitment. One of the most common issues raised in relationships with narcissistic people is a lack of commitment. This is a key characteristic of many narcissistic partners, because somebody who is primarily interested in what will best serve them is likely to stay focused on what they see to be "better alternatives" to their current significant other.

Aggression and Dominance. Because they are often trying to maintain their grandiose self-perception, individuals high in narcissism have been found to act out more aggressively toward romantic partners in an effort to establish dominance or to punish what they view as slights toward them.

Lack of Empathy. When we are feeling down, we probably want a partner who will tune into our emotions and needs. However, narcissistic partners are likely not going to go out of their way to focus on the things you are struggling with and may instead simply try and draw the conversation back toward themselves.

Taking Advantage of Partner. Relationships with narcissistic people may rarely feel like a partnership. In fact, narcissistic partners will often take advantage of their significant other, whether that be utilizing their status, money, or even just their time, in order to benefit themselves and their grandiose self-perception.

Putting Partner Down to Bring Themselves Up. In a similar way to what we mentioned above, you may find a narcissistic partner constantly putting you down in order to maintain their superior image and boost their self-esteem.

If your partner is frequently targeting your appearance or intelligence while simultaneously promoting their own, that may be a sign that you're in a relationship with a narcissist.

cont'd on pg. 10

Why Are People So Drawn to Narcissists?

When we consider all of the challenges that come with dating a narcissistic person, we may ask ourselves “How could I ever end up with someone like that?” The truth is, it can be quite easy to fall for a narcissist and not realize it until much later.

This is because a lot of the qualities that make narcissistic people so difficult to be with are usually the ones people are smitten by at the start.

For example, if you knew right away that somebody lacked empathy and would work tirelessly to solicit praise or admiration for others – even at your expense – you likely wouldn’t be interested in starting up a romance. On the other hand, if that person instead presented as confident, charismatic, and successful, you may give them another look.

On the research side, studies have also found that we are drawn toward narcissists because their grandiose view of themselves leads them to subsequently make grandiose attempts at courting others. In other words, someone might make large, bold romantic gestures or promises to gain your affection, even if they are doing it so that you will complement their efforts.

Narcissistic individuals also tend to begin relationships with an equally inflated view of their partners, meaning that they see their partners as perfect individuals high up on a pedestal, which boosts their own self-perception as the significant other of that flawless person.

However, this means that when the person starts to recognize that their significant other – like all people – has flaws, they begin to resent them, or push them away.

Sometimes we can’t help but become romantically involved with narcissistic people, but once we’ve realized that our partner is a narcissist, what do we do?

What to Do If Your Partner Is a Narcissist

If your significant other is a narcissist, it leaves you in a tricky position. When we love somebody, even somebody that is negatively affecting our lives, it isn’t uncommon for our first instinct to be to try and change their behavior.

Unfortunately, narcissistic individuals, by nature, are often very resistant to change, because they don’t want to believe that anything is wrong with them. While it is absolutely possible for a narcissistic individual to engage in positive change, it can be a monstrous – and sometimes futile – effort for many romantic partners.

At the end of the day, if your relationship with a narcissistic person has a significant negative impact on you, be it mentally, emotionally, or physically, the most likely next step is to end the relationship. However, this is easier said than done, and there are several things to keep in mind before you take that step:

Prepare for Pushback. A breakup can be a hit to anyone’s self-esteem, but to a narcissistic person who is entirely focused on their perception of themselves, their partner leaving them can be a devastating and personal blow. Prepare for your partner to engage in pushback, which can look like anything from begging, gaslighting, or potentially aggression.

Know Your Boundaries. A narcissistic partner will likely try and push your boundaries throughout a relationship, and especially at the end of one. Remain firm on these boundaries and lean on them as often as needed during the process.

Seek Outside Support. In any breakup, having social support on your side is a huge help, but especially when preparing for a breakup with a narcissist, have outside individuals at the ready. Whether this is family, friends, or a mental health professional, it will be a huge help to have people you trust by your side.

Romantic relationships have the potential to be mutually rewarding and balanced partnerships, but sometimes we find ourselves falling for a person that causes more harm than good.

Recognizing a narcissistic significant other and how they are impacting you is an important way to avoid a potentially negative situation and find the partner that is right for you.

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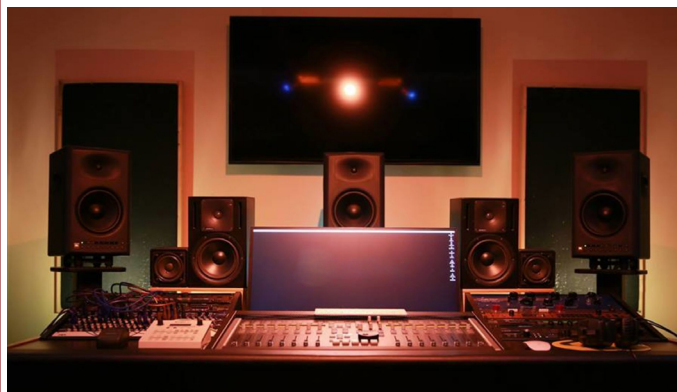
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