

# Are You Dating Someone with Narcissistic Personality Disorder?



By Tina Swithin, HopeAfterDivorce Expert

The term, “narcissist” seems to be spreading through the world like an out-of-control wildfire. The term itself doesn’t always have a negative connotation since, ironically, we are all narcissistic by nature and there actually is a certain degree of self-love that is healthy. However, there is a line that separates healthy confidence from the Å¼ber toxic Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). That’s what we need to be mindful of when we date someone.

The celebrity world seems to be brimming over with unhealthy

narcissism. The spotlight that shines in Hollywood is highly attractive to a person with NPD. Celebrities are equipped with fame and power, which feed a narcissist's ego. While many celebrities forge a balance through grace and humility, there is a significant number who bathe in the spotlight in complete self-indulgence.

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In 2006, Dr. Drew Pinsky and Mark Young conducted a scientific study with over 200 celebrities using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). The results showed that celebrities are 17.84% more narcissistic than the general public. It isn't surprising, given that most aspiring celebrities are driven by fame, money, and admiration. What better place for a narcissist to be than in the limelight? It's the equivalent of flipping on the porch light and watching moths come to life!

There are a vast number of celebrities who display many characteristics of narcissism (if not full blown NPD) such as Tom Cruise, Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian. While many people enter the celebrity arena with pre-existing characteristics of NPD, their egos balloon to extreme levels with every flash of the paparazzi camera, VIP entrance admission, limo service, and autograph request. These things often lead to a sense of entitlement as Reese Witherspoon displayed during her husband's DUI arrest.

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When it comes to the business world, narcissists are generally successful individuals. This is why the political arena and corporate scene is another area with a high concentration of NPD. These individuals generally attract their mates with their charisma, larger-than-life persona and their successful

careers. Those with extreme NPD believe that they are the best, and such confidence can certainly be attractive. Narcissists consider themselves special and those who are accepted into their circle *must* be special by default.

## **Prince Charming**

In 2000, I met a charismatic man named Seth who offered me the world on a silver platter. There were times in which I questioned whether our courtship was too good to be true. His parents had been married for 25 years, he was on his way up in a very promising career and I felt like I was living a fairytale. Seth told me all of the things that I wanted to hear and showered me with poems, flowers, shopping sprees, and vacations. My friends and family stood by in awe as this modern day Prince Charming wooed me and everyone around me. While there were red flags, the good outweighed the bad in the first few years and I swept my concerns under the rug and left them there.

Six years into our marriage, I sat on a therapist's couch and confided in the woman sitting across from me. I told her about Seth's lies and the manipulations which included financial schemes, stealing his parent's retirement savings and racking up 1.6 million dollars in debt – much of this was done behind my back. I described Seth's lack of remorse and his inability to show empathy. I explained that I had never felt so alone and unloved in my life. In a six-year period of time, I had been reduced to a shell of my former self. When I looked in the mirror, I was ashamed of the fake life that we were living. To those around us we were the golden couple, but behind closed doors my life was a living hell.

My therapist walked across the room and handed me a book from her bookshelf. The words seemed to jump off of the page, "Narcissistic Personality Disorder." To my naïve mind, it was thrilling to have a name for the hell that I was living. With a name, there was hope, or so I thought. My therapist went on

to explain that NPD is not curable and that, in fact, most mental health professionals will not treat those with this personality disorder. Her next words stung, "You either learn to live with this or you leave. There is no cure."

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I spent the next year and a half trying to block out my therapist's words. However, our marriage finally ended in 2009. In short order, I discovered that the only thing worse than being married to a narcissist is divorcing a narcissist. I quickly went from a 4,000 square foot luxury home to a local women's shelter. From there, I spent two years fearing for my life, sleeping with a hammer under my pillow and holding a can of mace in my hands as I made scrambled eggs for breakfast. I jumped at every noise. My modern day Prince Charming was actually a modern day Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Part of my healing has come from educating others on the red flags that I chose to ignore in the beginning of our relationship. I have listed them out for you below:

## **10 Red Flags**

**1. Excessive charm:** Question a person that seems too good to be true. Narcissists are masters at wooing their targets. If you are receiving tickets to your favorite ballet and bouquets of flowers larger than your Christmas tree before the third date, you may be dating a narcissist. Offers to whisk you away to Paris for New Year's Eve are fabulous but could be considered odd behavior if you just met last week and don't know his middle name!

**2. Overly confident:** A healthy dose of self-esteem is a good thing, but remain cautious if he seems to be the president of his own fan club. In short order, you are likely to become the secretary of that fan club.

**3. Haughty:** Pay attention to elitist comments and general

arrogance toward those who are “beneath” him. Narcissists will often put down co-workers, friends, and even family members. People with NPD are skilled at making you believe that they are superior. If you find yourself in their chosen circle, this attitude can rub off. Being chosen by someone so superior must mean that you too are superior, right? Wrong. That feeling will be short-lived. Trust me.

**4. Bragging:** Narcissists do not care about your feelings, views, or opinions. Narcissists are generally too obsessed with telling you how great they are to even ask about you. Their bragging rights carry over to a wide variety of topics including their family, heritage, money, cars, physical appearance, elite gym memberships, clothing and shoes.

**5. Grandiosity:** Narcissists seem to live by the phrase, “Go big or go home.” They like to be seen and known. Grandiosity is often their middle name. A narcissist will pick up an enormous group drink tab or buy everyone in the bar a round of shots. Their motivation is to be showy and to attract attention. These gestures could be easily interpreted as kindness, but this is the furthest thing from the truth. While a narcissist is signing the tab for drinks, he is also scanning the group to take inventory on how he can personally use each person to maintain his inflated self-image.

**6. Success:** There is a reason why the political and celebrity arenas are brimming over with narcissists. Narcissists are often found in leadership roles where they have free reign to dominate and dazzle those around them. They flourish in big cities where there is less accountability and less risk of developing a reputation that will haunt them.

**7. The Band-Aid:** Narcissists are professional Band-Aids. They will seek out your weaknesses (abandonment issues, poor self-image, etc.) and will morph themselves into your savior. Whatever voids you have, they will fill. This may sound great, but it will not last. Once you are hooked on them, they will

rip off the Band-Aid and leave you bleeding.

**8. Hypersensitivity:** Fluctuations between extreme confidence and extreme insecurity seem to be a common trait with narcissists. They will often perceive non-existent criticism and will respond by shutting down and sulking, or acting out in a rage. Any interpreted attack or criticism against the narcissist is dealt with in an unhealthy manner. In his mind, you are either with him or against him; there is no gray area.

**9. Moving Quickly:** Narcissists have a tendency to move at the speed of light. Has he extended an invitation to meet his parents after the second date? Did he have towels monogrammed with your initials as a gift for your first sleepover? These are red flags. By the way, beware of the monogrammed towels. I haven't found any studies to back my claim but there is something very suspicious about people with their initials sewn into hand towels!

**10. Lying:** You may initially notice a few white or grey lies. Take stock of these. Expert manipulators are well versed at twisting reality until you find yourself doubting reality.

Anyone in the dating world should be well versed on the red flags of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Dr. Craig Malkin, author, clinical psychologist and Instructor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School provides a list of five early warning signs to watch for in his recent article in the Huffington Post which discusses narcissism in the dating world. "In real life, the most dangerous villains rarely advertise their malevolence," states Dr. Malkin. This could be why narcissists are commonly known as wolves in sheep's clothing.

*Tina Swithin is the author of "Divorcing a Narcissist: One Mom's Battle" and the popular blog, "One Mom's Battle". Tina is a Huffington Post contributor. She is also a contributing writer and expert for HopeAfterDivorce.org and FamilyShare.com, LAFamily.com, and CupidsPulse.com. Tina's*

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