

July 16, 2024

For at least a century Western culture has been saturated with psychological jargon. The lexicon of our daily speech includes a host of clinical words such as “depression,” “triggered,” “antisocial,” and “codependent,” just to name a few. A clinical term that has been increasing in popularity since 2020 is “narcissist” (a person who has the condition narcissism). Psychiatry.org defines “narcissism” as “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity . . . , need for admiration, and lack of empathy.” Recently this condition featured in a range of headlines. Articles on narcissism usually include ways to protect oneself from a narcissist.

The relationship website Your Tango on July 8<sup>th</sup> suggested, “How to Instantly Tell if Your Husband Is a Narcissist (Or Just a Jerk).” The authors cited statistics that show clinical narcissism is rare, but casual use of the label is rampant. They recommend not applying “narcissist” to a selfish spouse too quickly since, “You create their magical ‘get out of jail free card’ because it's out of their control. ‘I couldn't help myself, honey...’ Ridiculous.” Whether narcissist or just a jerk, the article’s parting counsel was, “Either way, if he isn't getting better. It's time to leave.”

On July 10<sup>th</sup> the science and technology news portal, Phys.Org, featured, “Looking for an 'Outside the Box' Hire? You Might Get a Rule-Bending Narcissist.” The article exposed how the adjectives and adverbs recruiters list in their job advertisements increase the likelihood of hiring narcissists. A University of Maryland researcher stated, “Terms like ‘ambitious,’ ‘thinks outside the box,’ ‘communicates persuasively’ and ‘thinks strategically’ . . . such attractive keywords . . . disproportionately reel in narcissistic applicants.” The writer offers nothing to counter this attraction, just this warning to employers.

The July 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the New York Times contained, “Narcissism Is a Trait That’s Hard to Shake, Study Says.” The cited study was published in Psychological Bulletin and, “. . . analyzed 51 studies with more than 37,000 participants — mostly from North America, Europe and New Zealand — to explore how narcissism changes over a person’s life span.” The extent of the change could be summarized in two words, “Very little.” A researcher defined the classic narcissist as, “. . . superior to others, craves admiration and has an inflated sense of self-importance. They are typically very confident, assertive and want to be in leadership positions.” This expert concluded that people with toxic levels of narcissism do not change.

If King David’s son, Absalom, were alive today, he would have been diagnosed as a narcissist. For starters, Absalom wanted everyone to admire Him. He took great pride in his hair and its fullness. Absalom made a spectacle of his annual haircut by publicly weighing his shorn locks. These tresses weighed 5 pounds (2 Sam 14:26). Absalom also built a giant stone monolith to make sure future generations remembered him (2 Sam 18:18). Absalom bought a fancy ride and hired a fifty-man security detail to travel with him everywhere he went (2 Sam 15:1). Absalom could not wait for his father’s death to ascend to the throne, so Absalom staged a coup against King David (2 Sam 15:10).

Ironically, it was the hair that Absalom was so proud of that was Absalom's undoing. During the coup, Absalom rode under a tree and his hair got caught in the branches (2 Sam 18:9). Absalom was left dangling from the tree, where government agents were able to kill him (2 Sam 18:14-15). These agents created a second stone memorial to Absalom with the rocks they piled on his grave (2 Sam 18:17).

King David took extreme measures to protect himself from the narcissist in his life. However, in Psalm 3 God also inspired David to pen the prayer for future generations to use for protection from narcissists: "Rise up, LORD! Save me, my God! You strike all my enemies on the cheek; You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; may Your blessing be on Your people" (Psa 3:7-8).