

Collective Narcissism

Narcissism, Culture and Society*

by
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Can families, organizations, ethnic groups, churches, and even whole nations be safely described as “narcissistic” or “pathologically self-absorbed”? Wouldn't such generalizations be a trifle racist and more than a trifle wrong? The answer is: it depends.

Human collectives (states, firms, households, institutions, political parties, cliques, bands) acquire a life and a character all their own. The longer the association or affiliation of the members, the more cohesive and conformist the inner dynamics of the group, the more persecutory or numerous its enemies, the more intensive the physical and emotional experiences of the individuals it is comprised of, the stronger the bonds of locale, language, and history -- the more rigorous might an assertion of a common pathology be.

Such an all-persuasive and extensive pathology manifests itself in the behavior of each and every member. It is a defining, though often implicit or underlying, mental structure. *It has explanatory and predictive powers (italics, RP)*. It is recurrent and invariable; a pattern of conduct melded with distorted cognition and stunted emotions. And it is often vehemently denied.

A possible DSM-like list of criteria (301.81) for narcissistic organizations or groups:

An all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning at the group's early history and present in various contexts. Persecution and abuse are often the causes, or at least the antecedents, of the pathology.

Five (or more) of the following criteria must be met:

1. The group as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, feel grandiose and self-important (e.g., they exaggerate the group's achievements and talents to the

point of lying, demand to be recognized as superior simply for belonging to the group and without commensurate achievement).

2. The group as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, are obsessed with group fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance, bodily beauty or performance, or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering ideals or political theories.
3. The groups as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, are firmly convinced that the group is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status groups (or institutions).
4. The groups as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, require excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation, or failing that, wish to be feared and to be notorious (Narcissistic Supply).
5. The group as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, feel entitled. They expect unreasonable or special and favorable priority treatment. They demand automatic and full compliance with expectations. They rarely accept responsibility for their actions (“alloplastic defenses,” they blame others). This often leads to antisocial behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
6. The group as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, are “interpersonally exploitative”, i.e., uses others to achieve their own ends. This often leads to antisocial behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
7. The groups as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, are devoid of empathy. They are unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of other groups. This often leads to antisocial behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

8. The group as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, are constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about them. This often leads to antisocial behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

9. The group as a whole, or members of the group, acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group, are arrogant and sport haughty behaviors or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, punished, limited, or confronted. This often leads to antisocial behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

**Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*, Sam Vaknin, PhD. Narcissus Publications, Prague and Skopje, 2003.

Some Groups Exhibiting Narcissistic Behavior

The Twelve Tribes – *Elbert Eugene Spriggs*

The Body – *Roland Robidoux*

The Brethren – *Jim Roberts*

The Family of Love (a.k.a. The Children of God) – *David “Moses” Berg*

The Branch Davidians – *David Koresh*

Jonestown – *Jim Jones*

Heaven’s Gate – *Marshall Applewhite*