

Narcissists Battle 'Self-Perpetuating Cycle' of Pain

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They feel excluded, sometimes even when they're not, which may fuel problematic traits

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Narcissists can feel socially excluded, which may only fuel narcissistic traits. (Getty Images/diego_cervo)

It can be hard to feel sympathy for narcissists, who often lack empathy for others. But a new study sets the ground for, if not a sympathetic view, then a new way to look at those who are constantly aiming to defend their inflated ego, reports the *Washington Post*. It finds that people with high narcissism scores who show a heightened sensitivity to social cues and a desire to dominate social situations feel more excluded than their peers—and often they are. Narcissists tend to be ostracized due to their aggression, arrogance, and tendency to view benign social cues as negative, researchers say. And this can exacerbate narcissistic traits over time, creating a "self-perpetuating cycle" of pain.

"Many people think of narcissism in terms of entitlement and arrogance, but our research highlights that narcissists also frequently experience social pain," lead study author Christiane Büttner, a postdoctoral researcher in social psychology at the University of Basel, tells the *Post*. Her team focused on so-called grandiose or overt narcissists, who across large-scale surveys reported being ostracized more frequently than individuals with lower levels of narcissism, per CNN. While experiments showed people often choose to avoid highly narcissistic individuals, these narcissists were more likely to perceive even ambiguous social interactions as deliberately exclusionary, per the study published Thursday in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

"Narcissism may contribute to social exclusion, but ostracism itself can also fuel the development of narcissistic traits," Büttner says in a release. In other words, "narcissists who are excluded may become even more narcissistic in response, potentially increasing their likelihood of future exclusion," she tells the *Post*. The findings indicate that if we have to live with narcissists, it might be best to meet them head-on—in the proper setting. "Addressing these dynamics in structured ways, whether in workplaces,

therapy, or social interactions, could help reduce the negative consequences of exclusion for both narcissistic individuals and those around them," says Büttner. (More narcissism stories.)