

NARCISSISM

# The Hidden Danger of the Homicidal Narcissist

When ego threats, perceived slights, and romantic rejections can lead to murder.

Posted January 28, 2023

Reviewed by Vanessa Lancaster



## KEY POINTS

- Narcissistic personality disorder is rare. Studies have found that approximately one percent of the population meets the criteria.
- Most people with narcissistic personality disorder are not violent. But NPD seems to increase violence risk.
- Those with NPD often exploit and manipulate to protect their image and get needs met. People with NPD who kill, do so for the same reasons.



Alex Murdaugh is currently on trial for the cold-blooded murders of his wife and son. He is also facing a wealth of financial crimes; over ninety at last count. As usual, several people have weighed in on the psyche of the al-

US

Source: used with permission by Ferault  
on Pixabay

word "narcissism" quickly  
surfaced.

Here is what attorney Eric Bland, representing one of the families, said when talking about the overwhelming evidence against Murdaugh and arguing that the best thing he could do for his remaining family was to come clean and help law enforcement.

*"But he's such a narcissist—is he going to think of what this will do to his son, brothers, and cousins?"*

Moscow, Idaho, police have charged Bryan Kohberger with the murder of four college students on November 13, 2022. In the seven weeks between the murders and Bryan's arrest, several experts have weighed in on the psychological profile of the unknown murderer.

The word "narcissist" came up repeatedly. Here was one headline:

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

US

*sist."*

After Bryan Kohberger's arrest for the four Idaho slayings, body language expert Patti Wood told The Sun that Bryan Kohberger was a "charming narcissist" who reminded her of Brian Laundrie (who murdered girlfriend Gabby Petito in 2021).

Larry Rudolph was an affluent dentist charged and convicted of his wife's murder during a big game hunt in Africa. This description is how a former friend and colleague (and subsequent witness for the prosecution) described him:

*"His demented narcissism allows him to consider himself righteous, even though he is beyond evil."*

Clearly, professionals and lay people have a common belief that narcissism and violence are linked. But are they? And, if so, how and, more importantly, when?

## What Do We Mean By Narcissism?

Narcissism has been a popular buzzword for the past 10 years. The clinical term for a clinically diagnosable "personality disorder" has become an insult of choice in recent years. The term has been misused and overused so flagrantly that it's almost meaningless when labeling truly destructive tendencies.

Like all personality traits, narcissism is on a continuum; we all lie somewhere along it. But if we're going to look at the relationship between narcissism and violence, we've got to get

*disorder.*

THE BASICS

What Is Narcissism?

[Find a therapist who understands narcissism.](#)

Contrary to popular belief, narcissism doesn't mean excessive self-love. It's more accurate to say that people with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) are in love with an idealized, grandiose image of themselves that they have developed to avoid deep feelings of insecurity. But propping up and protecting these delusions of grandeur takes a lot of work—and that's where the dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors come in.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

For someone to be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder, they must meet at least five of these criteria:

US

- *Preoccupation with fantasies of success and power.* "I live in a fantasy where I exaggerate my accomplishments and relationships to myself and others."
- *A feeling of being unique.* "Because I am so special, I can only be understood by other special people. I want and deserve to be around high-status people, places, and things."
- *Requirement of excess admiration.* "I want relationships where I am the center of attention, and you shower me with praise, attention, and loyalty. Stop doing this, and you have betrayed me."
- *Sense of entitlement.* "I don't have to earn special treatment; I deserve it."
- *Interpersonally exploitive.* "I have no problem using people to meet my own needs. Sometimes it's malicious, and sometimes it's because I can't even see that you have them."
- *Lack of empathy.* "You are responsible for my feelings, but I don't care about yours."
- *Envious of others.* "I am threatened by people who have something I don't and look for ways to knock them down a peg or two."
- *Being arrogant and domineering.* "Challenge me, criticize me, or ignore my needs, and I will find ways to pay you back—with contempt, criticism, insults, or threats."

#### NARCISSISM ESSENTIAL READS

---



Revisiting  
Vulnerable  
Narcissism and



Two Takes on  
Narcissism

US

From a psychological standpoint, a person with a narcissistic personality disorder is dependent upon external sources to constantly validate, affirm, reassure and reinforce their idealized version of themselves. So it would make sense that a threat to their ego or public image, or an interpersonal rejection, would be most threatening to this person - and most dangerous to others.

## So Are Narcissists Violent?

Research says yes and no. Most people with NPD are not violent. But narcissistic personality disorder seems to increase violence risk. A [meta-analysis](#) of 437 narcissism and aggression studies involving 123,000 participants found that NPD was related to a twenty-one percent increase in aggression and an eighteen percent increase in physical violence. There is also a link between narcissistic personality disorder and [domestic violence](#). The risk of violence skyrockets when an antisocial personality disorder is also in the mix, a condition often termed "malignant" narcissism.

This study concluded that individuals high in narcissism were especially aggressive when provoked. They tend to be intolerant of any criticism or perceived slight or challenge and may react with outbursts of anger or aggression. They are also prone to fits of rage or aggression when they don't get their way.

In 2005, eighteen-year-old Brian Blackwell killed his parents in a rage after being confronted with a series of lies, deceit, and theft. He was unanimously diagnosed with a narcissistic

US

But they were also more aggressive without provocation. If you think of the psychology of narcissistic personality disorder—the need to maintain a superior image to themselves and others—it makes sense that someone with a severe narcissistic personality disorder might be willing to go to extreme lengths to protect or avenge it—even murder.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Carl Giraourd, the man charged in the 2020 Halloween sword attacks, was diagnosed with a narcissistic personality disorder by neuropsychologist William Pothier, who said he could trace the beginnings of this pathology back to the defendant's childhood. I have researched several murderous church leaders who murdered a spouse rather than tarnish their image with a divorce. In 2013, Glenn Ball and Darrell Puls surveyed 1,385 pastors, of which 30 percent participated by completing the survey. Of those participants, 31 percent were in the spectrum of having a narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

## The Bottom Line

US

Studies have found that approximately one percent of the population meets the criteria, with six percent displaying narcissistic traits, such as a need for admiration and a lack of empathy. While they often wreak havoc in professional and personal relationships, few of these one percent will ever murder anyone.

Dangerous narcissists are lousy business and romantic partners long before they commit murder. They exhibit warning signs before killing, a history of callous and manipulative behavior, a pattern of coercive control, previously expressed threats or fantasies of murder, a record of secrecy and pathological lying, and a history of verbal and nonlethal physical violence.

The degree of danger is in these behaviors, not the diagnosis. They tell us what we should pay attention to and when we should worry. After all, as the famous quote from the Network series *Maid* says, "Before they bite, they bark. Before they hit you, they hit near you."

### References

If you're interested in more forensic psychology and true crime articles, check out my free [true crime newsletter](#).

Puls, D. (2018). *Let Us Prey, Revised Edition: The Plague of Narcissist Pastors and What We Can Do About It*.  
<https://www.amazon.com/Let-Us-Prey-Revised-Narcissist/dp/1725257289>





ADVERTISEMENT

## About the Author

---



**Joni E. Johnston, Psy.D.**, is a clinical/forensic psychologist, private investigator, author, and host of the YouTube channel and podcast "Unmasking a Murderer."

Online: [Dr. Joni Johnston](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#)

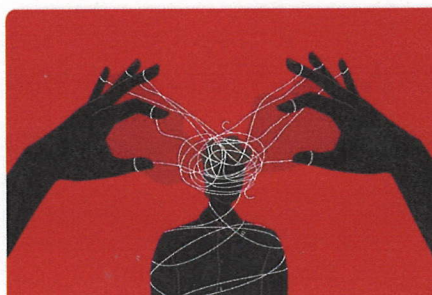
## More from Joni E Johnston Psy.D.

---



**SERIAL KILLERS** 4 MIN READ

**Strangulation,  
Sodium and**



**PERSONALITY** 6 MIN READ

**Getting Pleasure  
From Someone**

US

The 1970s murders of three young girls is back in the news.

Some serial killers, including the Long Island serial killer, are likely motivated by sexual sadism.



SUICIDE

5 MIN READ

### What Happens When a Staged Suicide Is Missed?

First responders often struggle to balance gathering information while minimizing further pain to a family. That may limit an investigation.



FANTASIES

6 MIN READ

### Murder and Mental Illness

Thirty-three year old Susie Zhao was a beloved poker player, friend and daughter.

## More from Psychology Today



NARCISSISM

5 MIN READ

### 10 Signs That You're in a



NARCISSISM

5 MIN READ

### The 8 Types of Children

A pathological narcissist isn't in love with their true self, but rather an idealized self-image.

### FAMILIES

Children scapegoated in a narcissistic family are often targeted with negative projections and burdened with adult responsibilities.

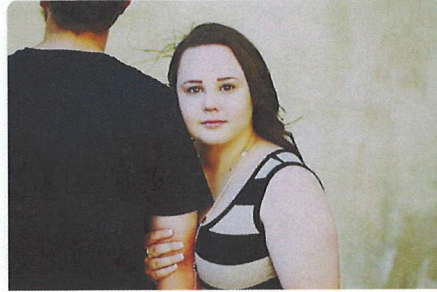


NARCISSISM

4 MIN READ

## Is Your Adult Child a Narcissist?

Sparing your adult child from a harsh, counterproductive label.



NARCISSISM

3 MIN READ

## 5 Reasons You're Attracted to Narcissists

Why do you keep choosing narcissistic partners?



NARCISSISM

4 MIN READ

## 10 Signs Your Boss or Manager Is a Narcissist

A narcissistic manager may exploit an employee without proper compensation, such as



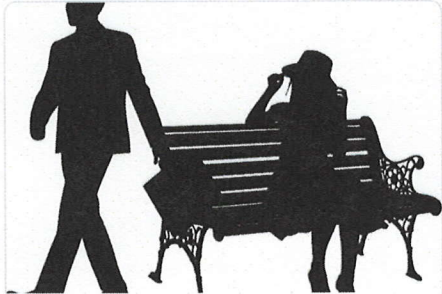
NARCISSISM

5 MIN READ

## Breaking the Trauma Bond Forged by Narcissistic Parents

US

victims, such as narcissistic parents and children.



NARCISSISM

4 MIN READ

### How Do Narcissists React to Breakups?

Narcissists may respond either particularly well or particularly poorly to breakups.



NARCISSISM

3 MIN READ

### Why Narcissists Can Forget Their Own Bad Behavior

A narcissist may expel bad behavior from their memory by using an unconscious defense mechanism: splitting.

## Find a Narcissistic Personality (NPD) Therapist

Get the help you need from a therapist near you—a FREE service from Psychology Today.

City or Zip

