

# INTRODUCTION TO NARCISSISM AWARENESS

Narcissists are basically people who think the world revolves around them (or if it doesn't, it should!). I (Paul) am a psychiatrist who has treated hundreds of people with this personality trait and thousands who have been negatively impacted by narcissists. In 1993, I appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey* show to discuss a book I had written about narcissists called *Don't Let Jerks Get the Best of You*, and another book on codependency (about being addicted to having narcissistic friends or mates) called *Love Is a Choice*. In reality, we all have a few of these narcissistic tendencies.

For many years, I have felt a strong need to write a serious psychological book about the causes and cures of narcissism and how to protect ourselves from narcissists. I have known and worked with one of my editors over the years, so she knows that I, like most authors, have a few of these narcissistic traits. So I asked her jokingly, "What do you want me to call the book, *Narcissism and How I Attained It?*" I told her it could consist of three hundred pictures of me along with a two-page autobiography. She laughed and said, "Paul, just try to recall any people you have come across in your life and career who are more narcissistic than you are and write about them!" I told her I thought I could do that.

A few years ago, I enjoyed a TV special based on the *New York Times* bestseller *You Might Be a Redneck If...* So, shortly after that, some friends of mine and I jokingly and spontaneously thought of some ideas for "You might be a narcissist if..." We took turns making up one liners about narcissistic behaviors we have observed in people over the years (including ourselves!). It created a more lighthearted avenue to confront each other on our own narcissistic traits. In fact, one night, I was supposed to pick up my friends at 6:00 p.m. for a ride to the restaurant where we had reservations,

## You Might Be A Narcissist if...

and I was so absorbed with writing material for this narcissism book that I lost track of time and was late. So, my buddy made me promise to add, “You might be a narcissist if you are so busy writing a book on narcissism that you forget to pick up your friends on time for a dinner date!” I hope this book will help us all see narcissism more clearly in others and ourselves.

At the same time, we do not want to make light of the serious devastation narcissists have inflicted on millions of people throughout history, including now, all around the world. We continually see numerous lives, marriages, families, even churches torn apart from the destructive forces of narcissism.

However, what we know to be true is that it is a rare person who intentionally sets out to destroy his<sup>1</sup> own life or the lives of the people he loves. But until we each become more conscious of which attitudes, feelings, and behaviors inadvertently hurt ourselves or others, we tend to go on for years repeating the same patterns, communicating in the same ways, not setting healthy boundaries, and so on. Life can become utterly frustrating and exhausting!

When we know what the issues are, we can change. Some of us will take longer than others to change, and some of us will need therapy to change, but we all *can* change. It is invigorating to know that we don't have to stay stuck, even if we're not struggling with narcissism. We can change the way we relate to the people who do struggle. Narcissistic character traits are very common. What we have come to see is that the more we are able to recognize and address these characteristics, the more we become truly free to love others as we love ourselves in healthy ways.

Over the years, we have found that many of our clients grew up in narcissistic homes. They don't know that they did. They don't know what is wrong with their lives. They initially don't realize that they have continued to fill their lives with other narcissists,

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1. Throughout the book, we will randomly make references to both male and female genders; in each case, the statement or example applies to both genders.

and this is why, no matter how hard they try, their relationships aren't working. It's because they haven't known what they're dealing with.

The great joy we have in our jobs is that once people can recognize the truth, they can begin to first get healthier themselves and then learn how to set healthier boundaries with others and initiate relationships with healthier people. These safer relationships provide them with the emotional energy they need in order to interact with the narcissists in their lives.

Our hope is that this book will put words to people's experiences. In fact, that is why our clients have urged us to put our thoughts into writing. As they heal, they come across so many others who are struggling with the same issues.

We are grateful that our clients have let us share some of their stories with you. We have, of course, changed their names and identifying information, but we believe that their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences relating to narcissism will help us all be able to see the issue at hand more clearly. Let us begin.