

Exercise: Read the passage, then fill in each of the numbered spaces with the correct form of the words given in the box.

COMPENSATE

ASSIST

RIVAL

EGO

PRIME

INTIMATE

EXPLOIT

Narcissistic personality disorder is relatively rare, affecting just [1-2% of Americans](#) by some estimates. But having some form of a relationship with someone who has narcissism is not uncommon. The disorder—characterized by arrogance, grandiosity, a lack of empathy, (1) _____, aggression, and a constant need for affirmation and admiration—also has a more alluring side. “We’re attracted to narcissists at first,” says Amy Brunell, professor of psychology at Ohio State University and a prolific researcher of narcissism. “They’re charming, they’re fun, they’re energetic, and then over time, the negative qualities come out more and more.”

Brunell wrote a recent [scientific article](#) on how to understand narcissism and cope when you’re in a relationship with a narcissist. Here’s what she says you should know about how to navigate those relationships.

As Brunell describes it, narcissists are “self-centered, they’re entitled, and very often they think the world should revolve around them.” But they don’t all present the same way.

A large body of work going back decades divides narcissism into three types: [agentic narcissism](#), [communal narcissism](#), and [vulnerable narcissism](#). Of the three, agentic narcissism is the most recognizable—and toxic. Agentic narcissists hold exalted views of themselves, seeing their competence and intelligence as far greater than that of others, Brunell explains. In an effort to maintain that self-image, they will often derogate the talents and temperaments of friends, colleagues, and family members. They are more invested in status and admiration than they are in (2) _____. They self-promote tirelessly, harbor grandiose fantasies of their prospects and projects, and often engage in (3) _____ with people—especially work colleagues—who threaten their sense of (4) _____.

“Ask these narcissists about themselves [and] they say, ‘Oh yeah, I’m so pro-social and so great,’” says Brunell. “But if you ask their peers about them, they actually see them as being kind of aggressive.”

Communal narcissists seek out admiration by being exceedingly—often excessively—caring and helpful, sometimes offering (5) _____ when it’s neither needed nor requested. That kind of other-directedness seems inconsistent with the me-first impulses of narcissism; however, the behavior does not come from a place of genuine altruism, but instead from a need to be loved and admired, Brunell says.

“Communal narcissists are self-enhancing,” she says. “They think they’re the most helpful person—that no one can do as much good as they do.”

The vulnerable narcissist is the most fragile type. Vulnerable narcissists have none of the overweening self-regard that is the province of the agentic or communal narcissist, Brunell explains; instead, they (6) _____ for a deep sense of low self-esteem. Often, they can be socially inhibited, defensive, anxious, and depressed—a painful suite of feelings that they try to battle with (7) _____, arrogance, defensiveness, and self-centeredness.

“Vulnerable narcissists feel bad about themselves,” says Brunell. “They are chronically mad that they’re not getting what they think is due them, so they tend to be more hostile. For a while, I struggled with understanding why vulnerable narcissists are narcissists at all, except they share the core feature of self-centeredness.”