

Comments From Henry J. Friedman, M.D. Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

George Conway's decision to reproduce the DSM-V criteria for the diagnosis of NPD points to one obvious aspect of what President Trump demonstrates on a daily basis, the self referential total concern with proving his invincible importance, his insensitivity to the suffering he imposes on others, the superficiality of his relationships with others where his concern is only with what he can get from them, these are all the basic aspects of pathological narcissism. It reminds me of the degree to which each of us, as individuals, has his or her narcissism as part of their personality; narcissism isn't necessarily a negative trait as we all have to have investments in ourselves, areas where we admire who we are, where we believe that our impact is important and that we have something special about our way of existing so that our confidence our very selfhood is built upon having enough positive narcissism i.e. what we see as self esteem.

However, and this is a big however, the line between healthy narcissism and pathological narcissism is pretty clear, if not absolute. I have often joked about Trump who is so often called narcissistic on TV and in the press, that he gives narcissism a bad name. By this I mean that what we see in Trump is much worse than what we observe with patients in our consulting room who either have NPD or have been the victim of a spouse or parent with manifest NPD. Why you ask is that the case? Basically there is a category that goes beyond NPD because the individual has even more power than a destructive parent or spouse. This becomes clear when you have a category of destructive narcissistic individuals in positions of great power, whether this be political power as in Hitler or Stalin (or Trump) or personal power like Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby or Matt Lauer. Imagine how inadequate it would appear to describe Hitler as having a NPD, really would be a reasonable response to this, you have to be kidding, it deserves a different category something far worse than NPD. It is with this in mind that I have coined a descriptive term, not a diagnosis but a term that conveys what we see in destructive leaders: GRANDIOSE, OMNIPOTENT PARANOID CHARACTER with leadership appeal.

Trump's grandiosity is linked with his paranoid leadership style. Identify an enemy (Jews for Hitler, illegal immigrant rapists, drug dealers and murderers for Trump) and then declare yourself as the only one who can eliminate the problem. Announce to the world a decline in the nation in exaggerated, unsubstantiated terms and then announce that only you can restore American or German greatness! This kind of destructive character can only do well when they are triumphant, they unravel as Trump appears to be doing, when they are frustrated and resisted by the free press. They become increasingly unhinged and begin to unravel and destroy the nation that they have hijacked, having convinced enough citizens that only they have the answer to these threatening groups and situations. Where does it end? With Hitler it was suicide, where will it be with Trump. As Michael Cohen said, he doubts that Trump will leave office peacefully either after an election where he is clearly defeated (He will claim it to be illegitimate) or if impeached and convicted that it was a witch hunt and illegal.

So is George Conway correct. No, but he is pointing in the right direction. Diagnosis, however, is besides the point. The destructiveness of his personality to the nation is the correct point and destructive behavior can be observed without any diagnosis of a mental illness that can be categorized according to the DSM-V.