

Narcissists Don't Forgive

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Contact: Susan Griffith susan.griffith@case.edu 216-368-1004 Case Western Reserve University

CASE PSYCHOLOGIST EXLINE STUDIES RELATIONSHIP OF NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY, FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is hard to do...especially for entitled people. When harsh words or actions tear a relationship apart, forgiveness can sometimes mend it. Because forgiveness implies letting go of justified feelings of resentment, it can be costly in terms of pride. Certain types of people--those with a high sense of narcissistic entitlement--may be especially reluctant to face the costs of forgiving others, according to Case Western Reserve University psychologist Julie Exline. The Case assistant professor of psychology examines the narcissistic personality in terms of its ability to forgive, in the article "Too Proud to Let Go: Narcissistic Entitlement as a Barrier to Forgiveness" in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. According to Exline, the idea of the narcissist grew out of Greek mythology and the concept of excessive admiration toward oneself.

"As part of that self-admiration, narcissists typically have a sense of entitlement in which they feel superior to others and expect special, preferential treatment," she said. "When social relationships do not provide the special treatment that is expected, the entitled person is quickly offended and demands repayment or revenge to rectify the situation.

"For people with a sense of entitlement, letting go of justifiable feelings of resentment may be regarded as too costly or as morally inappropriate. Exline was the lead author on the *Journal* article, with contributing researchers Roy Baumeister from Florida State University, Brad Bushman from the University of Michigan, W. Keith Campbell from the University of Georgia, and Eli Finkel from Northwestern University.

"Because of their inflated sense of entitlement, narcissists will be easily offended by others and will not readily forgive," write the researchers. "They will insist that others repay them and will be reluctant to 'lose face' by forgiving--particularly if justice has not been restored." The report also states that entitled persons not only expect special treatment, but also have an overwhelming preoccupation with defending their rights. This focus on defending self-interest can get in the way of forgiveness.

The researchers completed six studies that examined people's willingness to forgive in a variety of situations, including cases from everyday life in which people were hurt or offended, hypothetical offense situations, and a laboratory-based game situation in which one subject was faced with aggressive behavior by another. Across all six studies, a sense of entitlement was associated with unforgiving attitudes. The researchers also tracked forgiveness over time, and again, found that narcissistic

individuals would not let go of their grudges. The studies also revealed that the effects of entitlement operated independently from other major predictors of forgiveness, such as religiosity, relationship closeness, offense severity and the presence of apologies.

"These studies suggest that a sense of entitlement is a substantial barrier to forgiveness," stated Exline. "Entitled people are likely to insist on full repayment before they will consider forgiving. If they don't receive this payment, they will often hold grudges on principle. Over time, such unforgiving tendencies may prevent the healing of wounded relationships and lead to social alienation."

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