

# Grandiose? Perfectionist? Then you may be a narcissist, says Dalhousie prof

THE CHRONICLE HERALD

Published April 14, 2016 - 5:23pm

Last Updated April 14, 2016 - 5:28pm

## Apple founder picked as a prime example



Professor Simon Sherry, whose personality research team recently published two studies on narcissistic perfectionism. (CONTRIBUTED)

Clinical psychologist Simon Sherry knows a narcissist when he sees one—it's part of his job.

The Dalhousie University professor has just completed a study on narcissistic-perfectionist personality types.

Steve Jobs? Totally.

Donald Trump?

“As a clinical psychologist, I have to be very cautious,” he said in an interview.

For Sherry, Apple founder Jobs was a prime example of a narcissistic-perfectionist who made huge demands of others, a man who was known to harshly criticize those who did not meet his own high standards. Sherry also described Jobs' interpersonal style as “corrosive,” and led to seemingly unending conflict throughout his life.

“Despite his accomplishments he left a wake of destruction behind him,” said Sherry.

Jobs has been the subject of extensive scholarship, so fairly easy to classify.

Sherry is more cautious on political leaders widely viewed as sharing such traits, including dictators like Adolf Hitler or Bashar al-Assad.

He did say narcissists are often good at winning elections and can appear to be capable leaders, but are often caught up by ethical violations, impeachment proceedings, or protests against their rule.

“If you're looking for narcissistic-perfectionists among notorious political leaders, you're probably looking in the right place,” said Sherry.

Led by Sherry, Dalhousie's Personality Research Team ran two studies, the first involving a sample of university students logging daily diary entries reporting on their own behavior. The second included viewpoints of parents, romantic partners and friends of those with a narcissistic-perfectionist personality.

Researchers defined a narcissistic-perfectionist as someone who is grandiose, has a high sense of entitlement, and holds unrealistic expectations of other people.

"We can make a reasonable, evidence-based argument that personality traits like grandiosity and entitlement are on the rise in North America. This may be due in part to parenting practices, whereas children are pedestaled and given a unique place of importance within their home environments," said Sherry, who led the study.

However, such parenting practices are hardly exclusive to North American youth or university students. In China, an entire generation of only children has grown up coddled and indulged by their parents, after the Communist government rolled out its One Child Policy in 1979 to curb China's rapidly growing population.

When these children enter the wider world, the bubble of entitlement and grandiosity is often burst, leading to displays of anger, rage, and other abusive behaviours such as verbal or emotional harassment, according to Sherry.

He said that both narcissistic and perfectionist personality types are also well-represented among young adults at university, which formed part of his own research sample. Parents and others close to them were surveyed by researchers to help fill in blind spots on narcissists' sense of self.

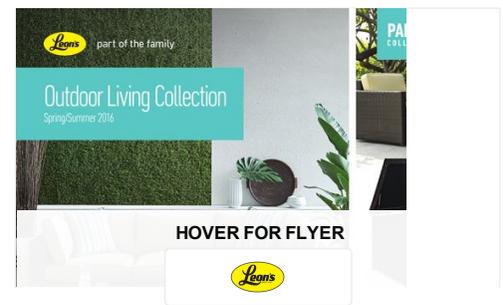
For example, a narcissistic-perfectionist person may view himself as a victim, constantly disappointed and let down by others. However, for spouses, coworkers, and others close to such people, such personality types are often the bullies who belittle them or make unrealistic demands.

"We may be characterizing a problem of our times," said Sherry. "It may very well be that we live in an age of entitlement where grandiose demands are often made in everyday life."

He said that the next phase of his research includes testing out the idea that forced exposure to narcissistic-perfectionist personalities can make people ill, an idea that Sherry is currently testing out in the lab.

This may happen when someone is forced to put up with a narcissistic-perfectionist boss when the economy is bad and jobs are scarce.

### This Week's Flyers



### From Around the Web

Promoted Links by Taboola

Jeff Bridges' Magnificent Home Is Beyond Stunning  
Lonny

A look at the six homicide victims so far this year in Halifax

'Huge police presence' in raid of Dartmouth home

Meet the brewmasters behind Hell Bay Brewing Co.  
Local Brewmaster Spotlight