

PHENOMENON

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 33rd magazine of the World Intelligence Network.

Many thanks to our contributors. The cover photos are of those who were interviewed by Scott Douglas Jacobsen:

Dr. Ramani Durvasula, Dr. Viktoryia Kazlouskaya, MD, PhD, Dr. Carol Tavis and Dr. Seth Meyers.

As this is a magazine primarily for smart people, and we have a tradition of having publishing dates conforming to a mathematical series, can you answer this riddle.

"This edition's date requires an equation: Let the day equal the number of the month, when put alongside the second half of the year, whilst sharing that between all the current number of magazines."

How does this give our full date of publication? Write the equation.

We also have a traditional Sudoku puzzle.

I have deigned to supply an article, plus a couple of poems.

James R. Macbeath has submitted a poem, too.

The magazine is peppered with colourful artwork and photos. Please enjoy all the art, photography and thoughts put to the page.

Finally, my humble thanks go to Scott Douglas Jacobsen for his sophisticated and profound interviews. Both Krystal and I are indebted to him once more.

Yours,

Graham Powell

DR. Ramani Durvasula on Authenticity and No Contact

Part One

Author(s): Scott Douglas Jacobsen



Dr. Ramani Durvasula is a licensed clinical psychologist in Los Angeles, CA, Professor Emerita of Psychology at California State University, Los Angeles, and the Founder and CEO of LUNA

Education, Training & Consulting. She is an author of several books including:

Should I Stay or Should I Go: Surviving A Relationship with a Narcissist, and "Don't You Know Who I Am?": How to Stay Sane in an Era of Narcissism, Entitlement, and Incivility.

The focus of Dr. Durvasula's clinical, academic and consultative work is the etiology and impact of narcissism and high-conflict, entitled, antagonistic personality styles on human relationships, mental health, and societal expectations. Her work has been featured at SXSW, TEDx, Red Table Talk, the Today Show, and Investigation Discovery. You can also find her on YouTube where she has accumulated millions of views on her videos discussing narcissism on her successful channel, and on social media @DoctorRamani. Now she will be adding the role of host to her resume as she launches her new podcast, Navigating Narcissism with Dr. Ramani, a show that focuses on narcissism and its impact on relationships.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Okay, so today we are here with Dr. Ramani Durvasula. So we're going to talk about a few things, more in a constructive frame, which I think is important because with the work that you do and have specialized in-there's a lot of darker facets of it, which can be a bummer. So in terms of things that might be considered, say, a counter to this, as you've presented in some of your videos, which would be in one word, authenticity. How do we present ourselves in our lives in terms of just living out more authentically?

Dr. Ramani Durvasula: So there's lots of different ways to live more authentically. I mean, you've got to remember, this is an intrapsychic process first, right? So we have to have plumbed the depths of ourselves to figure out who we are, what we're about, our values, again, connecting into really what we're about. How do we show up as more authentic? It's not being performative. It's touching back in with ego versus us genuinely wanting to be a part of the conversation.

It is also, I think in many ways, one thing that thwarts authenticity in a social situation is anxiety, right? So the more anxious we become, in some ways, the more distance we get from our authentic selves. In fact, Carl Rogers would argue that anxiety is a symptom of not being able to live in our authentic self, right? So that's really what anxiety is. And so when we are anxious, and that could be created because we feel we're being evaluated, because we might place certain kinds of importance on the people we're talking to, we're trying to impress the people, or we somehow might feel judged, or whatever the reason is, the social milieu is bringing up anxiety. Those are often times we won't be authentic.

And whatever that looks like is going to vary. Like I said, in some cases, it might be that we're performative. In some cases, we're talking more about what we do rather than who we are. And I think that difference of talking about who we are rather than what we do, which is why you'll see one of the kind of experiments that's often floated in certain organizations, or like when you're getting to know a new group, is in the first six hours, no one's allowed to talk about

what they do for a living. You just have to talk; you have to be in the moment, and so that kind of thing will lend itself to authenticity.

The less we fall into what we do for a living, or our titles, or any of that, and the more we stay present in a given moment, how we're feeling, or commenting on the avocado, or "I don't care for cilantro," or whatever it may be, we actually do show up more authentically. And those are some of the things we can do to show up authentically. I also think that- and this is probably going to be an unpopular opinion-is honoring, if we feel a discomfort, someone brings out a discomfort in us, whatever it may be, it may be because they're behaving badly, it may be because they are antagonistic, or dominating the conversation. It could be that they represent something that we still haven't fully worked through.

I often tell people it's okay at those times if you feel like you don't have to force yourself to participate, because I think a lot of authenticity, again, goes back to that anxiety, forcing ourselves to interact with people whose conduct is making us uncomfortable. And so, I think all of those things can contribute to it, but, really, it's that alignment of focusing more on the moment, and talking about who we are, what we stand for, versus what we do.

Jacobsen: And this getting in touch with being more genuine and in the moment.

Durvasula: Yes, it's more genuine in the moment.

Jacobsen: When someone is doing this and hasn't been doing as fully as they could, and doesn't have any formal diagnosis of a problem, but instead shows patterns of people-pleasing or living slightly into

a false self, what might be some potential consequences, socially or some of their professional life, if they begin living more authentically over time, more in touch with their true self-so to speak?

Durvasula: As a person starts living authentically over time, I don't think everyone is fully prepared for all the consequences. In some ways, people will experience a greater sense of inner peace. They'll feel more settled, more in tune with their bodies, and they may dread certain interactions less, or have fewer of them altogether.

As a person becomes more authentic, I actually think they're going to lose people. Their social circle will narrow, and they'll find themselves with more time on their hands, because they'll start saying, "No, that doesn't feel authentic."

They may even end up making less money, as they might turn down opportunities that aren't aligned with their sense of self, with their value system, with their meaning and purpose. I always say, "If you're really on this quest for authenticity, everything is about to get a whole hell of a lot smaller outside of you, and a whole hell of a lot bigger inside of you."

Jacobsen: What are the consequences in that intra-psychic realm, in what we would term "mental health"?

Durvasula: Well, again, if you look at a humanistic, Rogerian conception of mental health, humanists didn't really talk about "mental illness." There was no such thing. We focused on how we are buffeted by the conditions placed on us by the world. Those disconnects of having to please the demands of the world, is what

were causing this anxiety in us. Basically, it's us being commanded to be something other than what we truly are in order to be accepted by the world.

That would be the closest definition of mental illness a humanist would ever float. They wouldn't view a person as "mentally ill". This is why I've always adhered to a humanistic framework. It is the conditions of the world around them. If a person is able to work more towards that authenticity, you're asking if they can live more authentically, where that will take them. I think you will see an abating of anxiety. You will see a mental clarity.

It will be balanced. I have gotten some pushback from undergraduate and graduate students for 22 years. "Does being authentic mean you just go into a room and say whatever you want?" I said, "No, an authentic person can still read a room. But after reading the room and recognizing, 'I need to be careful about what I say here.'" They may also make the assessment, 'I don't know how much longer I want to stay in this room,' or, 'I may not come into a room like this again,'" right? An authentic person is not an unhinged person. They're a very clear person. The best way I can describe it, and I'm drawing this from embodied trauma work, is that they feel more in their bodies—they feel more in alignment with themselves. I think you will see a greater sense of well-being, probably a greater sense of expressed gratitude. You might see higher happiness scores. You're definitely going to see lower anxiety. You'll see a lower ego, however that gets quantified. There's going to be less of that need to prove oneself. In fact, you're probably going to

see far, far less antagonism, because an authentic person doesn't need to get into an argument with someone. "I know who I am. I know what I am about." If someone has a different opinion, they can coexist with that opinion and not feel driven by ego to convince the other person otherwise. That's a pretty damn peaceful way to live.

Jacobsen: I'll share something from my own experience. I have this in print. I grew up in an alcoholic home, in a divorced family. I cut contact about nine years ago with my father after receiving some messages and dealing with some family events that required the police. I was kicked out of the house around age 14. When I came back, basically, families, understandably, distanced themselves from that type of home—so to speak.

When I came back, age 14 after a couple months of being kicked out, in the small town where I grew up in, I became friends with some near-retired or retired people at a small, little restaurant called Veggie Bob's with the number 604-888-1223. I recall something you were saying, which was noteworthy, in some of your audiovisual presentations about people you have noticed who are authentic, typically, are older, something around 50.

Durvasula: I have to say: I haven't met many people much south of 50 who are truly authentic. But I've seen quite a few who become more authentic as they get older.

Jacobsen: Those individuals I mentioned would get together once a week or so to have a little discussion group at this restaurant, which was also a grocery store. At some point, they called it Veggie Bob's Growcery Café, but "Gro-" was spelled G-R-O-W. They invited me,

as a young person—14, 15, 16—to take part, listen, and make a few comments, and so on. That was very helpful for me at that point in my life, to see people who were quite comfortable in their skin because, frankly, they didn't have a lot of time left.

Also, they had lived their lives. They were in a small town where people generally keep each other in check because everyone knows everyone. It's hard to tell big lies or to be, at least, too grandiose. That's opining, but I'll leave it at that. So, when you're seeing older people who tend to be more authentic, why?

Durvasula: I think a couple of things. Not all older people are authentic, right? Sadly, authenticity remains a relatively rare quality in our world. In a way, the system is set up to make it difficult, right? The idea of a small town might would imply farther from an urban center, and all of the pressures and demands that come from it. I don't think a small town necessarily facilitates authenticity.

There's also the performative nature of some places. This isn't a complete diss on Capitalism, though some of it is. Capitalism requires us to morph into something else. We are constantly being told that something is wrong with us, but there's always a product we can buy to "fix" ourselves. That mindset can definitely be a thief authenticity.

As people get older, first of all, you have more data. You know how these stories end. You know the story doesn't go forever. I think there's probably more of a willingness to self-reflect on mistakes

one has made. It's time served, but time served doesn't work for everyone-that accumulation.

The "carrots and sticks" have been removed, right? By older age, a person has had children, a career, a picket fence if that is what they choose, have owned homes or not owned homes, gone through education. All of the "carrots and sticks" are removed. So, at that point, you really are living with whatever you have made. Some people may continue working until later in life. Some may be retired. It is choices not from a social performative metric. "You must get married. You must have a child. You must own a home. You must have a certain type of career. You must have this much money in the bank." This fritters away.

When those environmental demands lift, it becomes easier for authenticity to flow. What makes authenticity tough is the tension between the true self and what the world demands. Additionally, we are going to see a cohort effect with older people, at least until now, and probably for the next 10 years, maybe not even that much, are not as influenced by social media. So, they are not being as performative of "I have to keep up with my friend who is doing this." Some older people embrace it. By and large, it will not be a normative tool of social engagement. They may not feel the social press of "What do you mean my friend can run two laps around the track at the local high school, but I can only do one?" Maybe, they go and see the person. But you don't have this big press, which is one more carrot-and-stick dynamic that starts to fade as people age.

You don't live with that template and framework. This is why people don't always study what they want in higher education, or why they don't pursue careers that they value. It's why they enter marriages they didn't truly want in the first place, or why they don't feel comfortable coming out about sexuality or gender. All of these are responses to social pressure, right?

As these pressures are lifted, you don't have the same fight. All those other societal pressures steal the authenticity. The other pressure to authenticity is our need for belonging. These two don't fit well together. Because the people we wish to belong to, may be for example, a family of origin, the people who reside in the region we live in, may be a cultural group. In order to belong to the group, authenticity is what needs to be traded out.

You gave the example of going no contact. That's not an easy thing to do. But it has saved many people's lives. Many people have said that going no contact from a harmful system of any kind—whether it's a former partner, in-laws, family of origin, or even people you worked with—can be what lifts and finally allows their authenticity to flow. They no longer have to make excuses for themselves or be constantly shut down.

I don't care how damn authentic you are. If you are in a system that dismantles or creates chaos in their life, it's going to test them. The capacity to step away from such a system is not easy. On top of that, society very harshly judges people who make the choice. Nobody wakes up one morning and says, "We had an argument. I'm

going no contact." No contact is a massive iceberg. That iceberg is enormous under the water.

By the time someone decides to go no contact—not from a petulant or punitive place, but from a place of "this isn't good for me"—they've already suffered and tried countless ways to make it work. Eventually, they realize, "No more." It's often someone like me who comes in and says, "This pattern is never going to change, so you can decide how many more years you want to pay into this." I let them know that nothing will change, and they can make their decisions accordingly.

All of those factors are thieves of authenticity. If a person becomes authentic, the toxic systems want often nothing to do with them either. Those systems will keep trying to break them, but if the authentic person stands their ground, the system may eventually distance itself. I always liken it to looking at Medusa—they'll turn to stone.

It gets tricky. In older people, the aspirational piece often shifts. They start doing things out of genuine interest, no longer trying to achieve proverbial tenure, make partner, get notches on the belt. They think, "I enjoy this." By that age, people have often honed their skills and know what they're good at. They also know what they're not good at, and they stay in the areas they enjoy. I think these things just come with time.

Honestly, I have yet to meet a person under 30 who is authentic. I've never met that person.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HON. MR. DEREK GALON



ROSEAU, DOMINICA

Part Two

Jacobsen: You touched a little on the aspect of this in 'cultural groups.' If you have sexual or gender identity, or comes from a particular ethnic and cultural group, or the way people are gendered depending on the society, how do those pressures, as younger age especially, punish people from expressing their genuine interests, emotions, and intellectual curiosities?

Durvasula: Oh, they punish them horribly. If we think about queer people throughout history, for the longest time, they had to remain silent. They couldn't live in a way that aligned with their gender identity, nor could they publicly express love and affection for somebody they wanted to talk about losing authenticity. It's a tremendous tragedy.

This often resulted in mental health fallout, even suicidality, because it was too dangerous to live authentically. Had they done so, they could have been arrested, put in prison, or beaten up. And in many parts of the world, this reality still exists. The pressures weren't limited to queer individuals. People couldn't marry someone of a different religion, faith, or race—those things were against the law on top of it. So, it's only in recent memory, at least in some countries; there has been a shift. People have gained the ability to move through the world as their true selves.

We used to—literally—codify in law that people could not be authentic. You had to be what society demanded of you, or you would face punishment. Religious systems reinforced this too: “If you did this, or have sex now, or you do that, then you’re going to hell.” Essentially, “Don’t be yours.”

When we look at the myriad punitive structures that have been in place, and the myriad discriminatory laws that still exist in some places, people are literally forbidden by law from being authentic. That’s my point. When that’s the case, there’s real danger—a person could be arrested, disappear, or something like that. It is another pressure. Even if those laws change, I believe there’s still an intergenerational transmission of fear of coming out. Someone might think, “If I come out, I’ll lose my family.” We’re back to that need for belonging.

People often feel like they’re forced to make impossible choices. “I am going to have to distance myself from family.” It might sound simple on paper, but it’s incredibly difficult in practice. These kinds of societal pressures are immense barriers to authenticity.

Artists have often struggled with this too, being told their work isn't a legitimate way to seek out a living. Yet many artists achieve authenticity because they chose to pursue their passion, even though it was considered "off track" of what was considered productive, money-making work.

They would almost be forced into that position or have to give up on that dream. That social pull is a palpable and real pressure. The more marginalized someone is in society—whether by race, gender, religion, or social class—the more they have to bend to the will of what the society wants of them to stay safe. The more marginalized in society, then the barriers authenticity are even greater because showing up authentically can lead to being shut down or worse.

Jacobsen: Be mindful of time. Last question: If someone has developed, at least, a modest skill in authenticity and going no contact, what will happen with the narcissists in their life—to make this, at least, topical?

Durvasula: Listen, authenticity is not a destination; it's daily work, and it's uncomfortable. I really want to put a fine point on that. While authenticity can create a sense of peace and allay anxiety in you, it also means that every day can be uncomfortable because the rest of the world hasn't caught on. You're often making choices that people view sideways or even feel inconvenienced by. You're not going with the flow, and you're seen as that difficult, dissenting voice.

So, in a way, authentic people often have more difficult lives if they are fully leaning into their authenticity. Narcissistic people want nothing to

do with authentic people. They will gaslight them, shame them, make fun of them, and manipulate them.

If you are truly authentic and doing that work every day, the narcissistic person in your life will eventually lose interest or be uninterested. Ultimately, narcissists seek supply in relationships. If you're authentic, you stop being a source of supply. For example, if they try to gaslight you, yell at you, or humiliate you, and you just look at them as though they're a strange bug with three heads that walked into your living room, without engaging or being scared. They won't take well to that. Eventually, they'll write you off, say disparaging things, but they will often disengage — which is a gift, an absolute gift.

So, no contact—when it is not a petulant and acting out, narcissists often use it to punish others. I am talking about someone who says, "This is not healthy. I cannot interact in this system. This is not good for me, my mental health. It is not safe. I am not doing it anymore." When that happens, it is often a decision where there is an authentic tailwind on that. Which is saying, "This is not good for you."

Authenticity is a process, and that's likely why we tend to embrace it more as we age. It requires us to slowly assess the structures around us, having the willingness and openness of mind to dismantle some of this, and realize "this is nonsense, this is silly, this is ridiculous, and this isn't who I am." Maybe, get more comfortable with the idea of not belonging, the sense of "I will find my community." Maybe, it will be very small.

When you take away all those social strictures, narcissists lose a lot of their power. It's like watching Superman with kryptonite—they can no longer do anything fancy. In that sense, authenticity becomes both an antidote to narcissism, but after someone has been through and harmed by narcissistic relationships. It is where we're trying to get them. It isn't easy after a toxic relationship because you have been told that who you are is nothing. You are selfish if you want to be you. Authenticity is treated as you being selfish

When the whole family systems can also reinforce this idea that being yourself is selfish, they may label you as "weird" or the "crackpot cousin." If a person is truly authentic person, they will think, "This is a nieces wedding who I adore." Afterwards, "I am not doing that again." The authentic person can have that critical thinking to say, "This niece matters to me and my presence at this event matters to my niece. The human being I am wants to be there for her because I have cared for her." Recognizing that this will be hard on them, maybe, the authentic person will opt to drive the three hours home at the end of the event. They will show up.

Authenticity is not a line in the sand. That's where authenticity really speaks to where critical thinking comes into play and "how do I honor yourself without destroying yourself." In a narcissistic relationship, that is as razor's edge as a razor's edge gets.

Jacobsen: Dr. Durvasula, thank you very much for your time today

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Durvasula: Thank you so much for having me.

Poetry by J.S McBeath and
Photography by Hon. Mr. Derek Galon

SCHOLAR'S GAME

Fear escalated at the pinnacle of insanity,
Bones and blood,
Brilliance disappeared,
Tigers ate their prey,
Ninjas fought valiantly,
The galaxies were weeping tears,
Blackhole quickly wiz,
Bk to square one,
Magic profound intelligence,
Now then sit quietly and wither,
Pain was all to be known
Freedom was the prize,
The scholars game had ended,
Back to rest then a new adventure in the whimsical land of his head.
Good night.



SCOTTS HEAD, DOMINICA

ART BY ANJA JAENICKE



Anja Jaenicke

GATTOPARDO

Attention Deficit, Economy, and Intimacy: A Contemporary Form of Alienation

By Graham Powell

Abstract

This essay argues that contemporary economic conditions, intensified by digital communication technologies, have reconfigured intimate relationships through the fragmentation of attention. As dual-income households become increasingly necessary, economic rationality extends into the private sphere. However, the technological mediation of work and communication erodes the temporal and attentional conditions required for relational depth. Drawing on Karl Marx, Max Weber, Herbert Simon, and Byung-Chul Han, this paper conceptualises this tension as a modern form of alienation rooted not only in labour, but in the degradation of sustained attention, QED, relationships..

1. Introduction

The increasing economic necessity of dual-income households has reshaped the structure and expectations of intimate relationships. In many advanced economies, rising living costs, housing pressures, including labour market instability, have rendered single-income households less viable (OECD, 2023). Consequently, financial stability has become a central—if often implicit—criterion in partner selection and relationship maintenance.

At the same time, digital technologies have transformed communicative practices, dissolving the boundary between work and leisure. The result is a condition in which individuals remain perpetually accessible, responsive, and cognitively engaged. This paper contends that these developments are not merely parallel trends but mutually reinforcing dynamics that

produce a form of relational alienation grounded in attentional fragmentation.

2. From Economic Alienation to Attentional Alienation

The concept of alienation originates in the work of Karl Marx, who argued that capitalist production estranges workers from the products of their labour, from the labour process, from others, and from their own species-being (Marx, 1844/1978). While Marx's analysis focused on industrial labour, its underlying logic can be extended to contemporary conditions in which labour is no longer spatially or temporally bounded.

Digital technologies have enabled what might be termed the totalisation of labour time. Email, messaging platforms, and remote work infrastructures, allow work demands to permeate all aspects of daily life. In this context, alienation is no longer confined to the workplace but extends into the domain of attention itself. Individuals become estranged not only from their labour, but from their capacity to sustain presence—both with themselves and with others.

3. Rationalisation and the Economic Structuring of Intimacy

The expansion of economic logos into intimate life can be understood through Max Weber's theory of rationalisation. Weber (1905/2002) described modernity as characterised by increasing calculability, efficiency, and instrumental reasoning—processes that culminate in the “iron cage” of rational control.

In contemporary relationships, this rationalisation manifests in the growing emphasis on financial compatibility, career alignment, and economic resilience. The necessity of dual incomes encourages a form of assortative mating, in which people pair with partners of similar educational and economic status (Schwartz & Mare, 2005). While this may enhance household stability, it also reconfigures relationships as

partially economic partnerships, subject to evaluative criteria traditionally associated with markets.

4. The Attention Economy and Cognitive Fragmentation

The transformation of attention is central to understanding contemporary conditions. Herbert Simon anticipated this development, noting that "a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention" (Simon, 1971). In digital environments that are characterised by constant notifications, plus rapid information flows, and algorithmic reinforcement, attention becomes a scarce and contested resource.

Empirical research suggests that frequent task-switching and digital interruptions degrade cognitive performance and reduce the capacity for sustained focus (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). More importantly for the present argument, such fragmentation alters the qualitative experience of time. Rather than extended, continuous engagement, individuals experience time as segmented into brief, discontinuous intervals of attention.

5. Self-Exploitation and the Collapse of Leisure

Building on these developments, Byung-Chul Han argues that contemporary subjects are no longer primarily disciplined by external forces but driven by internalised imperatives of performance (Han, 2015). In *The Burnout Society*, Han describes a shift from a disciplinary society to an achievement society, in which individuals become self-exploiting agents.

This transformation has profound implications for leisure. Rather than functioning as a space of recovery and relational engagement, leisure becomes increasingly colonised by residual work and digital distraction. The boundary between productive and non-productive time collapses, leaving individuals in a state of perpetual partial engagement.

As a result, the temporal and attentional conditions necessary for meaningful interpersonal connection are systematically eroded.

6. Intimacy Under Conditions of Fragmented Attention

Intimate relationships depend fundamentally on sustained attention—on the ability to listen, respond, and co-experience time with another person. However, under conditions of attentional fragmentation, presence becomes attenuated. Individuals may be physically co-present yet cognitively divided, engaged simultaneously with multiple streams of information and obligation.

This leads to a form of relational alienation distinct from overt conflict or breakdown. It is characterised instead by subtle disconnection: diminished depth of conversation, reduced emotional atonement, and a pervasive sense of partial absence. Crucially, this alienation emerges not despite economic and technological developments, but because of them.

7. The Paradox of Economic Stability and Relational Erosion

A central paradox follows from this analysis. Economic conditions necessitate increased labour participation and income generation to sustain relationships materially. Yet the very processes required to achieve this—intensified work, constant connectivity, and attentional fragmentation—undermine the relational goods that such stability is intended to secure.

This paradox can be summarised as follows:

Economic rationality seeks to stabilise relationships through material security.

Technological mediation intensifies the demands of economic participation.

These demands fragment attention and erode sustained presence.

The erosion of presence undermines the quality of intimate relationships.

Thus, the pursuit of economic stability becomes entangled in a process that destabilises relational experience at the level of attention.

8. Conclusion

The contemporary transformation of relationships cannot be understood solely in economic or technological terms but must be analysed at the level of attention. The convergence of economic necessity, digital mediation, and internalised demands on performance, produces a form of alienation that is both structural and experiential.

Reframing the problem in attentional terms reveals that the central challenge is not merely to balance work and leisure, but to preserve the conditions for sustained presence in an environment that systematically fragments it. In this sense, the future of intimate relationships may depend less on economic arrangements than on the capacity to reclaim attention as a finite and essential human resource.

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JACO PARROT



SCOTTS HEAD, DOMINICA

What Is Necessary for Healthy Hair?

Author(s): Scott Douglas Jacobsen



Dr. Viktoryia Kazlouskaya, MD, PhD, is a dermatologist with 20 years of skincare, cosmetic procedures, and dermatological research expertise. She specializes in evidence-based treatments, including sunscreen, retinol, and antioxidants, while addressing conditions like acne, rosacea, and aging skin. Passionate about patient education, she emphasizes the importance of lifestyle, diet, and personalized care. Dr. Kazlouskaya is also experienced in advanced therapies like exosomes, microneedling, and lasers, making her a trusted authority in modern dermatology. She emphasizes the importance of addressing hair loss early with FDA-approved medications like finasteride and minoxidil. While dietary improvements, such as increased protein and iron intake, support overall hair health, they cannot reverse genetic or inflammatory conditions. Natural remedies like rosemary oil and caffeine provide minimal benefits but do not replace proven treatments. Hair transplants are a last resort, requiring careful planning. Dr. Kazlouskaya also highlights challenges for women experiencing menopause-related hair loss and stresses a holistic approach to hair care and treatment.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Dr. Victoryia Kazlouskaya. We'll be discussing hair. What are the principles of good hair health? I don't necessarily mean diet yet; I'm referring to indicators. When you examine a person's hair, what distinguishes healthy hair from unhealthy hair?

Dr. Viktoryia Kazlouskaya: Every person has a genetic predisposition to how much hair they will have and what is considered normal. For example, if a person's entire family has thin hair, that is likely their normal. Conversely, if someone's baseline is thick, healthy hair, that is their normal.

Everyone is very different. Normally, when you examine the scalp under a microscope, each hair follicle contains a few growing out of it, and these hairs tend to have the same diameter.

There are also visual characteristics to consider. We assess whether the hair is healthy by its shine and smoothness and whether it appears orderly or unruly. However, many factors come into play—cultural differences, genetic differences, and styling preferences. What is normal for one person may not be normal for another.

Jacobsen: How does nature showcase its variety when looking at hair types? Some people have tightly curled hair, others have loose waves, and some have straight, almost fine hair.

Kazlouskaya: There is truly an incredible variety in both texture and colour, primarily due to genetic differences. Here in New York, we see people of all races and ethnicities.

For example, individuals of African descent often have curly or coiled hair because their follicles are oval or slightly curved. This may have evolved as a protective mechanism against intense sun exposure. Still, it is a characteristic we admire and celebrate.

Asians, on the other hand, almost exclusively have straight, thick hair. Among Caucasians, there is a wide range—from very straight to curly hair. The variety of colours depends on the amount and type of pigment in the hair follicle, which is determined by genetics.

Jacobsen: When it comes to hair colour, we see rare shades like red. Some jokes about redheads going extinct are humorous ideas people bring up in conversations. Why did nature produce the colours we see, such as blonde, brunette, red, and black? Why don't we see other hair colours?

Kazlouskaya: It's difficult to say with certainty. Classical genetic studies suggest that pigmentation evolved as a protective feature. For instance, individuals of African descent almost exclusively have dark hair and dark skin, which may have been advantageous in tropical climates with intense sunlight. That explanation aligns with Darwinian theory, but we can't definitively say it's the full story.

Determining the exact reasons is challenging. In nature, we see animals with a wide variety of colours, so genetic diversity in pigmentation is something Earth's organisms share. This diversity gives us various features to observe, admire, and enjoy.

Jacobsen: Given that variety, people have different cultural and aesthetic preferences. How do you find people using techniques and products on their hair to style it in certain ways? Which techniques do not impact the hair's health, and which are potentially harmful to hair health?

Kazlouskaya: People style their hair in many different ways, and these are often influenced by their cultures and beliefs. For example, Afro-American individuals tend to have unique styling techniques, such as braiding, wearing braids, or straightening.

It's a bit of a joke that people are never happy with what they naturally have—people with curly hair often straighten it, while people with straight hair try to curl it. In the Afro-American population, we frequently see conditions associated with these styling techniques, such as braiding, dreadlocks, and straightening.

Curly hair follicles are generally more susceptible to damage. When traumatized repeatedly with tight styles, this can lead to a condition called traction alopecia or traction hair loss. Initially, this condition is reversible, but if the pulling and tight styles continue, hair loss may become permanent. Of course, this is devastating for anyone, especially for women.

Styles like dreadlocks and braiding are also popular among Afro-American men, and we often see particular hair conditions associated with these practices in this group. Similarly, in Caucasian and Asian populations, there's significant damage when individuals overuse curling, colouring or drastically change their hair colour.

For example, Asian individuals trying to achieve blonde or other bright colours common among European or Caucasian populations often experience hair shaft damage, dryness, and breakage. These are common issues.

Jacobsen: There's one very dramatic type of hair technique. It's mostly done in salons, but I can't recall the exact name. It involves using very harsh chemicals and is often a subset of Afro-American culture used to make the hair very straight.

Kazlouskaya: Yes, straightening can be achieved using various techniques and chemicals. When done continuously, these are undoubtedly harmful. Some emerging data suggest that these chemicals may not only damage hair but also have potential systemic consequences, including a possible link to cancers and other health issues.

This is not yet fully proven, but ongoing research is trying to determine whether these techniques are more harmful than just damaging hair. Despite these risks, many patients hesitate to return to their natural hairstyles.

I think natural Afro-American hair is stunning. I often encourage my patients to embrace their natural style. I grew up loving the big, round hairstyles of the disco divas in the 1980s, and I find those look beautiful. However, in Afro-American culture today, wearing natural hair isn't as common as it could be, which I find unfortunate.

Jacobsen: Regardless of cultural background or ethnic heritage, what are the general principles for maintaining healthy hair?

Kazlouskaya: Hair care routines differ significantly. For example, while Asians and Caucasians typically wash their hair a few times a week, Afro-Americans often wash their hair once a week or even less frequently—sometimes once every two weeks or longer.

This is because Afro-American hair is more difficult to manage due to its tight curls, and the hair follicles are more susceptible to damage. Washing too frequently can harm them. Afro-American hair also requires much moisturizing, and oils are very popular and helpful. Oil treatments protect hair shafts by preventing water damage.

In contrast, oils may not be as beneficial for Asians or Caucasians, as they can make hair greasy and heavy and worsen conditions like dandruff or seborrheic dermatitis. So, there are many differences in how people care for their hair depending on their hair type.

Jacobsen: What about diet? What should people take into account regarding their hair health? In a prior interview, you mentioned having a balanced diet and the importance of protein.

Kazlouskaya: In general, protein is crucial for both skin and hair health. Hair is made of keratin, which is a protein. You cannot directly improve your existing hair shafts—essentially non-living structures. However, you can make them look better by trimming the edges or using treatments to soften them. Hair grows from the scalp, so nourishing your body will lead to healthier hair growth.

For example, if you are experiencing hair loss, focusing only on the strands you already have will not prevent further hair loss. You need to work from within by nourishing the scalp and hair follicles.

A protein-rich diet is essential, especially for individuals over 40, particularly women in premenopause or menopause. Adequate protein intake is one of the first things I discuss with patients experiencing hair loss. I often recommend using free apps to track protein and macronutrient intake, focusing on protein and healthy fats.

Healthy fats—like omega-3 fatty acids, avocados, and olive oil—are also vital. Determining whether a patient is vegan or vegetarian is equally important, as these diets can lead to lower protein intake. I've had patients who, despite receiving the best treatments, struggled with hair regrowth until their diets were adjusted. Once their nutrition improved, the treatments became more effective, and their hair health quickly reflected these changes.

Ensure sufficient iron intake for women, as iron deficiency and anemia are common issues. Women lose iron through menstruation and childbirth and often eat less meat. Iron deficiency is one of the first conditions we check for in female patients with hair loss.

While addressing iron deficiency with diet is important, iron from supplements is not always well-absorbed. Therefore, improving dietary sources of iron can be more effective.

Vitamins also play a significant role in hair health. For example, data suggests that vitamin D deficiency can worsen hair loss. There are many vitamin D receptors in the hair follicles, so even though the relationship may not be entirely direct, we notice that patients with very low vitamin D levels often struggle more with improving their hair health.

Supplementation can help, but vitamin D is also present in many foods, such as meat and eggs. Maintaining a diverse diet that includes fresh foods, vegetables, antioxidants, and vitamins is important for overall hair health.

Jacobsen: What rare hair conditions might require medication or treatments where a good diet or a youthful lifestyle alone may not be sufficient?

Kazlouskaya: Hair diseases encompass a very broad topic. I could probably name at least 30 different conditions quickly, and not all hair loss is the same.

There are different types of alopecia, and some are caused by genetic conditions affecting the hair shaft. For example, the hair shaft might have abnormalities like twisting, bubbles inside, or irregularities. There are at least 10 to 15 classifications of how hair shafts can be abnormal, and many of these conditions are due to genetic issues.

In addition to hair shaft abnormalities, genetic conditions that affect the overall structure and health of the hair are also highly complex. Dermatologists undergo years of residency to learn about hair diseases. Still, not all dermatologists specialize in treating hair-related issues because it requires focused expertise. It's a specialized topic within dermatology.

While diet is beneficial for overall health and can support the ideal genetic potential of your hair, it is not enough to overcome genetic diseases or certain inflammatory conditions. For example, male pattern baldness, or androgenetic alopecia, is primarily driven by the DHT (dihydrotestosterone) mechanism. Although diet plays a minor role, it cannot fully address the problem.

Inflammatory conditions and other types of hair loss cannot be resolved solely through diet. Even for common male baldness, while diet can contribute to overall hair health, it does not significantly impact the primary causes of hair thinning in men.

Jacobsen: What should men do to mitigate early-onset balding, particularly in the crown or the front of the head?

Kazlouskaya: Men experiencing early-onset balding should start treatment as early as possible. If you have already noticed hair thinning, it likely means the process has been ongoing for several years. The best action is to consult a professional to confirm the diagnosis.

Using a dermatoscope or trichoscopy, we examine the hair follicles and scalp with a magnifying device, either handheld or digital. If we observe miniaturization—the hair shafts are thinning—that's often an early sign of androgenetic hair loss. By the time it becomes visible in the mirror, approximately 20% of the hair may already be affected.

The earlier you begin treatment, the better. For men, two FDA-approved medications work well: finasteride and minoxidil. Starting these medications as soon as possible slows the progression of hair loss. While these treatments are essential, other factors, such as diet, lifestyle, and overall health, also play an important role.

We underestimated the significance of these factors in the past. Still, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we noticed that individuals with worse COVID outcomes—often linked to comorbidities such as diabetes, obesity, and heart conditions—also experienced more severe alopecia and pattern hair loss.

Recent studies suggest potential connections between hair loss, cholesterol levels, lipid metabolism, and general health. For instance, I've seen patients with stable hair loss for years suddenly experience

worsening after developing metabolic issues like high cholesterol. Everything in the body is interconnected, so addressing these systemic issues is critical.

Nevertheless, science strongly supports the use of FDA-approved medications as a first-line treatment. Additionally, for those considering hair transplants, a good hair surgeon will not perform a transplant without the patient also using medication. Doing so is considered bad practice.

Jacobsen: What about women who are perimenopausal, menopausal, or postmenopausal? What are your recommendations for them?

Kazlouskaya: Women face greater challenges in treating hair loss because we don't have specific medications that target female hair loss as effectively as treatments for men. Minoxidil is the first-line treatment, but targeting other factors is harder.

During menopause, we can use medications like finasteride and dutasteride, which are typically used in men, because postmenopausal women are no longer able to get pregnant. However, these treatments are not as effective in women as in men.

In addition to diet and a healthy lifestyle, women can benefit from regenerative treatments such as platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections, laser therapy, growth factor treatments, and exosome therapy. While these treatments are still considered investigational and are often cosmetic, they hold promise. They are becoming more common in managing hair loss in women.

Jacobsen: What about solutions that people believe work because they've been sold by influencers, podcast hosts, or charlatans as the newest miracle pill or technique—things that don't work?

Kazlouskaya: Hair loss is on the rise right now. If you analyze Google search trends, hair loss is one of the most commonly searched topics. Over the past year, my clinic has almost entirely shifted toward treating hair loss due to overwhelming demand.

Unfortunately, I constantly have to combat misinformation. Marketers use aggressive tactics to create fear around traditional medications while promoting their products, often for financial gain.

One of the most popular trends is oils, particularly rosemary oil. There is a small degree of truth behind this trend because a very limited study suggested that rosemary oil could be as effective as 2% minoxidil for hair loss. However, this study was extremely small, conducted in Iran, and not from a reputable institution. Additionally, we know that 2% minoxidil is not particularly effective, so we use 5% minoxidil instead.

So, while oils and other natural remedies may provide a small benefit, they cannot replace traditional treatments. The danger is that people who believe in these trends waste valuable time. If hair loss is not addressed promptly, the opportunity for regrowth may be lost entirely.

Androgenetic pattern hair loss is progressive—once a hair follicle is lost, it cannot be revived. The only solution at that stage is a hair transplant, which comes with challenges. Many people assume surgery is a simple fix and will guarantee a full head of hair. However, transplants involve scarring, and there is no guarantee that the new follicles will survive. Sometimes, patients end up with a more significant issue than originally.

Beyond oils, people often ask me about other natural remedies, such as caffeine, green tea, or chamomile. Unfortunately, I wish I could say they work, but they do not. That's not how hair restoration functions.

Many people fear the medication, and there is a reason for that. We know that finasteride can cause side effects such as decreased libido, reduced sperm count, and, in some cases, worsening depression, which is a common concern.

Taking these medications is a commitment. There are additional concerns for young people experiencing early hair loss—what if they are planning to have children? What if they are thinking about starting a family? These are important questions; we do not yet have all the answers.

However, we do know that these medications work. So, it becomes a trade-off—do you prioritize your hair or other concerns such as family planning or mental health? It is always a balancing act when deciding how to manage these treatments.

Jacobsen: Dr. Kazlouskaya, thank you.

ART BY MR. ALWYN ST. OMER



MADONNA DOLOROSA

Dr. Carol Tavris: Social Psychologist, Writer, Lecturer



Author(s): Scott Douglas Jacobsen

1. What academic positions have you held?

Although I have taught at various institutions, including the New School for Social Research in New York and UCLA, I have never held a full-time academic position. I have always loved teaching, especially the intro course, but my career has primarily been as a writer—of textbooks, general interest books, book reviews and essays, articles for journals and magazines—all with the goal of promoting critical thinking and psychological science. In a world full of pop-psych pseudoscience, that is a full-time job!

2. How did you develop that career?

When I was in graduate school, a new magazine called Psychology Today was born. It was meant to be the Scientific American of psychology—a magazine that would bring good psychological science to general audiences. I wrote to them, looking for a summer job. They told me they would hire me, but only if I came for a year. Though scared to death to take a year off the Ph.D. program, I did, and that experience changed my life. There, working with brilliant editors, I learned to write, edit, and conduct interviews. When I went back to Michigan, I was an Associate Editor. When I got my Ph.D., I had a choice:

proceed with an academic career or go back to the magazine as a Senior Editor. The latter option was risky: no tenure or even job security, after all. But my beloved mentors at UM said, "You know, there are many ways to be a good social psychologist, and one of them is having the ability to educate the public about what social psychology is."

3. When did psychology interest you?

Not as an undergraduate! I took one intro course and got a C+. I majored in comparative literature and sociology, and went to the University of Michigan in sociology—to study "the sociology of literature," whatever that was. But there I found the interdisciplinary program in social psychology, and loved it. I switched into that program immediately. We learned an array of methods, topics, and perspectives.

4. Where did you acquire your education?

I was an undergraduate at Brandeis University, and a graduate student at Michigan. But I "acquired my education" also first and foremost from my parents, who were committed to critical and creative thinking, and social activism; from working at general-interest magazines, which taught me the importance of

using my education to help inform the public about science and critical thinking; and by coming of age during the civil-rights and women's rights movements.

5. Since you began studying psychology, what do you consider the controversial topics?

There is always "controversy" in any field: sometimes over politically sensitive issues (e.g., sex and race differences), or over methods, or about findings. In my lifetime, the most divisive and emotional issues were the "recovered memory" and "multiple personality" hysteria of the 1990s, along with widespread claims in Canada and the U.S. of ritual sex abuse going on in daycare centers. So many lives and families were shattered by these faulty beliefs—notably, the idea that traumatic memories of sexual abuse are repressed until "recovered" in therapy with hypnosis, dream analysis, and other methods now known to create confabulations; that trauma causes the self to "dissociate" into many personalities; that "children never lie" about being molested. These epidemics made many psychological scientists more committed than ever to educating the public about the importance of good psychological research. That research has showed how best to interview children to avoid coercing or inducing them into

telling fanciful tales, while being open to their telling about actual abuse; how "multiple personalities" can be manufactured in a collaboration between therapist and patient; and how trauma and memory really do function.

Of all my writings, I am especially partial to the popular book I wrote with Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes were made (but not by ME): Why we justify foolish beliefs, bad decisions, and hurtful acts*. In this book, we use cognitive dissonance to show why it is so hard for people to deal with controversies, once they have taken a position: why it is so hard to say, "hmm, time to give up that outdated belief after all" or to admit that a particular choice we made might have been wrong.

6. You have devoted much of your life to criticizing work most often termed 'pseudoscience'. How do you define pseudoscience? What do you consider its most common markers?

At least in its ideal form, science is falsifiable. A scientific premise can be disconfirmed; it is testable. Do you believe that dowsing and ESP exist? Do you believe that the Bible says the world will end next Friday? These are beliefs that can be tested empirically. If the test repeatedly fails, the hypothesis

is wrong—you need to modify it or drop it. But pseudoscientists keep the belief despite the disconfirming evidence: “It was the wrong day for dowsing because of clouds.” The world did not end Friday? Nothing wrong with my prediction, I just read that page of the Bible incorrectly—I meant Tuesday.

7. You earned numerous awards for your book *The Mismeasure of Woman*—such as the Distinguished Media Contribution from the Association of Applied and Preventive Psychology, the Heritage Publications award from Division 35 of the American Psychological Association, and the Distinguished Contribution to Women’s Health Award from the APA Conference on Women’s Health. You have received other awards, as from the Independent Investigations Group of the Center for Inquiry, for your contributions to skepticism. What do these awards mean to you?

Getting awards is extremely gratifying; it means your peers and colleagues respect and honor your work. But it’s also humbling. The next day, everyone forgets, so it’s back to work.

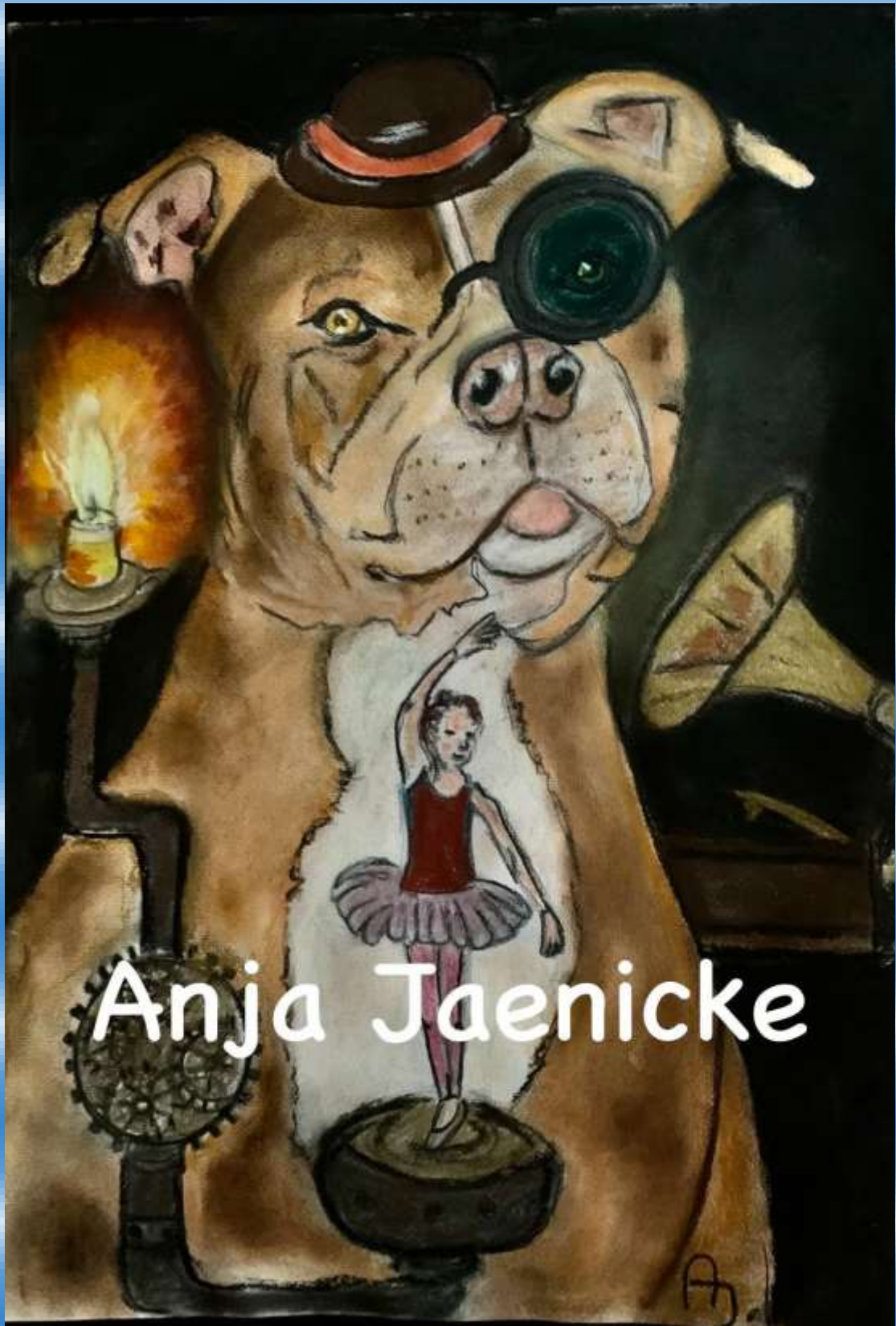
8. Who most influenced you? Can you recommend any seminal books/articles by them?

I hate lists! This question is impossible, because my influences were feminism, and the countless important books in psychology, politics, and culture about gender equality and how to achieve it; great studies in social psychology; great writers and poets, who have inspired me as a writer . . . how long have you got? Besides, what had an impact on me might have no interest to you. My advice to students, therefore, is always to follow your heart, mind, and nose—explore. Read in areas other than your specialty. Read for fun. Read and memorize poetry. Take courses not only because it is a required subject, but because you've heard the professor is brilliant and compelling—even if that course is far afield from your major.

9. Where do you see psychology going?

The biggest issue that psychology will face, in my view, is to remember that it is psychology. The biomedical revolution is transforming research and how we understand human behavior; neuroscience in psychology and other fields is rising in dominance. But we must not overlook the equally powerful influences of culture, learning, and the environment in determining how we behave, what we believe, and how we shape our worlds.

ART BY ANJA JAENICKE



Anja Jaenicke

Steampunk Bully

No Face

by *Graham Powell*

All those who truly know,
don't need to see my face,
the physical and mental
entanglement,
that combines our souls,
defies distance, and time,
with an abundance of love,
that no face requires,
not even God's:
we move, we feel, and steer our fates,
harmoniously, willingly,
till death spins us back
to infinity

Lacrimosa

by *Graham Powell*

How many sunsets
have I witnessed for you?
The vacillating Moon,
waxing and waning,
defying the death of hope
and dreams of wifely union.

The poet's salvation,
pouring, eyes to mouth,
a waterfall, unloosed,
carried by Mozart's
Lacrimosa,
comforting
as the mortal persists
in barefaced solitude.

A Challenging Sudoku

7								
2	5							
3	8	6						
8	2	1	4					
9	4	7	8	5				
6	3	5	7	1	9			
4	6	3	2	8	1	9		
1	9	2	5	7	4	8	6	
5	7	8	9	6	3	1	2	4

The Date Conundrum Equation

$$22 = \frac{726}{33}$$

Dr. Seth Meyers: Healthy and Narcissistic Relationships



Author(s): Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Seth Meyers, Psy.D. (Psychology Today) is a licensed clinical psychologist, T.V. guest, author, and relationship expert. He appears regularly on television on "Nancy Grace." He has also appeared on "Dr. Drew," "20/20," "Good Morning America," "The Doctors," "Fox News," "Showbiz Tonight," "Bill Cunningham," "Jane Velez-Mitchell," "The Early Show," "Good Day L.A.," "KTLA," and others. He has been featured in The New York Times, USA Today, and The Huffington Post. His official website includes many media credits and television clips. He wrote Dr. Seth's Love Prescription: Overcome Relationship Repetition Syndrome and Find the Love You Deserve. His newest podcast, on Spotify and iTunes, is INSIGHT with Dr. Seth.

Meyers explores the differences between healthy and narcissistic relationships. Healthy relationships are characterized by mutual support, trust, and reciprocity. In contrast, narcissistic ones often involve power imbalances and a lack of empathy. Narcissists display grandiose thinking

and create an emotionally intense but ultimately unhealthy dynamic. Meyers emphasizes the importance of finding a relationship where one's nervous system feels balanced and peaceful, contrasting this with the overstimulation common in narcissistic relationships.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here for round two with Dr. Seth Meyers. We're going to discuss his area of expertise, specifically relationships and narcissism, keeping the conversation focused. I want to begin with the basics, as many people who aren't experts, like myself, may have ideas about them, but we can only partially understand them. So, how do you distinguish between healthy relationships and narcissistic ones?

Dr. Seth Meyers: A subtler question is whether there are any points where narcissistic and healthy relationships overlap. One of the hallmarks of healthy relationships is the presence of agreed-upon expectations for the relationship and each other. In healthy relationships, there should be reciprocity, consideration of each other's feelings, and the capacity for perspective-taking. In unhealthy relationships, there is often no agreement on expectations, and the root of the problem frequently lies in power imbalances or hierarchies.

In many unhealthy relationships, there is a power imbalance where one partner is expected to dominate. The dominant partner expects the other to submit and know their place in the relationship. This dynamic can function as long as both partners remain in their prescribed roles of dominator and submitter. In other unhealthy relationships, the problem may not stem from power but dependence versus independence. There is anxiety around one partner individuating too much, leading to over-dependence.

In this type of relationship, which Melody Beattie refers to as codependent, the unspoken rule is that one cannot individuate without causing significant anxiety and problems within the relationship. As an aside, I believe Melody Beattie's *Codependent No More* is one of the most helpful self-help books ever written. It addresses codependence,

enmeshment, and the lack of boundaries that characterize many unhealthy relationships.

Jacobsen: Now, regarding Cluster B personality disorders, such as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), or individuals who fall along the narcissism spectrum—whether defined by traits or personality styles—how do these personalities fit into the dominator-submitter relationship dynamic?

Meyers: A colloquial way to describe this dynamic is to say that, in a relationship, a narcissistic personality must be recognized as the most important person in the room. This means that the narcissist's needs take precedence over everyone else's. It's not psychopathic in the sense that the narcissist believes others have no needs at all, but rather that others' needs are ranked a distant second to their own. Understanding this hierarchy and ranking is essential to understanding narcissistic thinking.

With a narcissistic personality in a relationship, the typical expectations of equality and mutual respect are abandoned from the start, as the narcissist would never agree to such terms. Problems develop because, initially, the non-narcissistic partner may set aside their thoughts and feelings to keep the peace and maintain the relationship. However, over time, the lack of fairness and reciprocity erodes their tolerance, eventually leading them to assert themselves and rebel against the unequal dynamic. The expectations within the relationship, or lack thereof, become a source of conflict. Additionally, in many relationships with a narcissist, there is a fundamental lack of sharing and mutual curiosity, which is often absent entirely.

One example would be that it is normal for two people in a relationship at the end of the day to show curiosity about what the other has experienced while they are out in the world. The narcissistic personality typically isn't interested in what happens in another person's day, whether it's a stranger or a spouse. So, there's this strange dynamic of a relationship of one when there are two people. It's a circuitous solipsism.

Everything feeds back into the mental landscape of the narcissist, which, from what I've gathered talking to other experts, is a rather fragmented and sad affair internally.

Jacobsen: If we are looking for a metaphor to describe the topography of a relationship with a narcissist, we can think of the narcissistic personality as a sort of island. What on this island is the least conducive to any healthy relationship? And, of those things present, are any even remotely treatable in a couples therapy setting, for instance?

Meyers: That's a good question. A relationship with a narcissistic personality is not necessarily impossible. There are certain conditions under which someone could potentially maintain a relationship with a narcissist over time. What would be required is that the narcissist does not perceive the emotional needs and expressions of the other person as demanding or triggering in any way. For example, suppose a narcissist had a particularly complicated relationship with a parent, sibling, or previous romantic partner because they don't typically engage in self-reflective work to heal. In that case, they will likely continue to carry those emotional wounds.

So, anyone in a relationship with them who reminds them of those past triggering individuals will likely not be tolerated. Narcissistic personalities do have some strengths they've cultivated over time, and they do have some capacity for relationships. Narcissists usually have biologically driven social needs for companionship. So, a relationship with a narcissist can work if the other person doesn't ask for too much or talk too much.

Jacobsen: Essentially, they have to know their place and support the narcissist's grandiose self-image.

Meyers: One example might be a husband who is married to a narcissistic wife. At parties, he regularly comments, "She must be one of the smartest people I've ever known," or, "There's no better mother to our children than this woman." Now, whether these statements are true or

not doesn't matter. What matters for the narcissist is that the person they've chosen to keep supports their public image.

You see, the image at home doesn't matter. What matters is the image in public.

You mentioned something interesting earlier about their lack of self-insight or reflective capacity. That's intriguing because it highlights the deep self-absorption and a lack of introspection. So how does that work? How does one have self-absorption without much self-reflection?

Meyers: Right. One way to understand narcissistic thinking is to relate it to the developmental growth spectrum we see in human beings. Picture an infant, a child, and an adult, each at different stages of awareness and cognitive development. For example, we don't expect a four-year-old to have the capacity for complex thinking or emotional nuance because their brain development has yet to reach that point. The narcissistic personality, metaphorically speaking, functions cognitively more like a young child.

Jacobsen: That's wild. Every time I hear it from an expert, depending on their background, it still surprises me because it's difficult to wrap your mind around the idea that someone with the emotional maturity of a young child can be in the body of a fully grown adult—even an older adult.

Meyers: One area of research that could help answer some questions about what happens in the brain of narcissists is cognitive rigidity. A typical narcissist isn't diagnosed as psychotic, meaning they don't have delusions or hallucinations. However, they still exhibit grandiose thinking about themselves. So, what do we call someone who isn't quite at the clinical level of psychosis but displays this exaggerated sense of self-importance? Is it simply grandiose narcissism, or is there a more appropriate diagnosis we haven't yet identified?

Jacobsen: It sounds like a kind of "psychosis-lite."

Meyers: Yes, so someone with this level of self-absorption can maintain certain functional relationships.

Jacobsen: What's it like for the person in those relationships? How do they feel when living within that narrow band of function with a narcissist? How do they approach you in clinical practice or casual conversation, seeking insight?

Meyers: That's a great question. The experience of being in a close relationship with a narcissist is mind-bending. It doesn't matter if the relationship is professional, familial, romantic, or friendship-based—proximity is key. Being near the narcissistic personality is what confuses those in the relationship.

The first stage in a relationship with a narcissist is often confusion. You might find yourself thinking, "Wait, what just happened? Did I do something wrong?" There's much mental puzzle-solving, as these interactions with a narcissistic personality often feel like a puzzle that you're trying to piece together.

They don't understand what they did to upset the narcissistic personality or what they did to make them sad. The cause-and-effect relationships they've come to expect and rely on in most other human interactions don't seem to explain why, in this case, the narcissistic individual is responding this way. This creates confusion. There are different emotional stages one goes through in processing one's experience with a narcissist, and many of those stages may mirror Kübler-Ross's stages of grief after being misunderstood for so long, after constantly feeling that they are hurting or upsetting the narcissist without understanding why, the person may feel angry and frustrated.

They may even reach a stage of learned helplessness, where they feel, "No matter what I do, I can't win," and they give up. They may feel depressed. Does the individual in a relationship with a narcissist ever reach the grief stage of acceptance? I believe that in relationships with

a narcissist, the stage of acceptance often comes when the person says, "I can't do this anymore. I can't continue to function in this relationship."

Jacobsen: In the first session, you used the phrase "self-erasure" to describe the experience of individuals in these relationships. This disorientation and the slow self-erasure over time—does that essentially mean long-term relationships with narcissists are unlikely? But short-term ones are possible, as long as certain things are taken into account, like catering to the narcissist's ego in public, whether it's about motherhood, brilliance, or physical appearance.

Meyers: Yes, a relationship with a narcissist can last as long as the other person remains tolerant of the significant imbalances—emotional and power imbalances. The relationship will continue as long as the non-narcissistic partner tolerates those dynamics. Multiple factors influence someone's tolerance levels. For example, someone with strong self-esteem and independence may be more likely to end the relationship sooner. And by sooner, I mean within a few years. It's important to remember that narcissists don't show their flaws at the beginning of the relationship.

I'm not going to use those jargony terms about narcissists "seducing" their partners because I don't find those helpful for understanding the raw emotions underneath. But in the beginning, the narcissist is on their best behaviour, and it's not entirely an act. The narcissist does have some desire to connect with another person. A small part of them genuinely hopes they can find love and be accepted for who they are, warts and all.

It's not all a performance from the very beginning. What starts to happen over time is that as the relationship deepens and the interdependence increases, the narcissist's anxiety also increases. Narcissists have highly conflictual relationships with interdependence, dependence, and vulnerability. So, returning to the question of how long a person can remain tolerant in such a relationship, it's often within a few years that the individual begins to recognize that something is deeply wrong with the relationship.

They often cannot pinpoint exactly what the problem is. They may even have researched the term "narcissist" online. Still, because diagnosing narcissism isn't like taking a blood test, there's always some degree of doubt. They wonder, "Is that what it is?" There's no definitive proof; even having a label doesn't solve the problem. So, someone financially independent, with no children or other dependents, might be able to end the relationship within a few years.

The problem arises when the narcissist gets comfortable, usually after long-term structures are in place. Once they realize they have the other person "hook, line, and sinker," the situation becomes more difficult to escape—especially if young children or financial dependencies are involved. The financially or parentally vulnerable person is more likely to stay in the relationship for many years—not because they are happy, but because they feel they don't have a choice.

Meyers: That's how they feel—they tell themselves they can't leave without major consequences. Another complicating factor is if the couple has purchased property together. Mutual financial responsibilities like property ownership can keep the relationship going for many years.

Jacobsen: Sounds like hell.

Meyers: Oh, yes, many have lived through it. People get stuck in that situation. They want out but don't need these complicating factors like children or financial dependencies.

Jacobsen: How, then, do you—as a therapist, a friend, or even a concerned family member—help someone in one of these hellish situations realize what's happening? How do you gently guide them toward a way out, practically and emotionally?

Meyers: The starting point is simple: ask yourself two basic questions. First, what is the purpose of a romantic relationship? It should be mutual support, trust, and comfort. If your relationship isn't meeting that purpose, you must look hard at it. The second question requires more time

to answer—it's not something you figure out in 60 seconds. It is, "Am I truly comfortable being single?" This is a crucial question. I've heard it from many people.

Jacobsen: In a more economically egalitarian time, that question can come with an immediate answer for many, can't it?

Meyers: Yes, exactly. In a healthy relationship, there's flexibility, adaptability, and authenticity. It's a bidirectional, negotiated experience. If those elements are missing, it's a sign that the relationship may not be as healthy as it should be.

Jacobsen: Genuineness, based on mutual comfort and trust, etc. So, what I'm thinking about is how, on the conservative side of things—typically the religious conservative or traditionalist side—they have well-established ideas about gender roles, like homemakers and breadwinners. On the other hand, in more progressive, center-left, or leftist circles, we see newer ideas with terms like "male feminist," "boss girl," or "boss babe" language. These narratives don't entirely reverse traditional ones but provide potential for self-stereotyping in some respects, too. It's a very interesting phenomenon.

An authentic and negotiated relationship can fall into any of those four categories, depending on how you map them along different spectrums. So, how do you help people realize that, in a negotiated relationship, where the goal is comfort and trust, it is really about individual choice, temperament, and personal circumstances? They don't need to fit neatly into any of these categories. It doesn't have to be performative, the way it often is in narcissistic relationships.

Meyers: Here's what I say to clients: The goal is to understand the difference between a new relationship that makes your central nervous system feel balanced and peaceful versus one that doesn't. In a healthy relationship, your nervous system feels balanced and peaceful. In a relationship with a narcissist, at the beginning, the central nervous system often feels like absolute bliss.

What many people like about a relationship with a narcissist at first is the feeling of being swept off their feet. It's Las Vegas lights lighting up their insides. The narcissist says things to them that no one has ever said before. It's terrifying.

That feeling is like a drug, but that's a healthy relationship. The goal should be to find someone with whom your central nervous system feels balanced and at peace, not overstimulated. That's the big difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Jacobsen: Thank you, Seth, for your time.

Meyers: All right, thanks! See you.



INDIAN RIVER, DOMINICA

**Answer Grid to
A Challenging Sudoku
by Graham Powell**

7	1	9	6	4	8	5	3	2
2	5	4	3	9	7	6	8	1
3	8	6	1	2	5	4	9	7
8	2	1	4	3	6	7	5	9
9	4	7	8	5	2	3	1	6
6	3	5	7	1	9	2	4	8
4	6	3	2	8	1	9	7	5
1	9	2	5	7	4	8	6	3
5	7	8	9	6	3	1	2	4

THE END