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Megalomania

Megalomania

This article is about a condition relating to grandiosity. For other uses, see [Megalomania \(disambiguation\)](#).

Megalomania is a psycho-pathological condition characterized by [delusional](#) fantasies of power, relevance, and/or [omnipotence](#). Megalomania is characterized by an inflated sense of [self-esteem](#) and overestimation by persons of their powers and beliefs'.^[1] Historically it was used as an old name for [narcissistic personality disorder](#) prior to the latter's first use by [Heinz Kohut](#) in 1968, and is used these days as a non-clinical equivalent.^{[2][3]} It is not mentioned in the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders](#) (DSM)^[4] or the International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD).

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Etymology

The word megalomania is derived from the [Greek](#) words "μεγαλο": megalo-, meaning large, and "μανία": [mania](#), meaning madness, frenzy. The first attested use of the word "megalomania" in English is in 1890 as a translation of the French word "mégalomanie".

Proposed distinction from narcissism: Bertrand Russell

A quotation by [Bertrand Russell](#) gives his interpretation of megalomania: "The megalomaniac differs from the [narcissist](#) by the fact that he wishes to be powerful rather than charming, and seeks to be feared rather than loved. To this type belong many lunatics and most of the great men of history."^[5]

Early Freudianism

Russell's near-contemporary, [Sigmund Freud](#), freely used the same term in a comparable way. Referring with respect to an adult neurotic to 'the [omnipotence](#) which he ascribed to his thoughts and feelings', Freud reckoned that 'this belief is a frank acknowledgement of a relic of the old megalomania of infancy'.^[6] Similarly Freud concluded that 'we can detect an element of megalomania in most other forms of [paranoic](#) disorder. We are justified in assuming that this megalomania is essentially of an infantile nature and that, as development proceeds, it is sacrificed to social considerations'.^[7]

[Edmund Bergler](#), one of his early followers, considered that 'as Freud and Ferenczi have shown, the child lives in a sort of megalomania for a long period; he knows only one yardstick, and that is his own over-inflated ego...Megalomania, it must be understood, is normal in the very young child'.^[8] Bergler was of the opinion that in later life 'the activity of [gambling](#) in itself unconsciously activates the megalomania and grandiosity of childhood, reverting to the "fiction of omnipotence".^[9]

[Otto Fenichel](#) states that, for those who react in later life to narcissistic [hurt](#) with [denial](#), ' a [regression](#) to narcissism is also a regression to the primary narcissistic omnipotence which makes its reappearance in the form of megalomania'.^[10]

Object relations

Where Freud saw megalomania as an obstacle to [psychoanalysis](#), in the second half of the 20th century [object relations theory](#), both in the States and among British [Kleinians](#), set about 'rethinking megalomania... intent on transforming an obstacle... into a complex organization that linked object relations and defence mechanisms' in such a way as to offer new 'prospects for therapy'.^[11]

[Heinz Kohut](#) regarded 'the narcissistic patient's "megalomania"...as part of normal development. By contrast, Kernberg viewed the "grandiose self" as pathological, as an instance of development gone awry',^[12] as did Herbert Rosenfeld and [John Steiner](#). Thus 'when it came to megalomania - Freud's term - or the grandiose self - Kohut and Kernberg's term - or the omnipotent self - Rosenfeld's term - there was disagreement....Developmental arrest or pathological formation?'^[13]

Everyday

Arguably, however, 'in addition to its pathological forms, megalomania is a mental behavior that can be used by any individual as a way of coping with distress linked to frustration, abandonment, loss, or disappearance of the object'^[14] in everyday life. In this sense, we may see 'megalomania as an extreme form of [manic](#) defense...against the anxiety resulting from separation from the object'.^[15]

In the social world, 'megalomania...can be a characteristic of power-drunk or [control-freak](#) dictators, some executives, some politicians and some army generals'.^[16] All such figures may be said to have 'a "Big Ego". A baby's ego, in fact, insufficiently shrunk....So they're much more likely to *miscalculate*. To offend people'.^[17]

Therapy

Unfortunately, 'a person with megalomania may not be interested in self-reflection or personal change',^[18] so the talking cures may be less effective than medication.

An additional complication with analysis is comprised by the transference: 'if the analyst has any tendencies toward megalomania or authoritarianism, the response of the patient to the analyst will strengthen them'.^[19]

Nevertheless, the megalomaniac might do well to 'remember, shrink is short for head-shrinker, isn't it?...And as our swollen heads get smaller...as people we grow'.^[20]

Alexander the Great

Main article: [Alexander the Great#Megalomania](#)

During his final years, and especially after the death of [Hephaestion](#), [Alexander the Great](#) began to exhibit signs of megalomania and [paranoia](#).^[21] His extraordinary achievements, coupled with his own ineffable sense of [destiny](#) and the [flattery](#) of his companions, may have combined to produce this effect.^[22]

Literary examples

'Megalomania is central to [Solzhenitsyn](#)'s satirical portrait of [Joseph Stalin](#). The dictator firmly believes in his superior powers of perception and insight and...stands above all humanity'^[23] in his own eyes.

See also

- [Delusions of grandeur](#)
- [Narcissistic elation](#)
- [Superiority complex](#)
- [Narcissism](#)
- [Rationalisation](#)

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External links

- [R. Kayne](#), "What is Megalomania?"

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Narcissism

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| Types | Acquired situational · Aggressive · Amorous · Closet · Collective · Compensatory · Conversational · Corporate · Cross-cultural · Cultural · Destructive · Egomania · Elitist · Exhibitionist · Fanatical · Gender · Group · Healthy · Inverted · Malignant · Medical · Megalomania · Pathological · Personality disorder · Phallic · Primary · Primordial · Secondary · Sexual · Spiritual · Unhealthy · Unprincipled |
| Characteristics | Arrogance · Bad boundaries · Betrayal · Boasting · Bravado · Conceit · Criticism (intolerance of) · Egocentrism · Egotism · Empathy (lack of) · Entitlement (exaggerated) · Envy · Exploitative · Fantasy · Grandiosity · Grandstanding · Greed · Haughtiness · Hidden agenda · Hubris · Magical thinking · Manipulative · Narcissistic abuse · Narcissistic elation · Narcissistic injury · Narcissistic mortification · Narcissistic rage · Narcissistic supply · Narcissistic withdrawal · Omnipotence · Opportunism · Perfectionism · Self-absorbed · Self-esteem · Self-righteousness · Selfishness · Shamelessness · Superficial charm · Superiority complex · Tantrum · True self and false self · Vanity |
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