

VALUING YOUR “ORDINARY”

Everyone is both special and ordinary. People who have buried feelings of being worthless and unlovable run from being average by inflating their abilities or seeking attention. Both types easily feel slighted, but inflated personalities often become enraged because their whole self-concept is threatened by undesired responses, whereas dramatic personalities only risk losing support. Inflated people may openly or subtly belittle others to bolster their fragile egos. Dramatic people are far too charming for this and rely on their manipulative skills. Both find it useful to busy themselves with big productions or exciting activities to avoid emotional pain. Six or more items marked in either column below can suggest that the ordinary self has been pushed aside by the performer.

Personality Types	
Inflated Personalities¹	Dramatic Personalities²
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Feel important, special, and unique and prefer to associate with “equals” who (supposedly) can best understand them. ___ Often mention successes and can monopolize conversations. ___ Like admiration and attention and hope others will notice (unproven) abilities. ___ Have fantasies of success, fame, fortune, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love. ___ Feel entitled to special treatment or automatic compliance with their desires. ___ Can take advantage of others when their needs “must” be met. ___ Have difficulty empathizing with others’ feelings and understanding their needs. ___ Can feel wounded, humiliated, or rageful when others are unresponsive or critical. ___ Often feel envious of others or believe that others are envious of them. ___ Can appear arrogant, boastful, haughty, or overly sensitive to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Exaggerate emotional expressions and can seem dramatic or superficial. ___ Change emotions rapidly, which can be “at the surface.” ___ Are uncomfortable when not noticed and like being the center of attention and creating excitement. ___ Give special attention to appearance to attract attention (rather than to avoid criticism). May be ultra macho or feminine. ___ Use stylized speech to create an impression, but may be unable to supply details. ___ Use seduction, flirtation, and being shocking as ways to attract attention. ___ Act more intimate than is warranted. ___ Constantly seek reassurance, approval, praise, or special consideration. ___ Are suggestible and easily influenced by others or circumstances. ___ Can appear charming, manipulative, or superficial to others.
<p>¹ Adapted from criteria on p. 661 with permission from the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i>, 4th edition. Copyright 1994, American Psychiatric Association.</p> <p>² <i>Ibid.</i> p. 657.</p>	

ORIGIN OF PROBLEMS

People with the above characteristics may have been attractive, talented, or advanced as children and indulged by their parents. However, high praise and attention may have been contingent on displays of ability, and young ones may have felt devastated when they did not meet expectations of being special. Their parents may have modeled similar inflated or dramatic characteristics and viewed their children as extensions of themselves—“Be wonderful for me. Do my bidding.” Like their parents, they learned to feel entitled to special treatment. Seductive qualities can develop when the opposite-sex parent is more available and nurturing and the same-sex parent is not affectionate or supportive.

Unusual abilities and attractiveness suggests that nature plays a role in the development of these problems. In addition, inflated personalities may be prone to overrespond to their

environment and handle stress with nonstop talking or striking out. Dramatic people may be less reactive and seek excitement for energy and to fill an internal void. Difficulty turning inward to pause and reflect and caretakers who pushed performance with little understanding of vulnerability may create problems with compassion and empathy.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

Giving up exaggerating, belittling, seeking attention, manipulating, playing on sympathy, and busyness can be painful. Without such defenses, you may fear you have no value; however, these patterns can drive others away and make it impossible to gain the very things you want most. Recognizing what you are doing is a giant step forward. No matter how good your ability to feel accomplished and gain attention, you will have moments of deep hurt. These are opportunities for growth. Keep a journal of upsetting incidents and use them to turn inward and identify what others' behavior means about you.

Directions: Mark any thoughts you get in your worst moments. Then, identify beliefs you would like to have about yourself and affirm these new ideas regularly.	
Turn Defeating Thoughts into	Beliefs That Promote Change
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm defective if I'm corrected. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm unimportant when I'm not "respected." <input type="checkbox"/> I'm better than others are. <input type="checkbox"/> People should accept me as I am. <input type="checkbox"/> Releasing my anger helps me feel better. <input type="checkbox"/> Others are uncaring and disrespectful. <input type="checkbox"/> Everyone must love me. <input type="checkbox"/> I have to be the most attractive person. <input type="checkbox"/> I cannot survive rejections. <input type="checkbox"/> It's awful when things don't go my way.	<input type="checkbox"/> I have value even when others disapprove. <input type="checkbox"/> I still matter when others don't "respect" me. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm as good as others and visa versa. <input type="checkbox"/> People can love me without liking all of me. <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding others helps me feel better. <input type="checkbox"/> Others have needs and struggles of their own. <input type="checkbox"/> I am worthy even when others aren't loving. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm still loveable when others are attractive. <input type="checkbox"/> I've survived before and I'll survive again. <input type="checkbox"/> I can handle it when things don't go my way.

BEHAVIOR EXPERIMENTS

It will be easier to identify your defeating thoughts by intentionally creating situations that bring them to the surface. Pick any of the following exercises that sound hard or distasteful. Find a family member or friend to be your coach.

- Have dialogues instead of monologues. Use a timer and give yourself no more than three minutes to talk about yourself or make your point with your coach. This will help you pace yourself with others.
- Pretend you are a TV interviewer and challenge yourself to have a conversation in which you don't mention anything about yourself. Log your discomfort later; however, pat yourself on the back when you help someone else open up.
- Ask questions to find out if you understand the other person's point or experience—"Are you saying (feeling) . . . ?" This ensures that you are attending and defeats boredom. Pick specific times to practice this basic listening skill, for example, in your carpool or at dinner.
- Play the "Blah Blah" game. Have a conversation in which your coach says nothing but, "Blah, Blah." Your job is to look interested and encourage him or her to keep blabbing. Your coach can rate how well you did. Discuss what the experience was like for each of you.
- Pretend you are reserved. Tone down your makeup or dress. Seek only one person's attention at a time and make sure it is reciprocal. Be aware of any flirtations. Practice this on specific occasions and log your feelings.
- Rate "catastrophes" on a scale of 0-100. One hundred might be your child dying or your house burning down. Think "How important will this be in five years?"