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The Narcissistic Self: Background, an Extended Agency Model, and Ongoing Controversies

W. KEITH CAMPBELL and JOSHUA D. FOSTER

Narcissism is a quality of the self that has significant implications for thinking, feeling, and behaving. Individuals with narcissistic personality possess highly inflated, unrealistically positive views of the self. Oftentimes, this includes strong self-focus, feelings of entitlement, and lack of regard for others. Narcissists focus on what benefits them personally, with less regard for how their actions may benefit (or harm) others. Most interesting from our perspective as self-researchers is the vast array of self-regulatory strategies used by narcissists (e.g., admiration-seeking, bragging, displaying material goods, socializing with important individuals, etc.). These strategies are both causes and consequences of narcissists' inflated self-beliefs. Our general orientation toward the narcissistic self is evident in the agency model of narcissism (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006). As originally conceptualized, however, the agency model left out some important aspects of narcissistic self-regulation. In this chapter, we briefly review the literature on narcissism and more specifically narcissistic self-regulation. We then present an extended agency model that includes aspects of narcissistic self-regulation previously ignored by the original model. Finally, we discuss some of the current controversies surrounding narcissism in the literature.

BACKGROUND

History as a Clinical Construct

Narcissism began its modern usage as a clinical construct, and today when most individuals think of narcissism they probably think of it as it relates to clinical theory. One of the earliest known clinical references to narcissism came from British sexologist Havelock Ellis (1898), who used the term to describe the paraphilia of kissing or otherwise being sexually attracted to oneself. Narcissism grew into a

more complex and far-reaching psychological variable with Freud's (1914/1957) *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. Freud spoke of narcissism in several ways, but most relevant to current social psychological research, he described narcissism as a type of attachment to the self rather than the other (Baranger, 1991). In essence, Freud discussed narcissism in terms of regulating libido in such a way that all interpersonal relationships strengthen the positivity of the self, even at the expense of feelings of warmth and caring for others. Although most modern social psychologists would, for example, stray from Freud's use of conceptually vague terms such as "libido," Freud's contribution to modern social psychological theories regarding narcissism should not be overlooked. For example, Freud's focus on the narcissistic drive to regulate the self using interpersonal tactics is one that continues to manifest itself in the modern social psychological literature.

The clinical study of narcissism expanded with the work of Kernberg (1974, 1975) and Kohut (1977) (for reviews, see Akhtar & Thompson, 1982; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). This work, while interesting if somewhat inscrutable, directed theory and research on narcissism into what we believe are two less productive directions. First, the argument is made that narcissism (at least in adulthood) is a defensive or deficit-driven psychological structure. It is seen as a defense against abandonment (Kernberg, 1975) or a lack of childhood mirroring (i.e., a process by which the child's positive self-image is reflected back to him or her by the parent) (Kohut, 1977). As we will discuss later, we prefer a somewhat different conceptualization of narcissism. Second, narcissism, at least "bad" or "unhealthy" narcissism, was considered to be a pathological disorder. Of course, too much of anything (even a "good thing" as the saying goes) can be detrimental to one's well-being, and there are certainly individuals suffering from pathological narcissism. However, this labeling of narcissism as pathological has led to a general consensus that narcissism as an individual difference variable is "bad" and predicts other "bad" things. It is our opinion that this oversimplifies the complex nature of narcissism (cf. Campbell, 2001).

The ultimate result of this work was defining Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) and including it in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-III; APA, 1980). A clinical description of NPD includes grandiose views of the self, an active fantasy life involving personal successes, the assumption that one is unique or "special," an arrogant attitude and desire for admiration, a sense of entitlement and envy for others' success and possessions, and little empathy for others and a willingness to exploit them. According to the DSM, less than 1% of the population has NPD; however, there is no clear explanation for this estimate that we are aware of. It strikes us (and, in our informal experience, many clinicians as well) that this figure is probably an underestimate. Indeed, to us the clinical definition of NPD seems to describe many of the individuals we come into contact with on an everyday basis. The underestimation of NPD prevalence might reflect the fact that to be diagnosed with NPD you must first present yourself for treatment. Why would you seek treatment if you think that you are wonderful? Establishing precise base rates for NPD in the population should be an important goal for clinical researchers.

History as a Personality Variable

Often forgotten in the intellectual history of narcissism is that it has been studied as an individual differences variable for almost as long as it has been considered a clinical condition. Narcissism and its cousins (e.g., egophilia, narciss) have been used as individual difference variables since the beginnings of personality psychology. Freud (1931/1950), for example, included narcissism as a basic personality feature in “Libidinal Types.” Those of the narcissistic type were said to be confident, independent, energetic, and aggressive. Wilhelm Reich (1949) also described a phallic-narcissistic character that was similar to Freud’s. Finally, Henry Murray (1938) developed what, to our knowledge, was the first personality measure of narcissism (i.e., “narcism”). He also published the first correlations of narcissism with different outcome measures. Importantly, and in contrast to the clinical history of narcissism, as a personality variable narcissism was generally considered to be a normal trait rather than a pathological condition.

Although there have been several narcissism scales developed since Murray’s (including several derived from popular scales like the MMPI), the most heavily used by far is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979). (This scale has been shortened into several forms: Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rose, 2002; with the 40-item Raskin and Terry version being the most popular.) It is important to discuss a couple of issues regarding this scale because of the impact that it has had on the study of narcissism. First, the NPI is based on the DSM criteria for NPD, but was designed to be administered to normal populations. This occasionally leads to differences between results attained using the NPI and those attained from more clinically specific measures of narcissism (Wink & Gough, 1990; although the NPI has been validated in psychiatric samples; Prifitera & Ryan, 1984). In short, narcissism measured by the NPI tends to be associated with high rather than low levels of functioning in many areas. We believe that the NPI is ideal for self-researchers who want to understand the narcissistic self; however, those who conceptualize narcissism as an entirely negative or pathological condition of the self may have issues with the NPI (Campbell, 2001). Second, there is no clear factor structure for the NPI. Researchers have uncovered seven (Raskin & Terry, 1988), four (Emmons, 1984), three or two (Kubarych, Deary, & Austin, 2004) factors. As for our own work, we have never really settled on a clear factor structure. In general, there seems to be the “nastier” factors (e.g., exploitativeness, entitlement) and the “healthier” factors (e.g., leadership, self-sufficiency). However, more work is certainly needed in this area to clarify the underlying themes that comprise narcissism as it is measured using the NPI.

BASIC INGREDIENTS OF NARCISSISM

We find it useful to think of narcissism as having three basic ingredients: a positive self, a relative lack of interest in warm and caring interpersonal relationships, and a reliance upon self-regulatory strategies. We next briefly review each of these.

The Positive Self

First, the narcissistic self is positive, inflated, agentic, special, selfish, and oriented toward success. (1) Positive: narcissists think they are better than others (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). (2) Inflated: these self-beliefs do not, on average, reflect reality. For example, narcissists' self-directed beliefs are inflated relative to what objective measures indicate (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee 1994) and how trained observers rate them (John & Robins, 1994). (3) Agentic: narcissists' positive self-views are most apparent in agentic domains (e.g., status, success, power, dominance) and physical appearance (Campbell Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Gabriel et al., 1994); narcissists' positive self-views are not seen in more communal domains (e.g., caring, morality, warmth). This likely reflects the general agentic orientation of narcissism, as can be seen in circumplex models of narcissism (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992). (4) Special: narcissists think that they are special and unique individuals (Emmons, 1984). (5) Selfishness: narcissists' selfishness can be seen in their high levels of entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004) and behavior in resource dilemmas (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005). (6) Finally, the narcissistic self is oriented toward success (i.e., approach oriented; Rose & Campbell, 2004). Narcissists look for opportunities to enhance the self with relatively little fear of failure.

Lack of Interest in Warm and Caring Interpersonal Relationships

Second, the narcissistic self is not particularly oriented toward warm interpersonal relationships. This can be seen in self-reports of communal traits (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002) and, perhaps more impressively, in scores on the need for intimacy as measured by the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Carroll, 1987). This can also be seen in choices made throughout narcissists' relationships (Campbell, 1999)—a topic that we will return to later.

Self-Regulatory Strategies

Third, and what perhaps makes the narcissistic self most interesting, are the strategies used for regulating the self. Narcissists spend a good deal of effort to make themselves look and feel positive, special, successful, and important. Sometimes these self-regulation efforts are intrapsychic, such as fantasizing about power (Raskin & Novacek, 1991) or blaming the situation rather than the self for failure (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). At other times these efforts are interpersonal, such as when they use their relationships in the service of the self.

The direction that narcissists' interpersonal self-regulation takes is influenced by several types of social skills and abilities that appear to be relatively strong in narcissists. Narcissists are typically energetic and socially extraverted (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), and this makes starting new relationships and being in unfamiliar social settings relatively easy for narcissists. Indeed, narcissists' are immediately likable. They are liked on initial meetings (Paulhus, 1998) and even in 30-second slices of behavior (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004). Despite

narcissists' easy likeability, their relative lack of interest in emotionally warm or intimate relationships (Carroll, 1987) directs them toward relationships that serve primarily to enhance their status, power, and esteem. Likewise, narcissists' low levels of guilt and social anxiety (Gramzow & Tangney, 1992), and their willingness to exploit others, make them more suited to self-regulation that benefits the self at the expense of others. In short, narcissists are socially skilled, likable, not too worried about taking advantage of others, and focused on looking and feeling good without concern for others' well-being. This combination is linked to an array of self-regulation tactics that serve to maintain the narcissistic self.

The self-regulatory tactics used by narcissists include efforts to be noticed, look good, surpass others, and defend the self against perceived threats. Attention seeking, directing the topics of conversations to themselves, showing off, speaking in a loud voice with exaggerated gestures, and bragging are all standard narcissistic strategies (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990). When skillfully performed, of course, this behavior can come across as engaging, charming, and entertaining (Paulhus, 1998). Other tactics for looking good include displaying high status material goods (Vohs & Campbell, 2005), associating with high status individuals (Campbell, 1999), or simply talking about themselves (Raskin & Shaw, 1988). A good example that illustrates the desire to associate with high status individuals (as well as talk about it later with the appropriate name-dropping) was relayed by one of our hairstylists. She recently reported that her narcissistic ex-boyfriend, a chef, constantly mentioned that he was friends with the famous chef Emeril Lagasse. Strangely enough, however, Emeril never seemed to call.

Surpassing others is also an important narcissistic self-regulation tactic. This is evident from self-reports of competitiveness (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Emmons, 1984), desire to perform well, particularly in publicly visible competitive tasks (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and grandiose reports of even poor performance on knowledge-based tasks (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). Indeed, narcissists will steal credit from others when something good happens and blame others when things go badly (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Gosling, John, Craik & Robins, 1998; John & Robins, 1994). Finally, narcissists behave aggressively toward those who threaten, criticize, or reject them (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Stucke, 2003; Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

Our research has focused most directly on narcissists' romantic relationships, so we will use this class of relationships as an extended example of narcissistic self-regulation in action. First, narcissists' romantic attraction is directed toward potential partners who reflect well upon the narcissist (e.g., are attractive, possess high social status, etc.) and who admire the narcissist. Whether partners are caring or not tends to be less important to narcissists. The underlying goal in narcissists' attraction appears to be esteem enhancement—narcissists want to be with people who make them look and feel good, not those who have relationship goals of intimacy and closeness (Campbell, 1999). This is reflected by the experiences of those who date narcissists, who report that their relationships, although sometimes exciting and satisfying (especially at the beginning), often lack emotional intimacy (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003).

Overall, narcissists find it relatively easy to start relationships, which may be a

product of their extraverted nature and initial likeability (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Paulhus, 1998). Once in romantic relationships, however, narcissists' self-regulation is evident in a range of experiences including love, sex, and commitment, and this may serve to ultimately undermine the stability and maintenance of their relationships. For example, narcissists report elevated levels of game-playing love (i.e., *ludus*) in their relationships, which is part of a strategy to maintain power and autonomy in the relationship (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Le, 2005). This same focus can be seen in narcissists' perception of sex. Narcissists are more likely than non-narcissists to describe sex in agentic terms, including terms such as "ego," "power," "dominance," and "excitement" (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006). This is, in turn, associated with greater unrestricted sociosexuality, and ultimately a lack of commitment to their romantic partners. Narcissists also focus heavily on potential alternative partners even while in long-term relationships, which is not surprisingly also linked to lower reported commitment to their partners (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Interestingly, narcissists do report some qualities that may help them maintain relationships. In particular, their ability to defend against negative feedback applies to feedback from both actual dating partners and potential dating partners. In both instances, narcissists' effectively cope with negative feedback (Foster & Campbell, 2005; Rhodewalt & Eddings, 2002). Indeed, we have shown that narcissists report less dysfunctional relationship behavior (e.g., probability of committing infidelity) relative to non-narcissists when reminded of reasons why their current romantic partners may not be committed to them. This finding might reflect narcissists' inability or unwillingness to process the negative information (Foster & Campbell, 2005). Overall, the course of narcissists' relationships is influenced dramatically by self-regulation. Their relationships usually start quickly and are exciting and enjoyable, but then become troubled as intimacy fails to develop and narcissists' negative behaviors (e.g., infidelity, manipulation, aggression) become apparent. Their relationships end quickly, and with more negativity experienced by their now ex-partners (Foster Shrira, & Campbell, 2003), with narcissists moving on to new relationships where they continue to regulate the self using the variety of tactics at their disposal (Campbell, 2005).

MODELING NARCISSISM AS A SELF-REGULATORY SYSTEM

Given the above, it is not surprising that the narcissistic self is perhaps most usefully conceptualized as a self-regulatory system: it is an interactive group of traits, abilities, beliefs, strategies, behavior, and emotions that mutually predict and reinforce each other. We briefly review some of the self-regulatory approaches to narcissism in the literature and then describe our extended agency model.

Self-Regulatory Models

Several related self-regulatory models of narcissism have been proposed over the last two decades. Most of these models share the basic features of regulating

self-esteem, pride, or related constructs: narcissism is about looking or feeling good about oneself and the narcissist acts and thinks in ways that keep these self-views viable. Raskin and colleagues (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991) described narcissism as a strategy for managing self-esteem via grandiosity. Narcissists' grandiose self-displays were theorized to drive self-esteem levels. Similarly, Campbell's (1999) self-orientation model focused on narcissists' use of interpersonal relationships, specifically via the mechanisms of associating with highly positive and admiring others (similar to BIRGING) for self-enhancement goals. To date, the most elaborated self-regulatory model of narcissism is the dynamic self-regulatory processing model (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). This model focuses on narcissist's efforts to regulate positive self-views. The model contains four interacting components: self-knowledge, intrapersonal self-regulatory process, interpersonal behaviors, and social relationships. We find this model to be extremely useful for thinking about the dynamics of the narcissistic self and we borrow from it when presenting our extended agency model.

Two additional models focus more directly on the affective/emotional side of narcissism. Baumeister and Vohs (2001) conceptualize narcissism as an addictive process. In a sense, individuals receive a reinforcing "high" when their egos are fed. Although there is a lack of direct empirical support for this model, it is consistent with anecdotal evidence stemming from our own interactions with narcissistic individuals. Hopefully, it will be a topic of future research. In a more emotional vein, Tracy and Robins (2004) applied their model of self-conscious emotions to narcissism. Narcissism was found to be linked with the emotion of pride, and they argue this may be part of a strategy for minimizing shame (cf. Gramzow & Tangney, 1992). This model is a very important step in the direction of grounding the narcissistic self in basic emotional processes and we look forward to more research in this area as well.

A final model that is highly relevant to our approach is Paulhus's (2001) "minimalist model" of narcissism. This model focuses on the basic structure of narcissistic personality—high agency/egotism, low communion/morality as being crucial for narcissists interpersonal functioning. This model offers a very parsimonious account of a good deal of the data on narcissism.

Extended Agency Model

Our own approach to narcissism, the agency model, has been largely related to interpersonal forms of self-regulation (Campbell et al. 2006; Foster et al., 2006). In this chapter, we present an extended form of our agency model that accounts for both *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* aspects of narcissistic self-regulation. This extended agency model shares a good deal with each of the self-regulation models of narcissism just described. Indeed, we made an effort to borrow aspects from each of these models when conceptualizing our own. There are three basic assumptions underlying the extended agency model. First, the qualities of narcissism and related skills and self-regulation strategies operate like a system. Second, this system generates positive feelings, which we term "narcissistic esteem." Third, there is no overarching goal of narcissism. There are certainly goal

directed behaviors, but narcissism is not conceptualized as primarily directed toward one goal.

The systemic quality of the extended agency model is represented in Figure 6.1. Narcissism is a system that includes (a) the fundamental qualities of narcissistic personality (e.g., approach orientation, agentic concerns), (b) narcissists' interpersonal skills (e.g., social confidence, charm), (c) narcissists' intrapsychic self-regulation strategies (e.g., fantasies of power, self-serving bias), and (d) narcissists' interpersonal strategies (e.g., self-promotion, game-playing). Importantly, each of these variables is mutually reinforcing. That is, activation of one element will lead to activation in other elements. For example, narcissists' approach orientation is linked to greater social confidence, which may be linked to public self-promotion. Self-promotion is, in turn, linked to greater focus on agentic concerns (e.g., status concerns), and so forth. Again, in this extended model, we include the intrapsychic aspects of narcissistic self-regulation, which we believe are also mutually reinforcing with each of the other variables in the system. For example, possessing inflated views of attractiveness or intelligence may reinforce the better-than-average effect, which may reinforce social confidence. Increased social confidence may in turn reinforce perceived attractiveness even further. In summary, the general nature of narcissists, the social skills that they possess, and the interpersonal and intrapsychic strategies that they employ all reinforce one another, serving a self-regulatory function for the narcissist. Likewise, if one of the elements is not working (e.g., the narcissist suddenly develops a phobia of speaking to strangers), this should diminish activation of other elements (e.g., less approach orientation).

As long as this system is operating effectively—the skills are available, the strategies are working, and the social environment is cooperative—the narcissist feels good. We label this “good feeling” *narcissistic esteem*. What we mean by this is a sense of self-esteem that is (a) linked primarily to dominance rather than closeness or acceptance (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004), (b) related to the emotion of pride (Tracy & Robins, 2004), and (c) may at times have the potentially addictive quality of a narcotic rush (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001). Furthermore, narcissistic esteem may make the entire regulatory system function more smoothly—a self-regulatory lubricant, in a sense.

Finally, we argue that narcissism is not primarily directed toward self-enhancement, self-esteem regulation, or any other single goal. As noted, there will be specific goal directed behaviors (e.g., mission: get lauded at conference), but there is not a fundamental goal of narcissism. Rather, we see narcissism as a truly dynamic system that is initiated once certain thresholds are surpassed, and discontinued when minimal thresholds are no longer met. In the same way that a hurricane will form when certain thresholds are met (sufficiently warm water temperatures, appropriate air temperatures at various layers, pre-existing meteorological disturbance, etc.) and will desist when one or more of these elements is removed (e.g., when traveling over land), narcissism will form when the appropriate conditions are present and diminish when they are removed. Furthermore, in the same way there is no inherent goal to a hurricane—for example, it does not set out to destroy coastal cities—there is no inherent goal in narcissism.

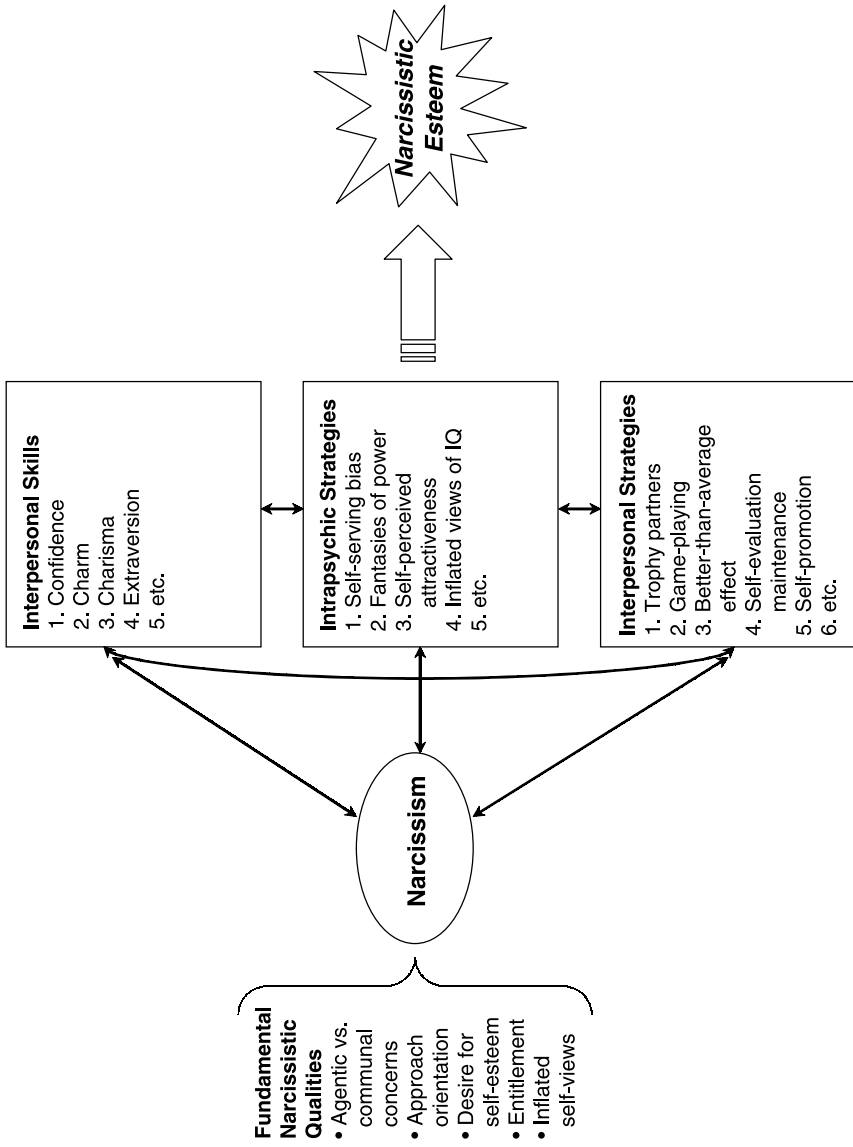


FIGURE 6.1 The extended agency model.

We realize that this might be a rather distant metaphor, so let us illustrate with something more specific. A good real-world example of this would be the formation of narcissism that may occur after obtaining celebrity status (Campbell & Baumeister, in press). If you take an average individual, lavish him with attention, praise and admiration, suggest that whatever he does is appropriate, and make excuses for his failings, it is likely that he will start to possess inflated self-views (“believe his own press” so to speak). This inflated sense of self may increase his social confidence, permitting him the opportunity to meet and establish relationships with other perceived high-status individuals. Having relationships with and being seen with these high-status individuals may further inflate his sense of self. As a way to protect and feed his now highly inflated self, he may utilize strategies such as blaming others for his failures and taking credit for success even when he realistically deserves none. Of course, the dynamic nature of this system may mean that increasingly high requirements are needed for the system to continue (in other words, the minimal thresholds are increased). Eventually, the demands of this system may become too exaggerated and impossible to fulfill. For example, if being seen with high-status individuals continually increases how inflated one’s sense of self becomes, then being seen with just high status individuals may not be enough to appease the sense of importance that one develops. In cases such as these, more extreme strategies to maintain the self may be utilized (such as making contact with “mega-stars”). If this person does not possess the social skills, etc. required to enact these strategies, then the system may falter and the level of narcissism may decrease. In other cases, characteristics that are negatively associated with narcissism may be reinforced. For example, a visit from a family member or old friend may remind the narcissist of the importance of close, personal relationships. This may, in turn, counter aspects of the system related to establishing relatively impersonal relationships with high status individuals.

This elaborate systemic view of narcissism, is, admittedly, half-speculative. There are data showing the association between narcissism and certain self-regulatory strategies, but there are few data on the creation of narcissism (notable exceptions include Horton, Bleau, & Drwecki, 2006, and Otway & Vignoles, 2006, which we will discuss later). We will have to wait for that research in order to see narcissism fully as a self-regulating system. Nevertheless, the research on narcissism to date fits well into this self-regulatory approach. Furthermore, we believe that this systemic view of narcissism has significant heuristic value. It suggests thresholds to be met to activate and deactivate the system; it implies mutual reinforcement of each of the elements in the system; it allows one to conceptualize narcissism without postulating a specific goal. There are also some other properties of a system that may be seen in narcissists. For example, we would expect some complexities or anomalies. For example, a particular narcissist might always speak in a quiet voice so that others are forced to pay careful attention to everything he says; another narcissist might focus inordinate attention on her family to the extent that they increase her social status. This systemic view of narcissism also implies natural limits to growth. Most systems, from forest fires and hurricanes to economic bubbles expand to a point to where they run out of the elements needed

for continued growth. The same might hold true for narcissists. For example, narcissists typically do not inflate their egos to the point where they think they are the absolute smartest and most attractive person in the world. The social forces against this in the vast majority of cases are too strong. Narcissism should thus be governed by the reality principle, although they will arguably bump against it or try to sneak around it more often than other individuals. In sum, we think it is useful to think about narcissism in this systemic framework, but more research needs to be done to clarify the specifics of the system.

ONGOING CONTROVERSIES

Research and theory of narcissism (not to mention public opinion on the topic) is fraught with controversy. We conclude this chapter by discussing some of these ongoing controversies. Many of these are a result of the two histories of narcissism: one clinical and one social-personality. We begin with one of the biggest questions.

Is Narcissism Healthy or Unhealthy?

One of the biggest issues surrounding narcissism is whether or not it is a good trait to have. There is a long tradition in clinical psychology and in sociology (Lasch, 1979) arguing that narcissism is associated with poor mental and social functioning. However, there is also a tradition going back to at least Freud arguing that narcissism can be good for mental health. The best empirical documentation of this is Sedikides and colleagues' (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004) series of studies demonstrating empirically the link between narcissism and a variety of forms of positive mental health. Indeed, given the impressive amount of evidence that narcissism benefits mental health, it may be that narcissism has a net-positive emotional consequence for the individual. Finally, there is a more nuanced view of narcissism, which divides it into healthy and unhealthy forms of narcissism (for one approach, see Rose, 2002). Our own take is that the benefits and costs of narcissism are dependent both on the social context and on the specific outcome variables being measured. We do not hold the view that narcissism can be "good or bad," although there are certainly aspects or components of narcissism that have different outcomes. Instead, we think the "goodness" or "badness" of narcissism depends on the contexts and outcomes being measured. In certain social contexts (e.g., initiating social relationships, emerging as a leader) and with certain outcome variables (e.g., feeling good about oneself and one's abilities) narcissism is helpful. In other contexts (e.g., maintaining long-term relationships, long-term decision making) and with other outcomes variables (e.g., accurate self-knowledge) narcissism is harmful.

From the perspective of the narcissist, this makes narcissism a trade-off. Narcissists gain many benefits, but are also at risk for many costs. For example, narcissists feel good about their academic skills, but their grades often suffer over time (Robins & Beer, 2001). All things considered, we speculate that narcissism is either

neutral or even slightly beneficial for individuals. The argument for narcissism being beneficial is based to some extent on the literature examining generational differences in narcissism and self-esteem (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). There appears to be a trend in that narcissism and more general inflated self-esteem are both becoming increasingly common. Assuming that narcissism is malleable and controllable (more on this later), one might surmise that the culture rewards more than punishes these trends.

Is NPD Different from Narcissism?

One of the more central controversies in research on narcissism involves the relationship between “normal” narcissism and NPD. There are three basic models of this relationship. First, NPD could be “really high” narcissism. Essentially, someone who is very narcissistic may at some point cross into the less than 1% of the population with NPD. For example, an individual’s sense of self may become so inflated that she falls so far outside of the normal range as to be characterized as having NPD. Although it would, of course, not surprise us that individuals with NPD are very narcissistic, we do not think the description of NPD is best met by the hypothetical ultranarcissist. A second model suggests that NPD could be a construct somewhat unique from narcissism as assessed by personality-social psychological researchers. The argument is basically that normal or “healthy” narcissists (e.g., charming, extroverted, self-confident individuals) are fundamentally different than those with NPD (e.g., grandiose, haughty, arrogant, and perhaps unhappy) (Rosenthal & Hooley, 2004). Empirically, this distinction can be observed by partialling self-esteem scores from scores on the NPI (Rose, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2004) or by examining certain subscales of the NPI (e.g., entitlement). In personality disorder terms, individuals with NPD have more in common with Cluster A, whereas individuals with high NPI scores have more in common with Cluster B. The data certainly support these two different flavors of egotism, but we look at NPD less as an expression or flavor of narcissism, but instead as a manifestation of “failed” narcissism (Campbell, 2001). This third approach to narcissism starts with the notion that self-esteem, extraversion, etc. are part of the narcissistic system (see the extended agency model). If the narcissistic self-system is working well, you typically do not end up with a disorder; when that system breaks down, perhaps because of a failure to develop good social skills or because of repeated failures in life, the result is a more depressed, empty or depleted narcissist who might seek treatment. Consistent with this perspective, many clinical psychologists acknowledge that the best way to “treat” the negative affect in narcissists is simply to give them positive reinforcement about their talents, looks, or uniqueness. This can kick the narcissistic self-system back into gear, allowing narcissists to feel like themselves again.

Discrete or Continuous?

A related question involves the structure of narcissism. Is it best to consider narcissism as a continuous variable or as a discrete variable? In other words, is there

a qualitative difference between individuals who possess very high or very low narcissism? Certainly, the NPI was developed as a continuous measure of narcissistic personality. Additionally, many of the more commonly studied personality constructs show continuous rather than taxonic distributions (e.g., “Big 5” personality traits; Arnau, Green, & Tubre, 1999). Therefore, we might predict that narcissism would demonstrate a continuous rather than discrete distribution. The best data we have concerning this issue is from a taxometric analysis of roughly 3000 respondents on the NPI (Foster & Campbell, 2006). This analysis failed to reveal any discrete taxon for narcissism. These results are not final—it may be that there was a very low base rate taxon at the highest levels of the NPI, which can be difficult for taxometric procedures to detect, or that we would not find this same pattern with a different narcissism measure. However, the evidence as it now stands seems to suggest that narcissistic personality is continuously distributed, and this is consistent with how it has been traditionally measured and conceptualized in the social-personality psychological literature.

Defense or Offense?

One of the most interesting issues in regards to the dynamics of narcissism is whether it should be considered defensive in nature or offensive. That is, is the narcissistic-self structured to defend a fragile core from attack or to maximize opportunities for enhancement? There are data that support both contentions. Narcissists’ response to criticism and disrespect is aggressive in nature (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Narcissists similarly distort negative feedback in self-protective ways (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1996). At the same time, there is a wealth of evidence that narcissists jump at opportunities for self-enhancement. For example, they often overperform at tasks when there is opportunity for public acknowledgement (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and in romantic relationships they are highly attentive to alternative partners (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Indeed, even following a long string of losses from betting on poor decisions, narcissists continue placing big bets on their abilities and thinking they are better than others (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). In short, the evidence supporting narcissists’ “offensiveness” is at least equal to the evidence supporting narcissists’ defensiveness.

A next step in resolving these conflicting findings would be to look at basic motivational differences between narcissists and non-narcissists. Although much of these data are only described in commentaries and chapters (Rose & Campbell, 2004), the consensus is that at a basic level narcissism is associated primarily with approach motivation. That is, narcissists are relatively more attuned to the possibility of obtaining successes in their lives than avoiding failures. This view of narcissism is consistent with recent research on the motivational bases of self-enhancement (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Based on extensive empirical work, these authors demonstrate that trait-level self-enhancement is grounded in self-enhancement rather than self-protection. This same argument has been made for the construct of self-esteem, with high self-esteem described as more approach oriented and low self-esteem more defensive (Baumeister & Tice, 1985).

Although there is evidence for narcissistic defensiveness, we argue that narcissism is primarily an offensive trait. Narcissists think that they are terrific, approach life with optimism, and only display defensiveness when they are threatened or criticized.

Deep Down Inside or Fundamental Imbalance?

A related issue surrounding narcissism is whether narcissism is characterized by negative feelings “deep down inside” (to borrow a phrase from Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). This view holds that somewhere deep down in their psyche, narcissists have low self-esteem, and that this inner low self-esteem is covered up by a false exterior of high self-esteem. Despite the popularity of this view, there is actually very little empirical evidence supporting it unambiguously. The difficulty, of course, is providing evidence of negative low self-esteem that is unknown to the possessor of said self-esteem. A potential solution to this difficulty is to assess self-esteem using implicit measures and show that narcissists are characterized by a pattern of low implicit self-esteem and high explicit self-esteem. Fortunately, we do not need to speculate on the results of this hypothetical study because it was recently conducted as part of a larger investigation by Jordan and colleagues (Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003). Although their focus was not on narcissism or the “deep down inside” model, *per se*, the results of the study are still very informative. Consistent with the “deep down inside” model these researchers found an interaction such that narcissism was associated with high explicit self-esteem when implicit self-esteem was low. Inconsistent with the “deep down inside” model, however, there was not a significant correlation between narcissism and implicit low self-esteem. Furthermore, in any study of implicit self-esteem there is the issue of how implicit self-esteem is measured. Essentially, the implicit association test (IAT), which is the most promising method of assessing implicit self-esteem, (in simple terms) compares the response time when one associates the self with positive and negative words. Unfortunately, there is no completely accepted list of these words, leading to some variation between studies. It is possible that the words that a researcher uses may influence the correlations with narcissism. In particular, given that narcissists’ explicitly report relatively elevated self-views when assessed with agentic terms, but not with communal terms (Campbell, et al., 2002), it is plausible that this same imbalance may occur on the implicit level. In our opinion, the word list used by Jordan and colleagues (and graciously provided by Jordan) showed a preponderance of communal words, and so it is plausible that the pattern of findings reported by Jordan and colleagues is consistent with an “imbalance” model of narcissism, rather than the “deep down inside” model.

A similar study to Jordan’s was thus conducted that assessed explicit and implicit self-esteem and self-views using: (a) agentic words, (b) communal words, and (c) a version of words used in an early IAT (Campbell & Bosson, 2005). Results for explicit terms replicated past research (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002): narcissism was most highly correlated with agentic traits, followed by self-esteem, and there was no correlation with communal traits. Importantly, implicit

measures of these same traits showed the exact same pattern—narcissists' implicit world seemed to match their explicit world with high levels of agency and low communion.

This same pattern can be seen on a very different implicit measure, the TAT. The TAT assesses unconscious needs via the analysis of stories written in response to pictures. Narcissists report high level of agentic needs (nPower and nAchievement) and low levels of communal needs (nIntimacy) (Carroll, 1987). Taken together with the IAT data, a picture emerges of narcissism that is one of a fundamental imbalance between agency and communion. This imbalance is evident at both explicit and implicit levels on multiple measures. It is also evident in a range of behaviors, from love (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002) to work (Campbell, Bush, et al., in press).

Finally, we would like to point out three additional things: first, our arguments against the “deep down inside” model do not mean that narcissists do not hold inflated self-opinions. As noted, there is ample evidence that narcissists think that they are better than they really are (Gabriel et al., 1994; John & Robins, 1994). We just do not think that inside every narcissist resides a “low self-esteem” person being protected. Second, there are likely individuals who possess very low and fragile forms of esteem, and who manifest narcissistic tendencies as a way of protecting the self. Again, we just do not think that these individuals represent all or even most of the narcissists that we encounter in the lab. Third, there may be more clever experimental methods that are used in the future that lend support to the “deep down inside” view. For example, there is recent research using the go/no-go association task (GNAT) that reveals evidence of implicit low self-esteem on the part of narcissists (Gregg & Sedikides, 2005). We have not had a chance to review this work in depth, but it looks promising. In short, this is not a closed issue.

Wounded or Spoiled or in Childhood?

A great deal of speculation has gone into understanding the childhood roots of narcissism. There are three basic schools of thought (Horton et al., 2006). The first is that narcissists were psychologically wounded during childhood. They did not receive the attention or mirroring that they needed (Kernberg, 1974, 1975; Kohut, 1977), and they were controlled by their parents. A second position is that narcissists were overly attended to in childhood, but in a fashion that led to psychological enmeshment. In essence, the child was used to act out the parents' own narcissistic needs (Kohut, 1977). The third is that narcissists were somehow spoiled in childhood, receiving too much positive regard and treated with inordinate leniency (Millon & Davis, 1996). The best empirical data available (Horton et al., 2006) are most consistent with the “spoiled” portrayal of narcissists' childhoods. In particular, parental leniency is a significant predictor of narcissism. These data, however, rely on self-reports of high school and college students. Although the data are largely consistent across these two samples, it would be ideal to also have longitudinal data that include very early assessments of parenting. The Horton data were conceptually replicated in a similar study (Otway & Vignoles,

2006). Adults were asked about the parenting they received in childhood. Narcissism was positively related to recollections of parental overvaluation (and, when controlling for parenting overvaluation, narcissism was linked to parental coldness). Overall, these researchers have made a nice first pass at this topic, but longitudinal data beginning in childhood are still needed. We believe that understanding the developmental roots of narcissism is one of the most important issues to be explored and encourage researchers in this area to pursue these issues further.

Same or Different Across Genders?

The issue of narcissism and gender can be a complex one. There are three basic questions. (1) Is the average level of narcissism the same in men and women? (2) Does narcissism predict the same thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in men and women? (3) Is the construct of narcissism structurally the same in men and women?

The answer to the first question is empirically straightforward: it entails comparing the means for males and females on a narcissism scale. When this is done, men are typically found to report slightly but significantly higher narcissism scores than women (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003). This difference is similar to that noted in self-esteem (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999) and psychological independence/interdependence (Cross & Madson, 1997). Our take is that the small gender difference in narcissism reflects this basic difference on independence/interdependence (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003). However, the subject is, of course, still open to debate.

The second question is also relatively straightforward to answer empirically. If narcissism predicts different outcomes in men and women, we would expect to see large numbers of Gender \times Narcissism interactions reported in the literature. This tends not to be the case, although there are certainly examples of such interactions (Morf, Weir, & Davidov, 2000). Our opinion is that narcissism tends to operate similarly in males and females, even though men have, on average, higher narcissism scores than women. For example, we can look at the area of sexual behavior where there are large and consistent gender differences in sexual behavior (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). Nevertheless, in our research on narcissism and sexuality we found no gender interactions (Foster et al., 2006): Male and female narcissists tended to conceptualize sexuality in much the same way. Still, there has been no systematic effort that we are aware of to locate domains where Gender \times Narcissism interactions are apparent. With such an undertaking, a more complex picture of narcissism and gender may emerge.

The final question has to do with the structure of narcissism in men and women. Even though narcissism appears to generally predict the same things in men and women, it is still possible that the structure of narcissism itself is different in men and women. The only published research that we know of that has examined this issue demonstrated some evidence for gender differences in the structure of narcissism (Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998). Notably, exploitativeness and entitlement were more closely linked with narcissism in men than

in women. We believe that there needs to be more research in this interesting and important area.

Same Across Cultures?

A fascinating issue surrounding the construct of narcissism is its cultural underpinnings. The huge popularity of Lasch's (1979), *The Culture of Narcissism*, shows not only the interest in narcissism as a cultural phenomenon, but also that a narcissistic culture can be localized not only in space (e.g., East versus West) but also in time (e.g., the 1970s in the US versus the 1950s). We will examine both these topics in order.

First, there is good evidence for cultural differences in narcissism. In a large web-based survey, for example, we found that narcissism scores were higher in the West than the East (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003). This finding is consistent with self-esteem differences between East and West and its relation to cultural independence (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). In fact, in one interesting study, a link was established from cultural independence to personal narcissism to narcissistic behaviors including game-playing love styles (Le, 2005).

Does narcissism "work" the same way across cultures? We know from the work of Stucke (2003) that narcissism predicts the same behaviors in the US and Germany. Less well understood is the working of narcissism in Asia, a continent frequently associated with higher collectivism. In one study, for example, the association between narcissism and Type A behavior was found to be similar in the US, Japan, and China (Fukunishi, Nakagawa, Nakamura, Li, Hua, & Krantz, 1996). On the other hand, it is possible that narcissism is simply different in Asia, with narcissism being associated with inflated views on communal, rather than agentic, traits (see Sedikides, Gaertner & Toguchi, 2003). Clearly, a good deal more research is needed in this area to understand fully the manifestations of narcissism in collectivistic cultures.

Second, there is evidence consistent with the thesis that narcissism has increased in the US (and maybe throughout the world) over the last several decades, but there is no conclusive evidence at this point. We have reasonable evidence that narcissism levels are lower in older participants (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003). However, this could be due to declining narcissism with age and/or cohort changes in narcissism. We have two additional pieces of evidence, however, that support the cohort change idea. First, self-esteem in college age samples has increased significantly in the US since the 1960s (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Second, on the MMPI, 12% of teens in 1948–56 agreed with the statement, "I am an important person." This percentage had increased more than six-fold by 1989 when 79% of teens agreed with the statement (Newsom, Archer, Trumbetta, & Gottesman, 2003). As we have argued elsewhere (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003; Twenge & Campbell, 2001), it is our opinion that at least in the US a "culture of self-worth" has inflated a range of self-related constructs from self-esteem and self-focus to self-importance and narcissism. Because of the recent creation of the NPI, however, it is impossible to do the cross-temporal meta-analysis necessary to completely confirm this prediction. However, if this trend continues, then it may

be possible to document it in the future as generations of college-aged participants continue to take the NPI as part of psychological investigations.

Changeable or Unchangeable?

The final controversy in the study of narcissism that we cover in this chapter regards its malleability: can narcissism be changed or is it unchangeable? This issue is especially salient in the clinical area, where narcissism (in the form of NPD) is widely considered to be one of the most intractable personality disorders. There are at least three factors that make narcissism highly resistant to change. First, narcissism involves the self, and the self, whether it be good, bad, or ugly, is highly resistant to change (Markus, 1977; Swann, 1996). Second, narcissists are notoriously resistant to any feedback judged as critical. As is evident from the self-serving bias research on narcissism (Campbell et al., 2000; Kernis & Sun, 1994; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), narcissists are adept at deflecting attacks and responding to perceived criticisms. Finally, narcissism feels good (Rose & Campbell, 2004; Sedikides et al., 2004), so the motivation to change may be hard to come by. To think about it in more personal terms, imagine waking up in the morning, looking in the mirror, grinning, and thinking that you are God's gift to the universe. It may be hard to give that up.

So, if narcissism is so difficult to change, is there any evidence that narcissists ever do change? The answer is: a little bit. First, narcissists can theoretically be changed by adding communal traits (e.g., warmth, morality, caring) to their personality. We think about this as a "communal shift." The beauty of this avenue to change is that it does not directly confront narcissists' inflated self-views on agentic traits; rather, it adds communal traits to the mix. In one study of married couples, for example, narcissists who reported that their partners elicited communal traits from them (i.e., made the narcissist feel more caring and warmth) actually became better partners over time (Campbell, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult 2007). Our current research is focusing on experimentally activating communal self-conceptions in narcissists and then assessing relevant outcome variables.

Second, there have been some very important recent advances in the clinical treatment of narcissism. Researchers using self-control regulation/interpersonal psychotherapy (SCRIPT) have found evidence of psychological change in clients suffering from NPD (Cukrowicz & Joiner, 2005). This therapeutic approach is completely nonjudgmental and relies on the narcissist to re-evaluate his or her own behaviors in regard to individual goals. For example, if the narcissist became aggressive with a co-worker because of a perceived ego threat, the clinician may ask: how did that help you reach your goal of being supervisor at your job? The narcissist may respond that it felt good, but it may have hurt his reputation in the eyes of his boss. The clinician will then ask the client to come up with an alternative way of handling the situation. Over time, the narcissist will ideally shape his or her behavior to be consistent with his or her goals, and develop some awareness of the detrimental effects of his or her narcissism. Clearly, the issue of changing narcissism is an important one. These two approaches hold promise, but we hope that future research will develop new strategies for minimizing narcissism.

CONCLUSION

In summary, there are clearly a variety of different theoretical takes on narcissism, and there is much to be done to resolve many of the controversies in the field of narcissism research. Perhaps the most important point we wanted to make by writing this chapter is that we believe narcissism should be thought of as neither entirely healthy nor unhealthy. Rather, we believe that the consequences of narcissism are largely dependent upon the context in which narcissism is studied and the outcome variables that are assessed, with narcissism being associated with positive outcomes in certain contexts.

As is seen in our extended agency model, there is a variety of things that narcissists do that are potentially beneficial (at least to the self) in some contexts. However, some of the things that narcissists do may only succeed if they possess certain skills that are commonly associated with narcissism (e.g., high extraversion and confidence). If these skills do not exist, we may see a breakdown in the system that may in some cases lead to depressed feelings and even treatment seeking. In other cases, narcissistic individuals may possess a level of skill required to maintain the system and their narcissistic esteem. If the latter is true, then we suspect that changing narcissism will be difficult indeed. What would a person who feels great about herself want to change? However, it may be possible to alter narcissism, not by attacking the features of narcissism, but instead by feeding the components of the narcissistic self that are lacking (e.g., communal concerns). Doing so may lessen the need to use strategies and skills that further increase narcissism (e.g., “game-playing” in relationships in order to satisfy agentic desires), thus weakening the narcissistic system. Of course, more research is need on this topic, but it suggests a possible remedy for a personality trait that, although in many cases is beneficial to the self, can be very problematic interpersonally and at a societal level.

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