

## Running From Shame or Reveling in Pride? Narcissism and the Regulation of Self-Conscious Emotions

W. Keith Campbell, Joshua D. Foster, and Amy B. Brunell

*Department of Psychology  
University of Georgia*

Self researchers in personality and social psychology have a wonderfully complex vocabulary for talking about the structures and processes of the self, but a rather limited language for the emotional and affective experiences that are thought to result from or to power many of these self-processes. We tend to rely on old standbys such as positive affect, unpleasant psychological tension, arousal, and esteem to explain a wide array of processes. The use of such a small quiver of explanatory bolts is ideal for integrative science (The compelling “self-zoo” model comes to mind [Tesser, Crepez, Collins, Cornell, & Beach, 2000]), however there is clearly a trade-off involved.

The model of self-conscious emotions Tracy and Robins (this issue) propose will potentially play an important role in correcting this imbalance. To give an example from our own research, one of us spent several years studying the self-serving bias (e.g., Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). These studies typically involved asking participants to engage in either an interdependent or independent task, giving them bogus success or failure feedback, and then measuring attributions for the outcome. Participants—unless they are non-narcissists and working with a close other on an interdependent task—will usually take individual credit for successful outcomes and blame their partner or the situation for unsuccessful outcomes. The standard explanation for this self-serving behavior was largely the motivation to enhance/defend the self or gain/maintain esteem. More complex emotional outcomes or mediators such as pride or shame were never measured or considered. We were not alone in this omission. Even after conducting a large meta-analytic review of the self-serving bias literature, we cannot recall any study that specifically examined shame, pride, or other

self-conscious emotions (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999), although self-esteem, positive affect, arousal, and self-awareness were all studied.

After reading the Tracy and Robins (this issue) article, however, it seems that hypotheses such as: “an experience of elevated hubristic pride is an outcome of narcissists’ self-serving attributions” and “individuals engage in self-serving attributional distortions following failure in part because they experience a threat to their hubristic pride” would be worthy of investigation. Such research could use interesting methods (e.g., codings of body posture as dependent measures or even mediators) and, perhaps more important, would serve as a bridge between a traditional attribution/self-regulation topic and the emotions literature.

### The Case of Narcissism

Despite our enthusiasm for research into self-conscious emotions—and for Tracy and Robins’s (this issue) model—we had several reservations about their use of the model to explain self-regulation among narcissists. It is not our intention to critique the model of self-conscious emotions. Instead, we would like to offer a competing view of narcissistic self-regulation that uses the Tracy and Robins model, but with a different view of the construct of narcissism.

To begin, we would like to restate our interpretation of their analysis of narcissism. Given our training in social psychology, we felt a compelling urge to place the key emotional constructs of pride (hubristic and achievement-oriented), shame and guilt into a 2 × 2 table. We did this by crossing the valence of the emotion (positive, negative) with the attribution type (stable/global, unstable/specific). The result is as shown in Figure 1.

		<u>Attribution Type</u>	
		Stable/Global	Unstable/Specific
<u>Valence</u>	Positive	<i>Hubristic Pride</i>	<i>Achievement-oriented Pride</i>
	Negative	<i>Shame</i>	<i>Guilt</i>

Figure 1. A 2 × 2 table of pride, shame, and guilt.

What is apparent from this table is that hubristic pride and shame share the important similarity of both involving stable/global attributions to the self. An attributional statement such as "I won the competition because I am an awesome person" would be a predictor of hubristic pride; "I lost the competition because I am a worthless loser" would be a predictor of shame. Likewise, "I won the competition because I did everything well today" would lead to achievement-oriented pride, and "I lost the competition because I did everything poorly today" would lead to guilt.

The next step is placing narcissism within this model. Tracy and Robins (this issue) suggest that narcissists (like everybody) "regulate self-esteem by striving to increase pride and avoid shame." They then make three specific points:

1. "Narcissism may promote excessive attentional focus on the self."

2. "Narcissism may influence appraisals of identity-goal relevance. ... Narcissism may also influence the tendency to regulate self-conscious emotions through reappraisals. They may reappraise negative events as irrelevant to identity goals by, for example, shifting the importance of various identity goals (e.g., 'It's OK that I failed my exam because I don't want to be a doctor anyway—I'd rather look cool to my friends')."

3. "Narcissistic self-enhancement biases may promote external attributions for failure. ... The 'shame-rage spiral' observed in clinical research has been noted to be particularly characteristic of narcissists (Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 1998). At an implicit level, narcissists may be much similar to other individuals with low self-esteem, who tend to globalize failure (Brown & Dutton, 1995), which, in our model, means experiencing shame. Thus, for a narcissist, internalization of failure would be internalization of global failure, leading to shame without any possibility of guilt. The only regulatory solution for these individuals is to externalize blame, and experience anger and rage instead. ... Conversely, narcissists may be vigilant of opportunities to internalize positive events, taking credit for successes whenever possible."

To restate, narcissists are self-focused, strategically alter importance of identity goals, and, as a part of a strategy to avoid shame, they externalize blame for negative events. In terms of the  $2 \times 2$  model presented previously, narcissists can be thought of as vacillating between the two cells on the left side of the model (e.g., stable global attributions). They want to stay in the hubristic pride cell, and avoid the shame cell. The latter being a particular risk to narcissists because of their implicit propensity to internalize failure.

We readily acknowledge the potential importance of pride and other self-conscious emotions and believe

that Tracy and Robins (this issue) do a real service to the literature on narcissism by highlighting this. Nevertheless, we would take a somewhat different approach to narcissism and emotion regulation. We will take their three predictions point by point.

First, we agree that there is ample evidence that narcissists are self-focused. They also have largely positive self-views, which would likely be associated with the experience of positive self-conscious emotions.

Second, we agree that narcissists make strategic importance appraisals of the relevance of outcomes to identity goals (e.g., reducing the perceived importance of a test after failing). However, this is not a self-enhancement strategy that is linked exclusively to narcissists. In the one empirical test of this process that we are aware of, narcissists and non-narcissists were given a creativity test followed by bogus success or failure feedback. This task was designed as either an interdependent (Exp. 1) or independent test (Exp. 2). In both cases, participants were asked to judge the importance of the test (as well as make internal or external attributions for the outcome). Across both experiments, narcissists and non-narcissists were equally likely to make strategic importance judgments (e.g., state that success was important and failure unimportant). Descriptively (although not statistically), this bias was slightly greater in non-narcissists than narcissists (Campbell et al., 2000).

Third, in the study just described and several others, narcissists do display a self-serving pattern of attributions. This is consistent with Tracy and Robins's (this issue) model. We also speculate that the emotion of pride (particularly hubristic pride) played a role in this process as an outcome and possibly a mediator of this attributional approach. Where we differ with Tracy and Robins is in the importance of the role of shame (or shame avoidance) in this process. They posited that narcissists experience shame (perhaps implicitly) and this is linked to a shame-rage spiral—the implicit feeling of shame driving the anger that accompanies external attributions made by narcissists.

We differ in our account of narcissists' reactions to negative feedback. In particular, we argue that narcissists are motivated by pride or esteem needs far more than shame. Several lines of reasoning converge on this conclusion: (a) Narcissists report lesser feelings of shame, guilt depression, and other internalizing emotions than non-narcissists. Indeed, narcissists have less negative affect (and more positive affect) than non-narcissists on almost every relevant measure (see Rose & Campbell, *in press*, for a recent review); (b) There is no evidence that narcissists carry negative global self-feelings implicitly. The evidence from Type A behavior seems relatively tangential, and evidence from the implicit association test (IAT) or other standard implicit measures is not there. (We should note that this conclusion is based largely on our discus-

sions with researchers who have tried and failed to find such effects. We would like to make a stronger claim, however to the best of our knowledge the data just are not out there one way or the other); (c) When narcissists react to threat, they display more externalizing (e.g., pride, anger) and fewer internalizing (e.g., shame, sadness) emotions. This has been found following ego threat on performance tasks (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998) and social rejection (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Narcissists do not seem prone to shame following threat. Rather, they seem to respond to threats by trying to knock the threatener down a peg or two. Of course, there is a more complex possibility that the shame is experienced unconsciously or implicitly, and this shame leads to anger and other externalizing emotions. To the best of our knowledge, however, there is no evidence for this. Functionally, it does not seem to make sense either. If one is trying to defend a position of dominance, and this position is threatened, the most rapid and effective (and thus adaptive) response would not include the intermediary of shame; (d) Narcissists are high in approach (but not higher in avoidance) orientation (I base this conclusion on unpublished data collected in our lab as well as by other researchers, see Rose & Campbell, *in press*). This is also the case for self-enhancement more generally (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Narcissists are differentially focused on achieving success, not avoiding failure. In emotional terms, it is arguable that they try to gain pride more than would others, however they would not show a greater desire to avoid shame.

In short, we are of the opinion that narcissists as a group do not typically have elevated negative self-opinions explicitly, implicitly, unconsciously, or anywhere else. We would, however, like to add four qualifications to the previous statement. First, we are talking about agentic traits (intelligence, power, etc.—narcissists do not hold high self-opinions on more communal traits such as caring; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). Second, there may be a small group of “defensive narcissists” out there, however these are not the folks that we generally study in social-personality psychology with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Third, there may be a small group of “failed narcissists” whose approach orientation may not be working because of repeated failure, and this had led them into the shame cell. Finally, we could simply be wrong; the data are at the point where they are still open to interpretation.

If we are correct, however, then we must ask: Why does the view of narcissists with implicit low self-esteem persist? We believe that there are several reasons. First, it might be the result of some misguided psychodynamic thinking. Freud was not a proponent of this idea, however others, such as Kernberg and Kohut, were. It is possible that their generalizations were mis-

guided because clinicians typically see individuals with severe self-disturbances—not normally functioning narcissists. Basically, there was a sample bias (Campbell, 2001). Likewise, there is some tendency in the psychodynamic literature to see explicit personality driven by the opposite implicit state. For example, depression might contain an unconscious component of grandiosity (Miller, 1990). This view, however, is not shared by the mainstream in social-personality psychology who study subclinical depression (with the exception that a range of clinical disorders share self-focused attention, Ingram, 1990). We should also mention that antisocials—the clinical cousin of narcissists—are rarely thought of as having implicit low self-esteem and implicit shame. Instead, much of their problems are traced to the inability to feel guilt. Physiological studies on response to threat make the case that when faced with threat, narcissists act at a physiological level similarly to antisocials (Kelsey, Ornduff, McCann, & Reiff, 2001). This physiological evidence is scant, however it suggests that narcissists (similar to antisocials) are not driven by shame avoidance.

Second, we agree that the narcissistic self is imbalanced, but not because they have positive explicit self-views and negative implicit views that they try to avoid. Rather, we argue the narcissists put tremendous effort and importance into agentic concerns, but little into communal concerns. When success is coming their way, and this success can be confirmed by their social group, they will feel great. When the success is not there, and they cannot explain the failure away, they will have problems that someone with stronger communal bonds would not have. Dependent personality, like Echo in the myth, would be a mirror image—the opposite sort of imbalance.

## Conclusion

Despite our small differences on the conceptualization of narcissism, we were very positively disposed toward Tracy and Robins's (this issue) model. We think that the real test will be if self-conscious emotions allow researchers to make additional predictions beyond the standard esteem, affect, and so on so common in self research. Do individuals who receive success feedback and make internal attributions display a body posture indicative of pride? If they are made self-aware, does this show itself as hubristic pride? Would having a participant boast about global positive (or negative) self-views (or simply to adapt the relevant body postures) lead them to being more violent after ego threat? If we have become a society of high self-esteem individuals, is the same true for our pride, shame, or guilt? There are certainly many roads to follow.

## Note

W. Keith Campbell, Department of Psychology,  
University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-3013.  
E-mail: wkc@uga.edu

## References

- Bushman, B. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (1998). Threatened egotism, narcissism, self-esteem, and direct and displaced aggression: Does self-love or self-hate lead to violence? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 219-229.
- Campbell, W. K. (2001). Is narcissism really so bad? *Psychological Inquiry*, 12, 214-216.
- Campbell, W. K., Reeder, G. D., Sedikides, C., & Elliot, A. J. (2000). Narcissism and comparative self-enhancement strategies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 34, 329-347.
- Campbell, W. K., Rudich, E., & Sedikides, C. (2002). Narcissism, self-esteem, and the positivity of self-views: Two portraits of self-love. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 358-368.
- Campbell, W. K., & Sedikides, C. (1999). Self-threat magnifies the self-serving bias: A meta-analytic integration. *Review of General Psychology*, 3, 23-43.
- Elliot, A. J., & Thrash, T. M. (2002). Approach-avoidance motivation in personality: Approach-avoidance temperaments and goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 804-818.
- Ingram, R. E. (1990). Self-focused attention in clinical disorders: Review and a conceptual model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107, 156-176.
- Kelsey, R. M., Ornduff, S. R., McCann, C. M., & Reiff, S. (2001). Psychophysiological characteristics of narcissism during active and passive coping. *Psychophysiology*, 38, 292-303.
- Miller, A. (1990). *The drama of the gifted child*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rhodewalt, F., & Morf, C. C. (1998). On self-aggrandizement and anger: A temporal analysis of narcissism and affective reactions to success and failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 672-685.
- Rose, P., & Campbell, W. K. (in press). Greatness feels good: A telic model of narcissism and subjective well-being. In S. P. Shohov (Ed.), *Advances in psychology research*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova.
- Sedikides, C., Campbell, W. K., Reeder, G. D., & Elliot, A. J. (1998). The self-serving bias in relational context. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 378-386.
- Twenge, J., & Campbell, W. K. (2003). "Isn't it fun to get the respect that we're going to deserve?" Narcissism, social rejection, and aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 261-272.
- Tesser, A., Crepez, N., Collins, J. C., Cornell, D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2000). Confluence of self-esteem regulation mechanisms: On integrating the self-zoo. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 1476-1489.

## Shame as the Emotional Response to Threat to the Social Self: Implications for Behavior, Physiology, and Health

**Margaret E. Kemeny**

*Health Psychology Program, Department of Psychiatry  
University of California, San Francisco*

**Tara L. Gruenewald**

*Department of Medicine, Division of Geriatrics  
University of California, Los Angeles*

**Sally S. Dickerson**

*Department of Psychology  
University of California, Los Angeles*

Tracy and Robins (this issue) bring an important, new perspective to the understanding of the self-conscious emotions. It is important to distinguish the self-conscious emotions from other emotional experiences and to recognize their unique features and importance in daily experience. The authors integrate ongoing thinking in this area with their own perspective on the antecedents and cognitive elicitors of these emotions, their functions, and the role they may play in a wide variety of psychological processes. This integrative perspective should stimulate a tremendous amount of research and further thinking in this important and understudied area.

In the following commentary, we limit our observations to shame and comment on and extend the work of Tracy and Robins (this issue) in three directions. First, we argue that although shame is a self-conscious emotion, it is most frequently elicited in social conditions that threaten one's social identity. We present a theoretical framework that elucidates the consequences of exposure to events that threaten one's social self (i.e., one's social value or status) and argues that a decrease in one's social status and social regard is the primary elicitor of the experience of shame. We discuss research findings that support this hypothesis. Second, we argue that shame is directly

Copyright of Psychological Inquiry is the property of Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.