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# On Being Eager and Uninhibited: Narcissism and Approach–Avoidance Motivation

Joshua D. Foster  
Riley F. Trimm IV

University of South Alabama

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*This article demonstrates the validity and utility of conceptualizing narcissistic personality in terms of relative approach–avoidance motivation. Across three studies (N = 1,319), narcissism predicted high approach and low avoidance motivation. That is, narcissists reported being strongly motivated to approach desirable outcomes but only weakly motivated to avoid negative outcomes. Relative approach–avoidance motivation was shown to be useful in terms of explaining behavioral tendencies associated with narcissism (i.e., functional and dysfunctional impulsivity) and distinguishing different “flavors” of narcissism (i.e., overt and covert narcissism). Discussion focuses on how approach–avoidance motivation may be used to explain prior findings in the narcissism literature and generate novel future hypotheses.*

**Keywords:** *personality; narcissism; motivation; approach; avoidance; impulsivity; covert narcissism*

Narcissism<sup>1</sup> has been described as a “mixed blessing” (Paulhus, 1998) because of its adaptive and maladaptive features. On the positive side, narcissists<sup>2</sup> are outgoing (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), confident (Emmons, 1984), secure in their close relationships (Foster & Campbell, 2005), and perform well under pressure (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). On the negative side, narcissists are impulsive (Vazire & Funder, 2006), romantically fickle (Foster, 2008; Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006), and aggressive (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008), and they fail to learn from their mistakes (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). The term *approach orientation* has been used to describe some of these patterns of traits and tendencies (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2007). That is, the behavior of narcissists is appetitively motivated.

Approach orientation is central to Campbell’s agency model of narcissism, which puts it as one of the defining

features of narcissism (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006; Campbell & Foster, 2007). Similarly, Morf and Rhodewalt’s (2001) dynamic self-regulatory processing model views approach orientation as an important concept for understanding narcissism. Other researchers have further suggested the utility of applying approach and avoidance motivation to narcissism (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2001; Vazire & Funder, 2006). Considering the level of interest in this issue, there is a notable lack of published empirical work that has attempted to locate narcissism on the approach–avoidance dimensions. Doing so may help clarify a number of issues in the narcissism literature. For instance, conceptualizing narcissism in terms of approach–avoidance may offer insight into narcissistic behavior patterns (e.g., impulsivity; Vazire & Funder, 2006) and help distinguish different “flavors” of narcissism (e.g., overt and covert narcissism; Rose, 2002; Wink, 1991).

The primary goal of the present research was to empirically demonstrate how narcissism relates to approach–avoidance motivation. It was expected that narcissism would be associated with strong approach and weak avoidance motivation. In other words, narcissists were expected to possess strong motivation to approach desirable outcomes coupled with weak motivation to

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avoid undesirable outcomes. A secondary goal of this research was to demonstrate the value of incorporating approach-avoidance motivation into the study of narcissism. To this end, we attempted to show how the link between narcissism and impulsivity (Vazire & Funder, 2006) and distinctions between overt and covert narcissism (Wink, 1991) may be elucidated by approach-avoidance motivation. Before moving to these studies, however, we first present an overview of approach-avoidance motivation and its relation to narcissism.

### Approach-Avoidance Motivation

Approach-avoidance motivation, as defined in the present research, maps roughly onto a collection of theories located throughout the history of psychology. Generally speaking, these theories propose systems that motivate behavior toward desirable outcomes (approach) and away from undesirable outcomes (avoidance). Included in these are Eysenck's (1990) psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism (PEN) model; Gray's (1970) reinforcement sensitivity theory; Davidson's (1992) neurophysiological model of approach/withdrawal; and the structural model of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1923/1962; see Carver, 2005, for further discussion). These theories share the notion that behaviors can be appetitively or aversively motivated.

Approach-avoidance motivations have been discussed by philosophers and scientists for thousands of years. Elliot and Covington (2001) noted that formal discussion of these concepts dates to at least Democritus (460-370 B.C.). Experimental psychologists, including James (1890), continued to stress the importance of approach-avoidance motivation. Research based on these concepts has generated a tremendous wealth of knowledge (e.g., Corr, 2004). As it relates to the present research, there are a couple of points worth noting. First, there are individual differences in approach-avoidance motivation. Second, approach and avoidance motivations are theoretically orthogonal. Consequently, approach-avoidance can be viewed as a two-dimensional model with different points in space representing degrees of approach and avoidance motivation. The primary goal of the present research was to locate narcissism along the dimensions of approach and avoidance motivation. As will be discussed, there were good reasons to expect narcissism to be associated with strong approach and weak avoidance motivation.

### Locating Narcissism on Approach-Avoidance Dimensions

Why might one expect narcissism to be associated with high approach and low avoidance motivation? There are at least two answers to this question. One is

more theoretical and deals with how narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation may be similarly shaped through development and experience. The other is more empirical and deals with how narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation share several personality and behavioral correlates.

### *Parenting and Society*

Where does narcissism come from? This question has long fascinated researchers. Many theorists look to the parenting of narcissists for answers. One prominent view is that narcissism develops from overindulgent, overvaluing, and overprotective parenting (e.g., Kohut, 1977; Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, & Ramnath, 2004). There is little research that empirically addresses this issue, but that which does (i.e., examining parenting recollections) generally supports this view (Horton, Bleau, & Drwecki, 2006; Otway & Vignoles, 2006). In a related vein, Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, and Bushman (in press-a, in press-b) recently reported that narcissism has been steadily rising in college students during the past 25 years. They suggest that programs associated with the "self-esteem movement" may be in part responsible for this trend. Like parents who overly praise and protect their children, the self-esteem movement attempted to bolster the self-image of America's youth by promoting praise and encouragement without correction. This "everyone's a winner" mentality has possibly contributed to the overconfidence and bravado that to some extent characterizes the current generation.

In short, when children (and adults for that matter) receive messages that everything they do is wonderful, it should not be surprising that they view themselves as wonderful too. Likewise, when children are protected from failure and the consequences of their actions, it should not be surprising that they consider themselves infallible. Moreover, just as these messages may fuel narcissism, they may also foster high approach and low avoidance motivation. If the most likely outcome of one's behavior is reward (e.g., praise), then reward should provide the primary motivation to behave. Thus, individuals who learn through years of experience that reward is a likely and punishment an unlikely consequence of behavior should adopt a more approach-focused mind-set. Their behaviors should be motivated more by reward promotion than punishment prevention.

Because narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation may be shaped by similar environmental forces, it seems reasonable to expect narcissism to be associated with strong approach motivation and weak avoidance motivation. Admittedly, this argument is longer on theory than empirical evidence. For this we turn to studies that

have examined variables related to narcissism and approach–avoidance motivation.

### *Empirical Evidence*

These studies can be broken into two general lines of research: those that focus on personality and psychological adjustment and those that focus on behavioral tendencies. In terms of personality and psychological adjustment, narcissism is linked to high extraversion (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), low neuroticism (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004), high self-esteem (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Campbell & Foster, 2002; Rose, 2002), and low depression (Sedikides et al., 2004). Each of these traits is associated with high approach motivation, low avoidance motivation, or both (e.g., Campbell-Sills, Liverant, & Brown, 2004; Corr, 2004; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Heimpel, Elliot, & Wood, 2006; Smits & De Boeck, 2006). It is also notable that narcissism and psychopathy, although distinguishable from one another, correlate strongly (in particular, narcissism and primary psychopathy; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathy in turn has been shown to relate to combinations of high approach or low avoidance motivation, or both (Kimbrel, Nelson-Gray, & Mitchell, 2007; Newman, MacCoon, Vaughn, & Sadeh, 2005). Given this documented pattern of associations, it seems reasonable to expect narcissism to relate to high approach and low avoidance motivation.

In terms of behavior, there are at least two examples from the literature suggesting a connection between narcissism and approach–avoidance motivation. Both of these follow a similar pattern of logic. First, narcissists tend to behave more aggressively in laboratory settings (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Reidy et al., 2008), and aggression has been empirically linked to high approach and low avoidance (Harmon-Jones, 2003). Consequently, it seems reasonable to predict a similar set of associations for narcissism. Narcissism is also reliably linked to high impulsivity (Vazire & Funder, 2006). Likewise, impulsivity is associated with high approach and low avoidance, or simply high approach motivation depending on whether the impulsivity is functional or dysfunctional (Smillie & Jackson, 2006). Again, based on this pattern of relations, it seems reasonable to predict similar associations between narcissism and approach–avoidance motivation.

Finally, it is notable that some of the behaviors in which narcissists more frequently engage offer both short-term rewards and long-term costs. For example, narcissists are prone to alcohol abuse and pathological gambling (Lahey, Goodie, & Campbell, 2006; Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005). Each of these behaviors offers short-term

rewards (e.g., winning money) and long-term costs (e.g., losing money). The fact that narcissists more frequently engage in these sorts of behaviors seems to suggest that their behavior is more strongly motivated by reward than punishment. That is, they appear to focus on the positive outcomes that stem from these behaviors while ignoring the potential negative outcomes. This seems to indicate high approach and low avoidance motivation.

### **Present Research**

The present research attempted to locate narcissism along the dimensions of approach and avoidance motivation. It was hypothesized that narcissism would be associated with high approach and low avoidance motivation. In other words, narcissists were hypothesized to possess strong appetitive motivations, coupled with weak behavioral inhibition. This was explicitly tested in Study 1 by correlating a measure of narcissism with measures of approach and avoidance motivation. Next, to demonstrate the utility of applying approach–avoidance motivation to narcissism, it was examined how this may clarify some issues in the narcissism literature. A recent review by Vazire and Funder (2006) demonstrated a consistent link between narcissism and high impulsivity. They speculated that approach–avoidance motivation may underlie this predisposition. Study 2 examined this directly by testing whether approach–avoidance motivation mediates the link between narcissism and impulsivity. Additionally, there is a growing interest in what researchers refer to as “covert” narcissism (Wink, 1991). Covert narcissism is a form of narcissism that is supposedly more maladaptive than the more heavily researched “overt” narcissism (overt narcissism being typically measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory [NPI]; Raskin & Terry, 1988). There is limited research that directly examines distinctions between overt and covert narcissism. Study 3 addressed this by testing the hypothesis that a key distinction between overt and covert narcissism lies in their relative levels of approach–avoidance motivation.

## **STUDY 1**

The first study provided an initial test of the links between narcissism and high approach and low avoidance motivation. Participants completed measures of narcissism and approach–avoidance motivation.

### **Method**

#### *Participants and Procedure*

A sample of 917 University of South Alabama undergraduates (mean age = 21; 63% female) was recruited

from the psychology department subject pool. They completed the following measures.

**Narcissism.** Participants completed the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), which consists of 40 pairs of self-descriptive statements. Participants selected the statement from each pair that best described them. For each narcissistic statement selected (e.g., "I am an extraordinary person") participants received 1 point. Thus, higher scores indicate higher narcissism ( $M = 17.30$ ,  $SD = 8.33$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Approach-avoidance motivation.** Participants completed the 20-item Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) and Behavioral Activation System (BAS) scales, which is a purpose-driven measure of approach (BAS) and avoidance (BIS) motivation (Carver & White, 1994). Thirteen items reflect approach (e.g., "When I want something, I usually go all-out and get it") and seven items reflect avoidance (e.g., "If I think something unpleasant is going to happen I usually get pretty worked up"). Participants responded to items from *very false* (1) to *very true* (4). Higher scores indicate stronger approach ( $M = 40.49$ ,  $SD = 5.36$ ,  $\alpha = .74$ ) and avoidance ( $M = 20.21$ ,  $SD = 3.54$ ,  $\alpha = .69$ ) motivation.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this study offered clear support for the hypotheses. Narcissism significantly predicted high approach motivation (i.e., BAS;  $r = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and low avoidance motivation (i.e., BIS;  $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, narcissism predicted approach and avoidance motivation equivalently across participant age, sex, and ethnic identify,  $F_{(\text{interactions})} < 1$ . The only exception to this was that the link between narcissism and low avoidance motivation was stronger for older relative to younger participants,  $F_{(\text{interaction})} = 10.58$ ,  $p < .01$ . Nevertheless, even for younger participants (i.e., age 1  $SD$  below the sample mean), the association between narcissism and avoidance motivation was significant ( $t = -4.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, the general finding that narcissism predicts low avoidance motivation was not affected by this significant interaction. In short, these results provide support for the hypothesis that narcissistic individuals report strong approach and weak avoidance motivation.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 attempted to demonstrate the value of incorporating approach-avoidance motivation into the study of narcissistic behavior. A recent review by Vazire and Funder (2006) demonstrated a highly replicable positive

correlation between narcissism and impulsivity. They noted that narcissistic impulsivity may "result from an excess of desires . . . or from a shortage of restraints" (p. 162). In terms of approach-avoidance, they suggested that impulsivity may result from high approach or low avoidance tendencies. Because narcissism is related to both, both of these explanations were plausible. A third possibility was that high approach and low avoidance may *both* contribute to impulsivity in narcissists.

In one important respect, these predictions may be overly simplistic. They reflect the view that impulsivity is a singular maladaptive construct (e.g., Smillie & Jackson, 2006). Dickman (1990) and others have challenged this view, showing that impulsivity can be dysfunctional or functional depending on whether outcomes are negative or positive. For example, making a quick, noncontemplative but appropriate decision might be considered functional impulsivity (e.g., quickly swerving one's car out of the way of an accident; Smillie & Jackson, 2006). Making an inappropriate decision in the same manner might be considered dysfunctional impulsivity (e.g., quickly swerving one's car into another car in retaliation for an obscene gesture). Smillie and Jackson (2006) have suggested that approach motivation underlies both functional and dysfunctional impulsivity. Avoidance motivation, however, underlies only functional impulsivity; it is unrelated to dysfunctional impulsivity.

Based on these findings, several predictions were made. First, because narcissism is related to high approach and low avoidance motivation, it was expected that narcissism would relate to impulsivity in general but more strongly to functional than dysfunctional impulsivity. This is because functional impulsivity is related to both motivational dispositions of narcissism, whereas dysfunctional impulsivity is related to only one. In terms of the explanatory roles of approach-avoidance, high approach and low avoidance were expected to account for the link between narcissism and functional impulsivity. Only elevated approach was predicted to account for the narcissism-dysfunctional impulsivity link. These last two hypotheses seem reasonable given the known links between narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation (Study 1) and approach-avoidance motivation and functional-dysfunctional impulsivity (Smillie & Jackson, 2006), and the hypothesized links between narcissism and functional-dysfunctional impulsivity (present study). Essentially, these predictions suggest that narcissists are predisposed to behaving impulsively in ways that result in negative outcomes because of an overwhelming urge to attain reward. On a more positive note, they are also predisposed to impulsive behavior that results in positive outcomes because of a strong reward focus coupled with low behavioral inhibition. Support for these predictions

would provide direct evidence that approach–avoidance motivation helps explain the mixed blessing that is narcissism (Paulhus, 1998).

Two potential limitations of Study 1 were also addressed in this study. Approach–avoidance motivation was measured in Study 1 using Carver and White's (1994) measure. It was possible that something specific to this measure prompted narcissistic individuals to respond as they did. A strategy to address this is to use alternative measures of approach–avoidance. In the present study, both Carver and White's (1994) measure and a conceptually related measure of sensitivity to reward and punishment (O'Connor, Colder, & Hawk, 2004; Torrubia, Ávila, Moltó, & Caseras, 2001) were used. These scales are conceptually similar in that both were designed to tap dimensions of approach–avoidance motivation.

In a separate matter, it was possible that narcissism related to high approach and low avoidance motivation because the items used to measure approach motivation were perceived as reflecting more positive qualities than the avoidance motivation items. Narcissists in particular might find themselves drawn to positive-sounding self-descriptors. To control for this, a measure of social desirable responding was administered in the present study. Narcissism was expected to predict high approach and low avoidance motivation independent of social desirable responding.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

A sample of 193 participants (mean age = 22; 75% female) completed the NPI ( $M = 14.83$ ,  $SD = 7.18$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ), BIS ( $M = 21.53$ ,  $SD = 3.83$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ), BAS ( $M = 40.68$ ,  $SD = 5.28$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ), and the following measures.

*Additional measure of approach–avoidance motivation.* In addition to Carver and White's (1994) measures of BIS and BAS, participants completed the Sensitivity to Reward and Punishment Scale (O'Connor et al., 2004). The Sensitivity to Reward subscale (SR)—an analogue to BAS—consists of 17 items (e.g., “Do you often do things to be praised?”) rated either *yes* (1) or *no* (0). The Sensitivity to Punishment subscale (SP)—an analogue to BIS—consists of 18 items (e.g., “Do you often refrain from doing something because of your fear of being embarrassed?”) also answered *yes* (1) or *no* (0). Higher scores on the SR ( $M = 7.13$ ,  $SD = 3.81$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ) and SP ( $M = 9.30$ ,  $SD = 4.75$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ) indicate stronger approach and avoidance motivation, respectively.

*Functional and dysfunctional impulsivity.* Participants completed Dickman's (1990) 23-item scale. Functional

impulsivity (DIIF) was assessed by 11 items (e.g., “I like sports and games in which you have to choose your next move very quickly”) answered *true* (1) or *false* (0). Dysfunctional impulsivity (DIID) was assessed by 12 items (e.g., “I often get into trouble because I don't think before I act”). Higher scores on the DIIF ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 2.71$ ,  $\alpha = .70$ ) and DIID ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ) indicate higher functional and dysfunctional impulsivity, respectively.

In addition to Dickman's (1990) measure, which is the standard assessment of functional and dysfunctional impulsivity, two additional analogue measures of dysfunctional and functional impulsivity were administered.

*Impulse control.* Participants completed the impulse control subscale of the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI; Weinberger, 1997). This scale measures impulsivity using eight items (e.g., “I do things without giving them enough thought”) rated from *false* (1) to *true* (5). Because the WAI is most commonly used to measure impulse control as it relates to aggression and behavioral problems (e.g., Farrell & Sullivan, 2000), it was deemed reasonably analogous to dysfunctional impulsivity. Higher scores on the WAI indicate higher dysfunctional impulsivity ( $M = 18.82$ ,  $SD = 6.95$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ).

*Blirtatiousness.* Participants completed the Brief Loquaciousness and Interpersonal Responsiveness Test (BLIRT; Swann & Rentfrow, 2001). This scale measures what is essentially verbal impulsivity (e.g., how quickly things that come to mind are said). There are a total of eight items in this scale (e.g., “I always say what's on my mind”) rated from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Because blirtatiousness has been shown to be interpersonally adaptive, at least in the short term, it was deemed reasonably analogous to functional impulsivity (Swann & Rentfrow, 2001). Higher scores on the BLIRT indicate higher functional impulsivity ( $M = 23.02$ ,  $SD = 5.31$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ).

*Social desirability.* Participants completed the 33-item Marlowe–Crowne Scale (MCS; Crowne & Marlow, 1960). The MCS measures social desirability by asking participants to report whether a number of uncommon but desirable and common but undesirable traits are true or false of them (e.g., “I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off”). Participants get 1 point each time they respond true to an item that reflects something positive or false to an item that reflects something negative. Higher scores indicate higher social desirable responding ( $M = 10.88$ ,  $SD = 3.22$ ,  $\alpha = .67$ ).

## Results

### Data Reduction

To reduce the number of variables used in subsequent analyses, two principal component analyses (PCAs) with promax rotation were performed: one on the four measures of approach-avoidance motivation (i.e., BIS, BAS, SP, SR) and one on the four measures of functional-dysfunctional impulsivity (i.e., DIIF, DIID, BLIRT, WAI). Two expected components emerged representing 77% of the variance (48% and 29% each) in the approach-avoidance measures. Examining the pattern matrix, BIS (.91, cross-loaded at .07) and SP (.89, cross-loaded at -.07) loaded strongest on the first component (labeled *avoidance motivation*). BAS (.82, cross-loaded at -.11) and SR (.88, cross-loaded at .10) loaded strongest on the second component (labeled *approach motivation*). Likewise, two expected components emerged representing 80% of the variance (55% and 26% each) in the functional-dysfunctional impulsivity measures. Examining the pattern matrix, DIID (.93, cross-loaded at -.04) and WAI (.91, cross-loaded at .03) loaded strongest on the first component (labeled *dysfunctional impulsivity*). DIIF (.93, cross-loaded at -.12) and BLIRT (.78, cross-loaded at .16) loaded strongest on the second component (labeled *functional impulsivity*). Component scores from each PCA were saved to the data set—component scores were computed using Thurstone's (1935) regression method—resulting in four variables representing approach motivation, avoidance motivation, functional impulsivity, and dysfunctional impulsivity.

### Is Narcissism Related to High Approach and Low Avoidance Motivation?

Replicating the results of Study 1, narcissism was significantly correlated with high approach motivation ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ) and low avoidance motivation ( $r = -.46, p < .001$ ). Also, narcissism significantly correlated with individual measures of approach motivation (BAS:  $r_s = .48$  for both BAS and SR) and avoidance motivation ( $r_s = -.38$  and  $-.46$  for BIS and SP, respectively). Thus, narcissism predicted high approach and low avoidance motivation regardless of how it was assessed.

### Does Social Desirability Explain These Findings?

Narcissism was not significantly correlated with social desirable responding ( $r = -.12, p = .09$ ). It is not surprising, then, that when approach and avoidance motivations were regressed onto narcissism and social desirability simultaneously, narcissism continued to significantly predict high approach and low avoidance motivation ( $\beta_s = .56$  and  $-.48$ , respectively, both  $p_s < .001$ ).

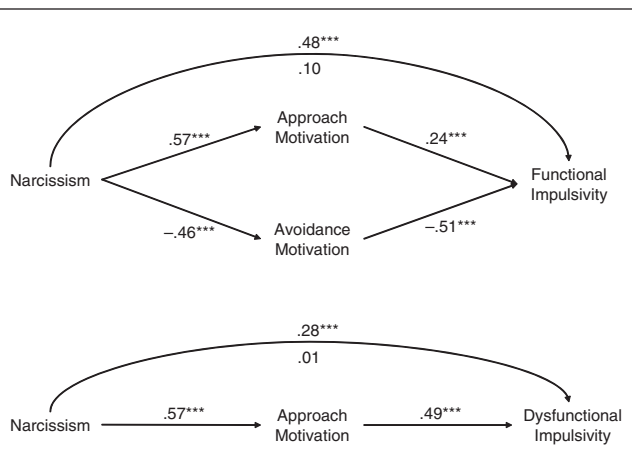
### How Are Narcissism, Approach-Avoidance, and Impulsivity Linked?

Supporting the first set of hypotheses, narcissism significantly correlated with both high functional impulsivity ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ) and high dysfunctional impulsivity ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ) but more strongly with high functional impulsivity ( $t = 2.78, p < .01$ ). Consistent with Smillie and Jackson (2006), functional impulsivity was significantly related to high approach motivation ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ) and low avoidance motivation ( $r = -.61, p < .001$ ). Also consistent with Smillie and Jackson, dysfunctional impulsivity was significantly related to high approach motivation ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ) and not significantly related to avoidance motivation ( $r = -.13, p = .06$ ).

### Does Approach-Avoidance Explain the Link Between Narcissism and Impulsivity?

It was hypothesized that the link between narcissism and functional impulsivity would be explained by both approach and avoidance motivation, and that the link between narcissism and dysfunctional impulsivity would be explained by just approach motivation. To test these hypotheses, two mediation analyses were conducted using Baron and Kenny's (1986) "causal steps" method.

*Narcissism and functional impulsivity.* First, a series of simple regressions established that narcissism significantly predicted functional impulsivity ( $\beta = .48, p < .001$ ), approach motivation ( $\beta = .57, p < .001$ ), and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.46, p < .001$ ). (Note that in simple regressions, the standardized regression coefficient,  $\beta$ , is equal to the Pearson product-moment coefficient,  $r$ . The  $\beta$  values are reported here so that readers do not have to search for their corresponding  $r$  values in previous sections.) Two additional simple regressions established that functional impulsivity was significantly predicted by approach motivation ( $\beta = .42, p < .001$ ) and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.61, p < .001$ ). Therefore, it was established that the predictor (i.e., narcissism), the proposed mediators (i.e., approach and avoidance motivation), and the outcome (i.e., functional impulsivity) were all significantly correlated with one another. Next, using multiple regression, functional impulsivity was regressed onto narcissism, approach motivation, and avoidance motivation simultaneously. The results of this regression model showed that whereas approach motivation ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ) and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.51, p < .001$ ) remained significant predictors of functional impulsivity, narcissism fell to nonsignificance ( $\beta = .10, p = .16$ ; model  $R^2 = .46$ ). In short, the association between narcissism and functional impulsivity was completely accounted for by the



**Figure 1** Path diagram of approach-avoidance mediation of narcissism and functional impulsivity (upper diagram) and dysfunctional impulsivity (lower diagram) from Study 2 ( $N = 193$ ).

NOTE: Numbers are standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ). The number above the curved arrow represents the direct link between narcissism and functional/dysfunctional impulsivity. The number below the curved arrow represents the link after controlling for approach-avoidance motivation.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

combined predictive utility of approach and avoidance motivation (see Figure 1 for the path diagram).

We next tested whether the indirect effects (i.e., mediation) observed were statistically significant by applying an SPSS macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2007). The total indirect effect (i.e., combined mediation stemming from approach and avoidance motivation) was significant ( $z = 6.40, p < .001$ ), as were the individual indirect effects of approach motivation ( $z = 3.51, p < .001$ ) and avoidance motivation ( $z = 5.52, p < .001$ ). This suggests that approach and avoidance motivations each significantly contributed to the mediation of narcissism and functional impulsivity. In sum, consistent with the hypotheses, approach and avoidance motivation significantly and fully mediated the link between narcissism and functional impulsivity.

*Narcissism and dysfunctional impulsivity.* Narcissism significantly predicted dysfunctional impulsivity ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ) and approach motivation ( $\beta = .57, p < .001$ ). Likewise, dysfunctional impulsivity was significantly predicted by approach motivation ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ); recall that avoidance motivation was not predicted to mediate. However, when both narcissism and approach motivation were used to simultaneously predict dysfunctional impulsivity, approach motivation remained significant ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ), whereas narcissism fell to nonsignificance ( $\beta = .01, p = .95$ ; model  $R^2 = .24$ ). The indirect effect was significant ( $z = 5.29, p < .001$ ). Therefore, consistent with hypotheses, approach motivation significantly and fully mediated

the link between narcissism and dysfunctional impulsivity (see Figure 1 for the path diagram).

## Discussion

Study 2 resulted in several important findings. The connection between narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation was replicated and shown to be independent of social desirable responding. Furthermore, the value of incorporating approach-avoidance motivation into the study of narcissism was shown for impulsivity. Narcissism was linked to high functional impulsivity through both high approach and low avoidance motivation. Conversely, narcissism was linked to dysfunctional impulsivity through high approach motivation. These results also replicate prior findings showing that functional and dysfunctional impulsivities are linked to high-approach/low-avoidance motivation and high-approach motivation, respectively (Smillie & Jackson, 2006).

The type of impulsivity one is referring to is a factor when attempting to explain why narcissists exhibit it. Narcissists are strongly motivated toward the attainment of reward and relatively uninhibited by fear of punishment. This helps them in situations that call for quick action (i.e., functional impulsivity). Their behavior is uninhibited and they are able to react quickly. It is primarily their heightened sensitivity to reward that is part of their downfall. Because they are so motivated toward reward attainment, they get themselves into trouble—doing things that may be inappropriate given the situation (i.e., dysfunctional impulsivity). In short, part of the mixed blessing of narcissism stems from its motivational disposition.

## STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 show that narcissism is reliably linked to high approach motivation and low avoidance motivation. Study 2 demonstrated how this can be useful in terms of understanding the link between narcissism and impulsivity. The purpose of the present study was to further demonstrate the theoretical utility of employing the concepts of approach-avoidance motivation in narcissism research. Specifically, it was investigated whether approach-avoidance motivation helps clarify the constructs of overt and covert narcissism.

### *Using Approach-Avoidance to Clarify Overt and Covert Narcissism*

The distinction between overt and covert narcissism has received increased attention in recent years (e.g., Rose, 2002; Wink, 1992). Overt narcissism is most

often captured by scores on the NPI and has traditionally been the type of narcissism most heavily researched in social psychology (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Covert narcissism is captured by scores on other scale measures such as the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Hendin & Cheek, 1997). The distinction between overt and covert narcissism is not entirely clear. Some suggest that covert narcissism represents the more pathological form of the trait (e.g., Hickman, Watson, & Morris, 1996; Watson, Hickman, & Morris, 1996). Consistent with this, Rose (2002, p. 380) states that

overt narcissists experience a grandiose sense of self, tend to demand others' attention, and are socially charming even though they are relatively oblivious of others' needs. Covert narcissists, on the other hand, feel profoundly inferior to others, are hypersensitive to others' evaluations, and are generally dissatisfied.

These descriptions paint decidedly different portraits of overt and covert narcissism. The overt narcissist is bold, brash, and confident. The covert narcissist is anxious, hesitant, and unsure. A couple of predictions involving approach-avoidance motivation are therefore evident. What seems particularly clear is that avoidance motivation should most strongly discriminate overt from covert narcissism. That is, overt narcissism should be associated with low avoidance motivation whereas covert narcissism should be associated with high avoidance motivation. This seems intuitive and consistent with prior thinking on the distinction between overt and covert narcissism (e.g., Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Rose, 2002; Wink, 1991).

In terms of approach motivation, it is less certain how overt and covert narcissism may differ. Both narcissism subtypes may exhibit elevated appetitive motivation. Rose's (2002, p. 380) description of overt and covert narcissists as "extraordinarily self-absorbed and arrogant" might suggest this. On the other hand, depression has been linked to both low approach motivation (Campbell-Sills et al., 2004) and covert narcissism (Rathvon & Holmstrom, 1996). In this respect, a prediction of low approach motivation seems more appropriate for covert narcissists. Given this ambiguity, the link between covert narcissism and approach motivation will be treated as exploratory.

#### *Using Approach-Avoidance Motivation to Explain Self-Esteem Differences in Overt and Covert Narcissism*

Perhaps the most striking difference between overt and covert narcissism is that overt narcissism is associated with high self-esteem whereas covert narcissism is associated with low self-esteem (e.g., Rose, 2002). A

goal of the present study was to determine whether approach-avoidance motivation might account for this distinction. Heimpel et al. (2006) demonstrated that approach and avoidance motivation account for individual differences in self-esteem, with the high-approach/low-avoidance pattern predicting the highest levels of self-esteem. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to expect approach-avoidance motivation to mediate links between overt-covert narcissism and self-esteem. Note, however, that whereas covert narcissism was predicted to correlate with high avoidance motivation, its link with approach motivation was left exploratory. Therefore, although it could be predicted that avoidance motivation would mediate the link between covert narcissism and self-esteem, whether approach motivation would also provide mediation remained contingent on whether it correlated with covert narcissism. Because overt narcissism was predicted to correlate with both types of motivation (and had correlated with them in Studies 1 and 2), its link to self-esteem was predicted to be mediated by both approach and avoidance motivation.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

A sample of 209 University of South Alabama undergraduates (mean age = 21; 65% female) was recruited from the psychology department subject pool. They completed the NPI ( $M = 17.01$ ,  $SD = 7.80$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ), BIS ( $M = 20.53$ ,  $SD = 3.56$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ), BAS ( $M = 40.33$ ,  $SD = 5.21$ ,  $\alpha = .74$ ), SP ( $M = 8.46$ ,  $SD = 5.07$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ), and SR ( $M = 7.96$ ,  $SD = 3.64$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ), in addition to the following measures.

*Covert narcissism.* Participants completed three measures of covert narcissism: the Hypersensitivity Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997), the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale (NPDS; Ashby, Lee, & Duke, 1979), and the Serkownek Narcissism Scale (SNS; Serkownek, 1975). Three measures were used because, unlike overt narcissism, there is no dominant measure of covert narcissism. The HSNS consists of 10 items (e.g., "I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others") rated from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The NPDS consists of 18 items (e.g., "I have felt embarrassed over the type of work that one or more of my family members have done") rated either *true* (1) or *false* (0). The SNS also consists of 18 items (e.g., "Most people are honest chiefly because they fear being caught") rated *true* (1) or *false* (0). Higher scores on the HSNS ( $M = 28.86$ ,  $SD = 5.97$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ), NPDS ( $M = 7.18$ ,  $SD = 2.91$ ,  $\alpha = .59$ ), and SNS

( $M = 9.59$ ,  $SD = 3.23$ ,  $\alpha = .63$ ) indicate higher covert narcissism.

*Self-esteem.* Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). The RSE consists of 10 items (e.g., “I feel like a person who has a number of good qualities”) rated from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem ( $M = 37.95$ ,  $SD = 7.16$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

### Data Reduction

As was done in Study 2, approach and avoidance motivation variables were created using the principal component scores of their associated measures (i.e., BIS, BAS, SP, SR). A PCA with promax rotation was conducted on these measures, which revealed that two components account for 72% of the variance (39% and 33%). Examining the pattern matrix, BAS (.88, cross-loaded at  $-.13$ ) and SR (.73, cross-loaded at  $.10$ ) loaded most strongly on component 1 (labeled *approach motivation*); BIS (.75, cross-loaded at  $.41$ ) and SP (.85, cross-loaded at  $-.31$ ) loaded most strongly on component 2 (labeled *avoidance motivation*). Component scores were then saved to the data set so that each participant received two scores (i.e., one representing approach motivation and one representing avoidance motivation) to be used in subsequent analyses. An identical analysis was conducted on the measures of covert narcissism. A single component accounting for 65% of the variance emerged. All three covert narcissism measures loaded similarly on this component (HSNS =  $.76$ , NPDS =  $.84$ , SNS =  $.83$ ), which was labeled *covert narcissism*. Scores for this component were then saved to the data set so that each participant received a single score representing covert narcissism to be used in subsequent analyses.

### Does Approach–Avoidance Motivation Distinguish Overt From Covert Narcissism?

It was hypothesized that a primary distinction between overt and covert narcissism would be found in the avoidance motivation dimension (no specific prediction was made for approach motivation). This was supported by the data.

*Avoidance motivation.* First, replicating Studies 1 and 2, overt narcissism was significantly associated with low avoidance motivation ( $r = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Supporting the hypothesis of the present study, covert narcissism was significantly associated with *high* avoidance motivation ( $r = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, whereas overtly narcissistic individuals possess low avoidance

motivation, covertly narcissistic individuals possess high avoidance motivation.

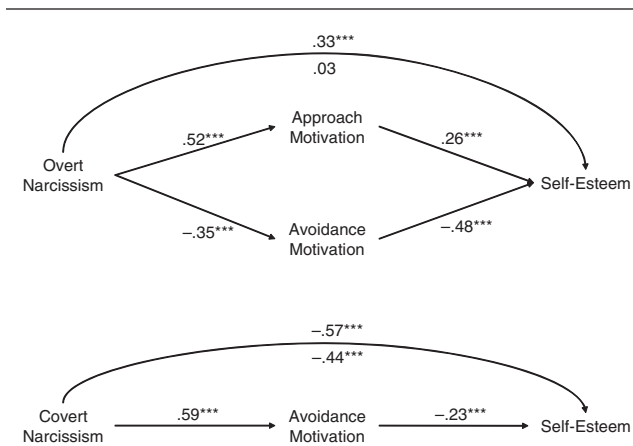
*Approach motivation.* Also replicating Studies 1 and 2, overt narcissism was significantly associated with high approach motivation ( $r = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Covert narcissism was unrelated to approach motivation ( $r = .06$ ,  $p = .39$ ). Therefore, whereas overt narcissists possess high approach motivation, covert narcissists seem to possess more moderate levels of approach motivation.

### Does Approach–Avoidance Explain Self-Esteem in Overt and Covert Narcissism?

As expected, overt narcissism was associated with high self-esteem ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas covert narcissism was associated with low self-esteem ( $r = -.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ). To determine whether approach–avoidance motivation explained how overt and covert narcissism related to self-esteem, two sets of mediational analyses were conducted using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) “causal steps” method and Preacher and Hayes’s (2004, 2007) method and SPSS macro for determining significance of indirect effects. Based on the literature and the preceding results, it was predicted that the link between overt narcissism and high self-esteem would be explained (i.e., mediated) by both high approach and low avoidance motivation. Conversely, the link between covert narcissism and low self-esteem was predicted to be explained by high avoidance motivation.

*Overt narcissism and self-esteem.* Overt narcissism significantly predicted self-esteem ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ), approach motivation ( $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, self-esteem was significantly predicted by approach motivation ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, when overt narcissism, approach motivation, and avoidance motivation were used to simultaneously predict self-esteem, approach motivation ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ) remained significant, whereas narcissism fell to nonsignificance ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .70$ ; model  $R^2 = .31$ ). The total indirect effect (i.e., mediation stemming from approach and avoidance motivation combined) was significant ( $z = 5.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as were the individual indirect effects of approach motivation ( $z = 3.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and avoidance motivation ( $z = 4.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, consistent with hypotheses, approach and avoidance motivation significantly and fully mediated the link between overt narcissism and self-esteem (see Figure 2 for the path diagram).

*Covert narcissism and self-esteem.* Covert narcissism significantly predicted self-esteem ( $\beta = -.57$ ,  $p < .001$ )



**Figure 2** Path diagram of approach-avoidance mediation of overt narcissism (upper diagram) and covert narcissism (lower diagram) and self-esteem from Study 3 ( $N = 209$ ).

NOTE: Numbers are standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ). The number above the curved arrow represents the direct link between overt-covert narcissism and self-esteem. The number below the curved arrow represents the link after controlling for approach-avoidance motivation.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

and avoidance motivation ( $\beta = .59, p < .001$ ). Likewise, self-esteem was significantly predicted by avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.49, p < .001$ ). When covert narcissism and avoidance motivation were used to simultaneously predict self-esteem, avoidance motivation ( $\beta = -.23, p < .01$ ) and covert narcissism ( $\beta = -.44, p < .001$ ), both remained significant (model  $R^2 = .36$ ). The indirect effect was significant, however ( $z = 3.14, p < .001$ ), indicating that mediation was significant but partial. That is, covert narcissism was linked to self-esteem through avoidant motivation and additional unidentified mechanisms (see Figure 2 for the path diagram).

## Discussion

Several findings emerged from this study. First, the links between overt narcissism and high approach motivation and low avoidance motivation were replicated for a second time. Second, the value of incorporating approach-avoidance motivation into the study of narcissism was further demonstrated. Overt and covert narcissism were distinguished in terms of their motivational dispositions. Whereas overt narcissism was associated with low avoidance motivation, covert narcissism was associated with high avoidance motivation. Results related to approach tendencies were more ambiguous. Covert narcissism was unrelated to approach motivation in the present sample, whereas overt narcissism displayed its typical strong positive association with approach motivation. In sum, a critical distinction between overt and covert narcissism lies along the

avoidance motivation dimension. Finally, the link between overt narcissism and self-esteem was completely explained by high approach and low avoidance motivation. Covert narcissism was related to low self-esteem through high avoidance motivation but also through additional unidentified mechanisms (i.e., the link was partially mediated). In short, one of the most striking differences between overt narcissism and covert narcissism can be at least partially explained by differences in approach-avoidance motivation.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

There were two primary goals of this research. The first was to locate narcissism along the dimensions of approach and avoidance motivation. The results of all three studies were unambiguous showing that (overt) narcissism is characterized by high approach and low avoidance motivation. This is consistent with prior research showing that narcissism is related to many traits and proclivities associated with high approach and low avoidance motivation (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Campbell & Foster, 2002; Jacobwitz & Egan, 2006; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Rose, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2004; Vazire & Funder, 2006). These results are also consistent with the theoretical development of narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation. As discussed earlier, one view is that narcissism develops when individuals are unconditionally rewarded and overprotected from failure (Kohut, 1977; Millon et al., 2004; Twenge et al., in press-a, in press-b). These individuals may reasonably be expected to view reward as the most probable result of their behavior, punishment being highly unlikely. In other words, narcissism and high approach/low avoidance motivation may manifest from the same developmental history. In this light, one would expect the connection between narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation observed in the present research.

The second goal of this research was to demonstrate the value of incorporating approach and avoidance motivation into the study of narcissism. To this end, approach-avoidance motivation was used to (a) understand the link between narcissism and impulsivity and (b) distinguish overt from covert narcissism.

### Narcissism and Impulsivity

Study 2 tested whether the link between narcissism and impulsivity (Vazire & Funder, 2006) can be explained by approach-avoidance motivation. First, supporting prior research (Smillie & Jackson, 2006), functional impulsivity was associated with high

approach and low avoidance motivation, whereas dysfunctional impulsivity was only associated with high approach motivation. Narcissism was associated with both functional and dysfunctional impulsivity, although it was more strongly linked to functional impulsivity. More specifically, narcissism was linked to functional impulsivity through both high approach and low avoidance impulsivity. Conversely, narcissism was linked to dysfunctional impulsivity through high approach motivation but not avoidance motivation.

As noted, narcissism has been described as a mixed blessing in the literature (Paulhus, 1998). These findings suggest different explanations for each “blessing.” For example, an individual who scores high on the NPI might be prone to jump at opportunities (e.g., a graduate student who takes the lead on a research project) because he or she is sensitive to rewards (e.g., publications) and insensitive to negative outcomes (e.g., failure of project) that might follow from such action. On the other hand, this same individual might be prone to maladaptive behaviors that stem from heightened sensitivity to reward (e.g., a graduate student who yells at a professor because doing so feels good, at least for the moment). In short, the motivational tendencies of narcissists appear to be both adaptive and maladaptive.

### Overt and Covert Narcissism

Although several studies have examined what is commonly referred to as covert narcissism, there is little in the way of direct comparison between it and overt narcissism. The present study suggests that overt narcissism and covert narcissism exhibit different motivational patterns. Whereas overt narcissists are appetitively motivated, with low levels of behavioral inhibition, covert narcissists seem to be more moderately driven by appetite but also more inhibited. Overt narcissists seem to be the types of people who “shoot for the stars,” not afraid to miss. Covert narcissists, on the other hand, seem at least somewhat motivated by reward (perhaps they shoot for the moon) but are also highly sensitive to punishment (i.e., they are very afraid to miss).

In terms of how these motivational tendencies contribute to psychological functioning, overt narcissism seems to be the healthier form. For example, overt and covert narcissism were associated with high and low self-esteem, respectively, in Study 3. Heimpel et al. (2006) showed that high approach and low avoidance motivation are both tied to high self-esteem. Corroborating and extending this, in Study 3 the link between overt narcissism and self-esteem was fully accounted for by approach–avoidance motivation. Thus, a primary explanation for the positive self-regard exhibited by overt narcissists seems to be their sensitivity to

reward and relative insensitivity to punishment. Covert narcissism’s link to low self-esteem is apparently more complex in that neither the approach nor avoidance motivation fully accounted for it. However, high avoidance motivation does appear to play a role as evidenced by its significant albeit partial mediation of covert narcissism’s link to low self-esteem in Study 3. It is interesting to note that the correlation of self-esteem with covert narcissism was stronger than its correlation with overt narcissism. This might be because there are more sources fueling low self-esteem in covert narcissists compared to high self-esteem in overt narcissists. This is admittedly speculative; future research may wish to examine this issue further. Given the incongruent nature of covert narcissism (i.e., it is narcissism with low self-esteem), it may very well be the more complex form of narcissism.

### Considerations on Narcissism and Approach–Avoidance Motivation

What does this all mean about how we should think about and study narcissism (with specific regard to overt narcissism)? Essentially, narcissists are sensitive to and strongly motivated by reward. They are relatively insensitive and weakly motivated by punishment. Thinking about narcissism in this way may help to better understand findings in the narcissism literature.

Many of the decisions we make and the actions we take have the potential to result in reward or punishment, or both. Based on what we know about narcissism and approach–avoidance motivation, one should expect the decisions and behaviors of narcissists in these situations to be fueled primarily by prospective reward. Supporting this view, narcissism is linked to behaviors that are both rewarding in the short term but costly in the long term (e.g., pathological gambling; Lakey et al., 2006). Narcissists seem to focus on the rewards of these behaviors while ignoring the punishments. Aggressive behavior may mark another instance of this. As discussed earlier, narcissism is linked to aggressive responding to insults (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). When insulted there are a variety of ways to respond—including not responding at all. Aggressive responding likely serves a hedonic function; it feels good to “get even.” Of course, aggression has longer term consequences that are generally negative and can be severe (e.g., lost friendships, going to jail). Given that narcissists are strongly approach motivated and weakly avoidance motivated, it should not be surprising that they, more often than less narcissistic people, respond aggressively when slighted. Of course, there are other potential explanations for the narcissism–aggression link. Nevertheless, it would seem reasonable to expect

approach-avoidance motivation to at least partially mediate this link.

In a similar vein, narcissists are prone to overconfidence, which can lead to decision-making errors (Campbell et al., 2004). For example, when asked how well they will do on a future task, narcissists relative to nonnarcissists tend to report that they will do well even if their past performance *on the same task* suggests otherwise. One can see the problems with this type of overconfidence. Whereas less narcissistic people might opt for a different course of action if evidence suggests that their current course is wrong, narcissists are likely to stay the course, which may only compound problems. Again, there are probably numerous explanations for this tendency. One could argue, however, that approach-avoidance motivation plays a role. If narcissists are sensitive to reward and insensitive to punishment, prior mistakes may play little role in determining their future behavior (i.e., they stay the course). Of course, depending on the result of their actions (i.e., whether they eventually fail or succeed), this tendency might be labeled *stubbornness* or *persistence*. In this light, narcissism may be viewed as adaptive or maladaptive depending on the outcome. In both cases, however, approach-avoidance motivation likely plays a role.

#### Limitations, Caveats, and Future Research

There are, of course, limitations to the present studies. First, all measures were assessed with survey instruments. It is uncertain to what degree the measures accurately reflect what they purportedly measure. Special care was taken to prevent specific confounds (e.g., social desirability) from overly influencing the results of the study. Therefore, to the extent that the measures did reflect the constructs they purported to measure, confidence should be placed in the findings. However, it would be interesting to test the link between narcissism and approach-avoidance motivation using alternative assessments. Behavioral measures may prove particularly useful to this line of research. For example, the use of different reinforcement and punishment schedules to shape the behavior of narcissists may prove particularly enlightening (Foster, Syklawer, Trimm, Goff, & Westmoreland, 2008). One would predict, based on the present results, that reinforcement will be a powerful shaper of narcissistic behavior. Punishment, conversely, may be largely ineffective on narcissists. Evidence of this may be useful to therapeutic interventions that target narcissism. It would suggest, for example, that reinforcing positive behaviors rather than punishing negative behaviors is most appropriate for narcissistic clients.

Another limitation is that the correlational nature of the studies precluded us from establishing whether narcissism causes approach-avoidance motivation or vice versa. The present research clearly demonstrates that narcissism is linked to these motivational dispositions, and this is consistent with models of narcissism that place approach motivation as a defining feature of narcissism (e.g., Campbell et al., 2006). But is high approach and low avoidance motivation a cause or consequence of narcissism? Similar approach-avoidance combinations are characteristic of other personality constructs that are related to narcissism (e.g., psychopathy; Newman et al., 2005). Therefore, it may be that approach-avoidance motivation plays a role in the development of this cluster of personality traits. It is also possible that these traits emerge from similar developmental histories and this causes them to share patterns of motivation. It is, of course, impossible to say for sure given the existing research. Future experimental research will be necessary to clarify this interesting and potentially important issue.

Finally, although narcissism is associated with high approach and low avoidance motivation in a general sense, it is possible that narcissists exhibit strong avoidance motivation in certain domains. For example, narcissists possess a strong desire for power and status (see Campbell & Foster, 2007), which reflects a high level of approach motivation. Conversely, narcissists prefer not to get involved in emotionally close relationships (e.g., Campbell, 1999), which would seem to reflect a high avoidance motivation. Therefore, although narcissism seems to be generally characterized by high approach and low avoidance motivation, this may be to some degree context dependent. This is an issue that certainly merits further investigation.

#### Conclusion

If one were to attach a label to narcissists based on the results of the present study, it may be that they display an *unmitigated approach orientation*. Narcissists are strongly motivated toward desirable outcomes. They are relatively unmotivated by the avoidance of undesirable outcomes. In some respects this motivational combination is adaptive (e.g., linked to high self-esteem, functional impulsivity). In other respects it appears to be maladaptive (e.g., linked to dysfunctional impulsivity). Regardless, it offers a potential explanation for issues that are important to the narcissism literature. It is hoped that future narcissism research will employ approach-avoidance motivation to more thoroughly understand the complex and sometimes conflicting cognitive-behavioral patterns of narcissists.

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted (in particular, Study 3), *narcissism* refers to overt narcissism as measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988).

2. Scores on the NPI do not distinguish narcissists from nonnarcissists (Foster & Campbell, 2007). The term *narcissist* is used, as a matter of convenience, to reference individuals with above-average NPI scores.

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