Narcissism, Interpersonal Self-Regulation, and Romantic Relationships

An Agency Model Approach

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Narcissism is at the center of the human condition, resting at the place where the desires of the self intersect with relationships with others. Are you better than others, more deserving, more special? Or are you on the same plane as others, connected and part of a larger whole? From this intersection of self and other, narcissism is manifested in inflated self-conceptions, interpersonal self-regulation, and relationships at all levels of human behavior, from cultural independence to private fantasies of power.

In this chapter, we focus on narcissists' interpersonal self-regulatory efforts with a focus on narcissists' romantic life. We do so in an effort to narrow our discussion and also as a nod to the myth of Narcissus, which pitted the romantic love of self against the love of another. However, we also bring into the discussion findings from a range of interpersonal settings. The manifestations of narcissism in romantic relationships differ little from those in friendships, work relationships, or stranger relationships.

We begin by offering an abbreviated history of narcissism. We next focus on the construct itself, with particular attention directed at narcissistic self-regulation. We present an *agency model* of narcissism that we find useful for thinking about many of its effects. We then turn our attention directly to narcissism in the context of romantic relationships.

HISTORY OF NARCISSISM

Freud

The application of the myth of Narcissus to psychological phenomena was first made by Havelock Ellis (1898). However, it was with Freud's famous monograph *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (Freud, 1914/1957) that interest in narcissism took off. Freud's approach to narcissism had two important outcomes. First, he presented narcissism in such a way that its importance in normal human development, in psychopathology, and in normal adult psychology and behavior was clear. Second, he made his presentation in such a confusing manner that researchers and clinicians would be forced to spend years simply trying to untangle his ideas (Baranger, 1991). The study of narcissism has thus been one of broad interest, from clinical and developmental psychology to sociology, management, and political science. This breadth, however, has barely concealed rampant confusion about the construct itself.

For our purposes, it is important to extract just a few key ideas from Freud's monograph. Freud distinguished between two types of individual experiences of love. "Anaclitic," or attachment-type, individuals focus their love outward, preferring love objects reminiscent of past attachment figures. In contrast, narcissistic-type individuals focus their love inward toward the self. The narcissistic object of affection represents: "(a) what he himself is (i.e., himself), (b) what he himself was, (c) what he himself would like to be, (d) someone who was once part of himself" (Freud, 1914/1957, p. 90). In a sense, Freud was arguing that love could be about connection (anaclitic type) or about the self (narcissistic type). As we will see, in this regard he was not that far off the mark.

Freud returned again to narcissism as a personality variable in a later work, *Libidinal Types* (Freud, 1931/1950). In this essay, he notes that those of the narcissistic type are independent, energetic, confident, and aggressive. This same pattern was suggested in Reich's phallic–narcissistic character (Reich, 1949). This personality approach appeared to be linked primarily to extraversion/surgency and low agreeableness. Indeed, this is relatively consistent with the empirically demonstrated Big Five correlates of narcissism that include extraversion/surgency and openness to experience, along with low agreeableness (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Kernberg and Kohut

In terms of the modern psychodynamic understanding of narcissism, the two most influential thinkers have been Kernberg (1974, 1975) and Kohut (1977) (for reviews, see Akhtar & Thompson, 1982; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). Both of these individuals took more of a deficit approach to narcissism: either narcissism was a defense against feelings of abandonment and its associated rage (Kernberg, 1975), or it was a response to not getting enough mirroring and idealization in childhood (Kohut, 1977). These approaches resulted in the notion that narcissistic personality is a defensive structure.

Murray

Henry Murray must be noted as the first researcher to our knowledge to empirically assess and examine correlates of "narcism" (his term; his alternate term was "egophilia.") Murray's work on narcissism grounded it in the empirical, personality tradition. Although his narcism scale differs from what we use today, it remains important historically (Murray, 1938).

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

The inclusion of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) dramatically increased interest in narcissism. Unfortunately, the creation of NPD also changed the image of narcissism from a normal personality trait (e.g., Freud, 1931/1950; Murray, 1938) to a disorder that afflicts less than 1% of the population (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Furthermore, because normal individuals with high narcissism scores do not typically seek therapy—Why would they? They view themselves as winners—the clinical impression of narcissism was arguably subject to a sample bias. The narcissists seen in clinical settings may have been overly represented by "failed" narcissists, that is, those narcissists who could not function smoothly in normal life. This sample bias, we argue, skewed the clinical picture of narcissists in the direction of individuals with fragile self-esteem covering up inner depression and self-loathing (Campbell, 2001; Campbell & Baumeister, in press).

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory

Fortunately, Raskin and Hall (1979) brought narcissism back into the territory of social and personality psychologists with the creation of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). This measure is based on the DSM description of narcissism but is designed for use in normal samples. It is typically a 40-

item (Raskin & Terry, 1988) scale in a forced-choice format, although there are several other versions in circulation that provide similar results (e.g., Emmons, 1984). The vast majority of empirical research on narcissism uses the NPI.

Summary

Narcissism has worn many guises throughout the years, from a developmental stage to a clinical disorder. There are two ways to approach this history. One is to try and think deeply about it and try to find some resolution; the other is to ground our ideas in empirical research and use the past simply as a source of inspiration. We are of the mind that a critical mass of empirical research in social and personality psychology has been reached; the focus should be on theory development that reconciles empirical findings, not historical theoretical approaches.

WHY STUDY NARCISSISM?

Whenever you study an individual difference variable such as narcissism, the first question to ask yourself is: Why? (or, as reviewers like to put it, "Who cares about narcissism?"). The individual differences space can be divided up in infinite ways. The Big Five and its variants were initially derived from natural language. These are ways that individuals naturally describe others. Many other personality models share similar empirical heft. In contrast, narcissism is originally derived from psychoanalytic theory. It is not alone: Attachment research, for example, is in part an outgrowth of object relations theory, also a psychoanalytic theory. Neither of these models, however, is the result of the empirical grind that led to the Big Five. Thus it is particularly important to state why it is useful to study narcissism. We can think of at least five benefits.

First, as noted, we would argue that narcissism stands at the potential point of conflict between a focus on the self and a focus on others. This tension between egotism and affiliation has been a key element in human interaction throughout human existence (e.g., Boehm, 1999). At a social level, this tension is one between dominance and egalitarianism: Am I different from and better than others, or am I the same as and equal to others? This tension has been noted by a range of psychologists who have given the concept various names, from getting along versus getting ahead (Hogan, 1983), to moving against others versus moving toward others (Horney, 1937), to power versus tenderness (Sullivan, 1953). This is a basic theme in human relations and narcissism is at its heart.

Second, narcissism can be thought of as a bridge variable. By that, we mean that it can be used to bridge multiple approaches to a single issue. Nar-

cissism sits at the nexus of personality, the self, self-regulation, and relationships. In the case of romantic relationships, for example, we can link a personality variable (narcissism) to a self-concept (I am a winner!), to a self-regulation strategy (I want others to see that I am a winner), to a relationship behavior (I will date a supermodel) (Campbell, 1999). This linkage is thus directly related to the topic of this volume. Narcissism can bridge different levels of analysis as well. For example, narcissism is relevant to understanding physiological responding to stress (Kelsey, Ornduff, McCann, & Reiff, 2001), fantasy life (Raskin & Novacek, 1991), decision making (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004), attribution (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000), self-conceptions (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994), self-esteem (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991), interdependent relationships (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2002), group-level processes (Hogan & Hogan, 2002), societal processes (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005), and cultural processes (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003).

Third, and also directly relevant to the present chapter, narcissism provides a window to self-enhancement processes that would not normally be open. For example, if you ask psychologically close individuals to engage in a dyadic, interdependent task (e.g., a creativity task), give them false negative feedback, and then ask them to attribute responsibility for the failure, you will not find a self-serving bias. That is, close individuals tend to share responsibility for failure rather than blame each other (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). The reasonable conclusion is that close relationships reliably mitigate the self-serving bias. However, if you assess narcissism and run the same study, a somewhat different picture emerges: Yes, close relationships attenuate the self-serving bias, on average. But the underlying pattern is that narcissists still show the self-serving bias and nonnarcissists actually show an other-serving bias (Campbell et al., 2000).

Fourth, narcissism has the potential for several important applications. This is because narcissism is linked to a range of behaviors that have a negative effect on both individual performance and social outcomes. Narcissism, for example, is linked to diminishing academic performance (Robins & Beer, 2001) and poor decision making (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). On a more social level, narcissism is linked to corrupt leadership (Hogan & Hogan, 2002), counterproductive workplace behaviors (Penney & Spector, 2002), aggression and violence (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Twenge & Campbell, 2003), rape (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003), incarceration (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002), and exacerbation of the tragedy of the commons (Campbell et al., 2005).

Fifth, narcissism is interesting to study in part to find out how life would be without it. If the self-regulatory impulse that drives narcissism were not part of the human psyche, what would the experience of life be like? It is arguable that narcissism is a roadblock to a perception of the world that is unmedi-

ated or unhindered by the ego (or, at least, by egotism). Narcissism is a very effective roadblock because narcissists feel good about themselves, are happy, and function reasonably well (Rose & Campbell, 2004). In dynamic systems terminology, narcissism may be a "local minimum": It is a moderately positive and self-reinforcing self-regulatory strategy that makes it difficult to enter a less distorted, more reality-consistent level of awareness.

NARCISSISM AS A SOCIAL PERSONALITY CONSTRUCT

Narcissism has three fundamental characteristics. The first is a positive and inflated self-concept. The inflation is evident in comparisons made between self-reports and objective criteria (e.g., Gabriel et al., 1994; John & Robins, 1994). Narcissists have positive opinions about themselves on several agentic domains (e.g., intelligence and creativity), as well as on physical attractiveness (Gabriel et al., 1994). This is largely because narcissists care primarily about agentic issues. This is evident both in self-reports (e.g., Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002) and in projective tests such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Carroll, 1987). The narcissistic self also includes a fundamental sense of specialness. This is reflected in a heightened sense of uniqueness (Emmons, 1984) and psychological entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). There may even be a deeply held sense that others exist to serve the narcissist (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002).

The second characteristic is a relative lack of interest in close, warm, or intimate relationships. For example, narcissists place less importance on communal traits (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). Narcissists also express a relatively weak intimacy motive on the TAT (Carroll, 1987). Indeed, it is this relative lack of interest in communal traits that separates narcissists from those with high self-esteem. Narcissism is not simply "very high" self-esteem. Narcissists limit their overly positive self-views to agentic domains; individuals with high self-esteem have positive self-views in both the agentic and the communal domains (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002).

The third characteristic of narcissism, and the one most directly related to the topic of the present chapter, is self-regulation. The trouble with inflated self-beliefs is that their inconsistency with reality needs to be bolstered and supported. This makes self-enhancement, both intrapsychically and interpersonally, central to narcissists. Because narcissists are temperamentally extraverted, sensation seeking, and approach-oriented (e.g., Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Emmons, 1991; Rose & Campbell, 2004), these self-enhancement processes are largely (although not exclusively) "offensive" rather than "defensive." That is, narcissists spend time looking for opportunities to augment the self; they do not simply remain at status quo reacting defensively to threats.

The intrapsychic efforts to self-enhance include fantasizing about power and status (Raskin & Novacek, 1991), maintaining beliefs that one is better than others (i.e., the better-than-average effect) (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002), and taking credit for successes and blaming situational forces for failure (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

Perhaps the more interesting aspect of narcissistic self-regulation in regards to this chapter is interpersonal self-regulation. Narcissists are masters at using the social environment to maintain their sense of status and esteem. This skill reflects in large part narcissists' social extraversion and high energy level (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), as well as their relative lack of interest in close, warm social relationships (and the lower levels of guilt and social anxiety that go with that; see Gramzow & Tangney, 1992). Some examples of this self-regulation are as follows: Narcissists adopt "colorful" personae to draw attention to themselves and establish specialness (Hogan & Hogan, 2002). General Douglas MacArthur, for example, deliberately used dramatic props such as his corncob pipe and large aviator glasses to set himself apart from other generals. In conversation, narcissists will direct the topic toward themselves (Raskin & Shaw, 1988; Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990). They will brag, show off, and seek attention (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). Narcissists will also be energetic and entertaining (Paulhus, 1998). Narcissists are highly competitive, constantly on the lookout for opportunities to best or dominate others (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Emmons, 1984). They will jump at the opportunity to win for public glory (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and steal credit from or place blame on coworkers (Campbell et al., 2000; Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; John & Robins, 1994). Narcissists also punish those who threaten their self-conceptions. This can be seen in aggression following ego threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) and social rejection (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). This aggression is part of a basic externalizing response among narcissists to threatening information and is linked to externalizing attributions (Stucke, 2003).

It is worth noting two additional aspects regarding narcissistic self-regulation. First, narcissists' internal and external self-enhancement strategies are not necessarily independent. Their fantasies, for example, involve an imagined audience, and their predilection to talk about themselves may be as much for themselves as it is for the public. Second, narcissism is not a socially unappealing trait. Indeed, for narcissistic self-regulation to be effective, narcissists need to be popular, admired, and respected by other powerful and important people. One outcome of this is that narcissists are liked in the short term (e.g., Paulhus, 1998). Recent research on NPD has even found that narcissists were viewed as likeable by others after seeing 30-second "thin slices" of narcissists' behavior (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004), although narcissism seems to fall apart (at least in the eyes of others) in the longer term. Narcissists' general lack of interest in oth-

ers' welfare and overinterest in the self eventually leads others to dislike them (Paulhus, 1998).

THE AGENCY MODEL

The central goal of this chapter is to describe narcissistic self-regulation within the context of romantic relationships. Before jumping into the research findings, however, we would like to present a model of narcissism that we find useful for thinking about the issue of self-regulation in relationships. For lack of a better name, we call this the *agency model of narcissism*. The model itself is an outgrowth of several other models of narcissism. It borrows esteem regulation, agency seeking, and interpersonal self-regulation from the self-orientation model (Campbell, 1999); it borrows a dynamic self-regulatory approach from the dynamic self-regulatory processing model (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001); it starts with the assumption that narcissism is grounded in a basic agentic–communal asymmetry as does the minimalist model (Paulhus, 2001); it uses self-esteem as an important regulatory goal from the self-esteem management model (Raskin et al., 1991); it includes a broader view of esteem, however, based on the addiction model of narcissism (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001) and the model of self-conscious emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004); and it assumes that narcissism is largely offensive/approach-oriented rather than defensive (e.g., Rose & Campbell, 2004).

Central to the agency model, narcissism has certain fundamental elements or qualities:

1. Narcissists focus on agentic rather than communal concerns (e.g., Campbell, 1999; Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002) and this is linked to their basic personality structure (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Paulhus, 2004).
2. Narcissists are approach-oriented (Campbell & Rose, 2004).
3. Narcissists' self-regulation is focused on acquiring self-esteem (Campbell, 1999; Raskin et al., 1991).
4. Narcissism is linked to entitlement in interpersonal self-regulation (Campbell, Bonacci, et al., 2004).
5. Narcissists have an inflated view of themselves on many dimensions.

See Figure 4.1 for an illustration of the agency model as applied to interpersonal self-regulation.

The agency model is presented as a system. Narcissism is linked to two basic processes: interpersonal skills and interpersonal strategies (again, there are other processes, such as intrapsychic self-regulation, but we are focusing more on interpersonal self-regulation). To take one path, narcissists' interper-
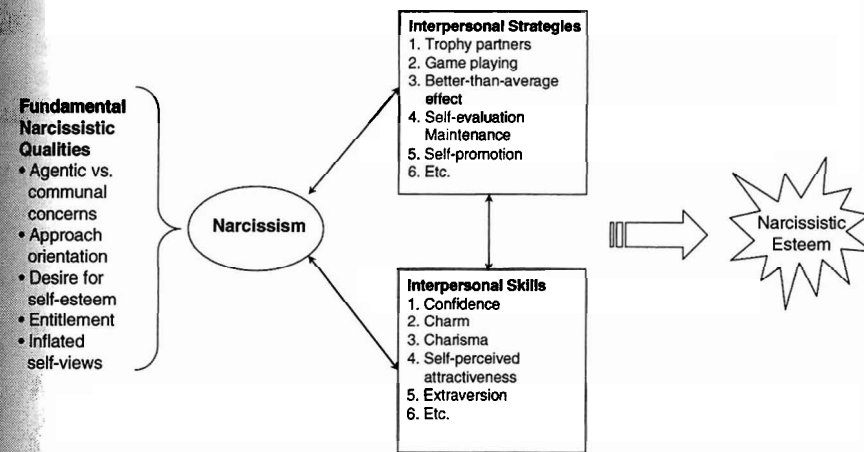
The Agency Model: An Esteem-Generating System

FIGURE 4.1. Visual representation of the agency model.

sonal skills (e.g., confidence, charm, resilience) make their self-regulatory strategies (e.g., game playing, acquiring "trophy" [i.e., high self-presentational value] romantic partners) possible. All elements of the system feed back into each other. For example, confidence and extraversion leads the narcissist to date a highly attractive partner. This, in turn, further strengthens the narcissist's self-views, which then leads to greater confidence, and so on.

One important outcome of this system in action is what we call "narcissistic esteem." We see this as more than simple self-esteem. Rather, it is a dominance-related self-esteem (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Campbell, 1999) with a hint of pride (Tracy & Robins, 2004) and a rush of possibly addictive excitement (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001). We do not argue that self-esteem is the "ultimate goal" of narcissistic self-regulation—in fact, narcissistic esteem is likely to feed back into the system and increase the workings of the other components. The question of the "ultimate goal" of narcissism is a tricky one. Some have argued for self-image defense or aggrandizement (e.g., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001); others have argued for self-esteem (e.g., Raskin et al., 1991). The agency model makes clear that the various outcomes (esteem, inflated self-views, excitement) are associated, but does not theoretically identify a single "ultimate goal" of narcissism. The inflated self-image and the desire for narcissistic esteem are both important to the system.

Finally, we should also note that we find it useful to think about narcissism visually by using the interpersonal circumplex (e.g., Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1991). We are not arguing for a strict circumplex form, nor for the
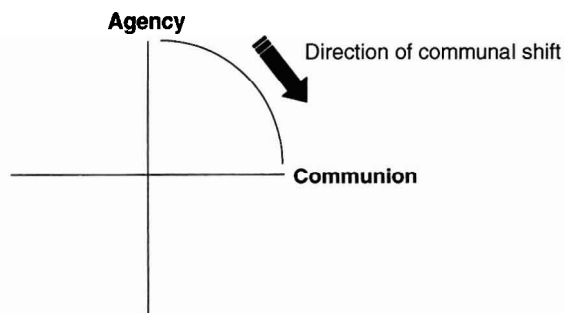
FIGURE 4.2. Visual representation of agency and communion in circumplex. We find this to be a useful visual heuristic for conceptualizing change in narcissism.

exact elements on the circumplex. These are topics for a different discussion. Rather, we find it useful to think about two basic sets of traits, values, and approaches to interpersonal relationships. These have been referred to as agency and communion (e.g., Bakan, 1966), alpha and beta (e.g., Digman, 1997), dominance and friendliness (e.g., Leary, 1957), and egoistic and moralistic (Paulhus & John, 1998). We use the terms "agency" and "communion" because they are broad and they convey more meaning than the terms "alpha" and "beta." Furthermore, we find it useful to think of these two traits as being represented in circumplex form (see Figure 4.2). This makes it easy to conceptualize individuals as being high in agency and high in communion; high in agency, low in communion; and so on. Also, it makes it easy to visualize individuals shifting along the circumference of the circumplex. For example, a narcissist who is high in agency but slightly low or middling in communion would conceivably become a better partner by shifting toward the communion end of the circumplex. We have more to say on this topic later; for now, we turn to narcissists' romantic relationships.

APPLYING THE AGENCY MODEL TO ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The agency model is useful for understanding narcissism in romantic relationships. Narcissists' approach to relationships is a self-reinforcing, self-regulatory system that generates narcissistic esteem. This is especially evident in the relative desire for agentic goals (status, dominance, autonomy) versus communal goals (warmth, caring, emotional intimacy). Narcissists' self-regulation will be coupled with a generally confident and extraverted interpersonal style. This self-regulatory agenda will infuse all aspects of narcissists' romantic life. This includes narcissists' desired partners, relationship initiation

strategies, behavior in relationships, experience of love, and sexuality. Similarly, the agency model can be used to explain not just narcissists' behaviors, but also the reason why others are attracted to narcissists (i.e., agentic traits and confidence). Finally, the agency model suggests approaches for mitigating the negative outcomes of narcissism for romantic relationships.

Our discussion is arranged in three parts. First, we tackle narcissists' approach to relationships. Second, we look at the partners of narcissists and their experiences in these relationships. Third, we speculate about ways in which narcissism can be a positive for romantic relationships.

Before we begin, however, we should briefly note that almost none of these findings is qualified by gender. Narcissistic males and females generally act the same way in romantic relationships. There are three important caveats: First, there are gender main effects for many of these relationship findings. Men, for example, reliably report greater levels of unrestricted sociosexuality than women. Second, men are on average more narcissistic than women (Foster et al., 2003). Third, there is some evidence that males and females experience narcissism differently (e.g., Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998), so the possibility of gender interactions certainly should not be ruled out.

Narcissists' Approach to Relationships

Attraction

The principles underlying narcissists' romantic attraction are consistent with the agency model. Narcissists are looking for partners who can provide them with self-esteem and status. How can a romantic partner provide status and esteem? First, he or she can do so directly: a romantic partner who admires me and thinks that I am wonderful elevates my esteem. Second, he or she can do so indirectly through a basic association: my partner is beautiful and popular, therefore I am too. This indirect esteem generation is clear from a range of social psychological research, from the self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model (Tesser, 1988) to Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing; Cialdini et al., 1976). This indirect esteem provisioning is evident in the term "trophy" partner.

There is good empirical evidence that narcissists like targets who provide esteem and status both directly and indirectly (Campbell, 1999). There is also an important interaction effect. Namely, narcissists like popular and attractive partners, especially when those others admire them. Narcissists, however, are not particularly interested in admiration from just anybody. This finding is inconsistent with the "doormat hypothesis." Narcissists are not looking for someone they can walk on and who worships them; rather, narcissists are looking for someone ideal who also admires them.

The next question, of course, is what characteristics of a potential partner make them able to provide narcissists with narcissistic esteem? Not surpris-

ingly, what narcissists particularly look for in a partner are physical attractiveness and agentic traits (e.g., status and success). A narcissist's ideal partner is like a narcissist's ideal self (recall Freud's comments): attractive, successful, and admiring of the narcissist. Indeed, in our research, narcissists report that part of the reason that they are drawn to attractive and successful partners is that these people are similar to them (Campbell, 1999).

Initiation: Confidence and Mate Poaching

In a recent conversation with a hairstylist, one of us (WKC) heard the following description of how she (the hairstylist) was approached by a gentleman at a bar:

> HIM: Hey, I know you from the store.
>
> HER: Yes, I've seen you there.
>
> HIM: Well, I'm hot, you're hot, what do you say we get out of here and go back to my place?
>
> HER: Are you kidding me?
>
> HIM: (pointing) Look, I could have her or her or her, but I'm talking to you.

One of us asked from the barber chair, "Did this approach work?" She responded that she did give him her number because he "really was hot."

This is a classic example of a narcissistic approach to relationship initiation. It relies on extreme extraversion and confidence, as well as on resilience in the face of rejection. (These approaches have very low base rates for success when employed by men, unless the invitation is for a date; see Clark & Hatfield, 1989.) Also, note that this approach relies on traits narcissists care about. It is not about caring or feelings, but about physical attractiveness.

We have conducted several studies looking at reports of relationships initiated by narcissists and nonnarcissists (more on these later; Brunell, Campbell, Smith, & Krusemark, 2004). What we find is that the relationships with narcissists are initiated more rapidly, and that the narcissists are described as confident and charming. They are also described by their relationship partners as physically attractive, which contradicts the data that narcissists are no more attractive than nonnarcissists (Gabriel et al., 1994). There are a couple of possible explanations for this. It could be that in still photos narcissists are not more attractive, but they are in interpersonal settings because of the way that they carry themselves and/or attire themselves. It also could be that attractive narcissists are the ones out there using these confident dating strategies. Our hunch is that it is the former, but more data are needed.

Research on "mate poaching" (Schmitt & Buss, 2001) also is consistent with the idea that narcissists use high-confidence initiation strategies. Narcissists are more likely to lure dating partners away from preexisting relationships (i.e., to mate poach) (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2004).

Finally, an additional line of research has found that narcissists are prone to distort their memories of romantic rejection in such a way that narcissists' egos remain unbruised (e.g., "I never liked him anyway") (Rhodewalt & Eddings, 2002). In short, it is apparent that narcissists are confident in their interactions.

If the agency model holds, narcissists should also use their relationship initiation strategies in order to directly gain esteem. There is no research evidence for this prediction. However, there is certainly anecdotal evidence of individuals collecting "phone numbers" in an effort to gain status among their friends and esteem. Thus we suspect that there is a direct enhancement agenda present, but will withhold judgment on this issue until data are collected.

Self-Serving Biases

Although narcissists look for attractive, high-status partners, they tend to maintain positive self-views by favorably comparing themselves to their partners. This can be seen in work on the better-then-average effect, where narcissists are asked to rate themselves on a series of traits relative to their dating partner. Narcissists rate themselves more highly than they rate their partners. Consistent with the agency model, the more inflated ratings are on agentic traits (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002).

To the best of our knowledge, no experimental research has been done on romantic partners using a classic self-serving bias or self-evaluation maintenance paradigm. However, research with other close relationships has found evidence that narcissists are more self-serving (e.g., Campbell et al., 2000). Given that self-enhancing responses are typically attenuated in close relationships (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenberg, 1995; Beach, Tesser, Mendolia, & Page, 1996; Sedikides et al., 1998), narcissists' self-enhancing self-regulatory strategies do not bode well for relationship longevity.

Attachment

Narcissism arguably has important parallels with attachment theory. In a sense, both can be modeled with a basic interpersonal circumplex. Narcissists have positive views of themselves and report relatively little interest in warm relationships with others. The parallel to this in attachment theory terminology would be dismissive attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). At first

blush, the clear prediction would be that narcissists would report dismissive attachment styles. Indeed, there is some reported evidence for a positive correlation between dismissive attachment and narcissism (Campbell & Foster, 2002; Neumann & Bierhoff, 2004), as well as psychological entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, et al., 2004).

We view this conclusion with caution, however, because we have several data sets that do not show this effect. It is possible that there may be important differences between narcissism and dismissive attachment. Dismissive attachment may include more emotional constriction than narcissism (Carlson, 2002). Narcissists, in contrast, tend to be outgoing and engaging. Narcissists may shun emotional closeness, but they need interpersonal contact to effectively regulate narcissistic esteem. This is not necessarily the case with individuals with a dismissive attachment style, which may be linked to a general dislike of relationships altogether. In personality disorder terminology, it is arguable that dismissive attachment contains some elements of both Cluster A (e.g., schizoid) and Cluster B traits (e.g., narcissistic). Thus, it does not strongly correlate with a Cluster B trait like narcissism.

It is also arguable that the developmental roots of dismissive attachment and narcissism differ. Dismissive attachment is based on social rejection. Narcissism, in contrast, may be derived from a combination of warm parental involvement that is contingent upon performance coupled with parental permissiveness consisting of loose social restraints in childhood and adolescence (Horton, Bleau, & Drwecki, in press). Future research is clearly needed in this area.

Materialism

When one thinks about romantic relationships, materialism is not the first thing that comes to mind. We have found, however, that this is a major complaint among those who date narcissists. The problem from the perspective of those dating narcissists is that the narcissists spend too much energy and attention on possessing material goods. This is arguably detrimental to the relationship because it takes away from energy that could be directed toward deepening intimacy (material relationships are basically "shallow" in that there is no reciprocal and deepening self-disclosure with an object—unless it is a volleyball named Wilson).

Why would narcissists be materialistic? Based on the agency model, narcissists' materialism would be in the pursuit of agentic goals that are used to regulate self-views, social success, and narcissistic esteem. Fortunately, there is some evidence for narcissistic materialism as an interpersonal, self-regulatory process (Vohs & Campbell, 2004). Narcissists self-report being more materialistic, and the stated reason is largely to meet their esteem needs. In other words, narcissists like high-status "stuff" because it makes them look

and feel good (e.g., narcissistic esteem). Indeed, when initiating interpersonal interactions with strangers, narcissists prefer to discuss their material goods rather than more emotional topics. This is especially true when they want to impress high-status others of the opposite sex.

Probably the most interesting implication of narcissistic materialism is the potential substitutability of things for people. In order to meet intimacy needs, you need to interact with a person (or, rarely, an object imbued with a lot of human qualities). This is because intimate relationships involve reciprocal communication and self-disclosure (Reis & Shaver, 1988). In order to meet narcissistic esteem needs, however, an object may serve equally to a person. Chas, the narcissist, can gain narcissistic esteem by showing up at a party with his attractive girlfriend or in his new Porsche. From the perspective of esteem regulation, the experience of the two events may even be the same.

Commitment and Interdependence

One approach to investigating narcissism in romantic relationships is to apply interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). According to this approach, relationship outcomes can be considered emergent properties of the relationship. Commitment, for example, is seen as a motive that emerges from the interaction of the two partners in the relationship (i.e., a macromotive).

The most influential model in the interdependence tradition for examining commitment is the investment model (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). According to the investment model, commitment in a relationship is the result of three predictors: satisfaction, investments, and alternatives. Satisfaction is the reward supplied by the relationship minus the costs. Investments include things such as time, shared friends, or children that would be potentially lost if the relationship were to end. Alternatives are other possible dating partners or being alone.

When placed within the context of the investment model, narcissists report lower commitment. Importantly, this lower commitment is driven primarily by increased alternatives. Put another way, narcissists perceive greater alternatives to their relationships and this leads to lesser commitment (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

Why the greater alternatives? The agency model would suggest that this is linked to self-regulation, approach orientation, and extraversion. There is some evidence of approach orientation in narcissists' alternatives. In particular, narcissists score particularly high on what is known as "attention to alternatives" (Miller, 1997). This is a measure of how much effort one applies to identifying and spending time with alternative partners. It is not that the alternatives come to the narcissist; rather, narcissists are actively seeking out potential alternatives. As for narcissistic esteem regulation, there is no direct evidence linking alternatives to esteem. We think it is plausible to assume that

narcissists are "looking for a better deal" or "looking to trade up." If they can find the partner who will bring them more status and esteem, they will go for it.

Sexuality

Sexuality is not just a physical act. It is also a social process that is suffused with meaning (Baumeister & Tice, 2000). Based on the agency model, one would predict that, for narcissists, sex can be a self-regulatory act that invokes positive feelings of agency rather than communion. This is indeed the case. Narcissists are more likely to use agentic words to describe sex, such as daring, power, and domination (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, in press). This agentic view of sex has positive self-regulatory benefits for narcissists, but has social costs for them as well. First, it is linked to lesser relational commitment (Foster et al., in press). Second, it is associated with greater unrestricted sociosexuality. Narcissists are more likely to perceive sex as divorced from emotional warmth and closeness, and also to desire greater sexual diversity. This same research also found that narcissists conceived of sex more in terms of personal pleasure than in terms of emotional intimacy. Basically, it is a selfish and self-serving activity (Foster et al., in press). (Of course, there is also the possibility that narcissists could strive to be "dynamos" in bed in order to gain narcissistic esteem. This would be an example of a behavior where the interests of narcissistic selfishness and partner needs may be aligned.) Finally, one line of research directly examined predicted infidelity in newly married couples (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). These researchers found that narcissistic wives were more likely than nonnarcissistic wives to predict being unfaithful (although actual infidelity was not assessed) to their husband.

Love

There is a Western cliché that you have to love yourself before you can love others. Using narcissism as a model for self-love, this statement is far from accurate. Narcissists' approach to love is consistent with the tenets of the agency model. Narcissists are extraverted, socially confident, and approach-oriented. They are interested in their own agentic goals and not interested in communal goals. Their style of loving reflects this state of affairs.

In terms of the typology of love styles operationalized by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986), narcissists report being selfish (low agape) and pragmatic (high pragma). What really separates narcissists from nonnarcissists, however, is a game-playing (ludic) approach to love (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Le, in press). Narcissists see love as a game and enjoy keeping their partner uncertain about their commitment to the relationship. This approach not only

plays on narcissists' social strengths, but is also an excellent self-regulatory strategy for narcissists. By keeping the partner uncertain of commitment, increased power and autonomy (agentic traits) accrue to the narcissist (Campbell, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004).

This process relies on a social psychological process known as "the principle of least interest" (Waller, 1938). Simply put, the individual with the least interest in the relationship has the most power. Imagine that you are dating someone to whom you are very attracted, but who is really not very interested in you. Saturday night rolls around, and she says that she would like to go "clubbing." You have no desire to go clubbing because you don't really like crowds, dancing, or dressing in black. But because you have more to lose in the relationship by saying no, you put on your black attire and head out the door.

In sum, narcissists' approach to love is a clear example of social self-regulation in action. Importantly, it demonstrates how certain groups of individuals (narcissists) can increase agentic self-views (power and autonomy) by employing a specific love style (game playing) that, in turn, activates a basic social psychological process (principle of least interest.)

Aggression

On occasion, the self-regulatory agenda of narcissists will lead to physical violence. Although no research has looked directly at narcissism and aggression in the context of ongoing romantic relationships, a wealth of data suggests a link between narcissism and aggression under conditions of ego threat (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). The seminal research on the topic placed narcissists in a condition of ego threat (i.e., negative performance feedback). Aggression against the person who provided the critique using a white noise blast was then assessed. Narcissism was linked to increased aggression following threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Additional research has replicated this same pattern in the context of relational rejection. Individuals were brought to a lab and asked to choose two other people who they "liked and respected" to be in a group. Each individual was then given false rejection feedback (nobody chose them) and then offered the opportunity to set the level of white noise blasts directed toward the rejecting group. Under conditions of rejection, narcissists were more aggressive (Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

Recent research has also linked narcissistic aggression following threat directly to external attributions (Stucke, 2003). Basically, narcissists blame others for the negative feedback and disrespect that they receive. They then reassert dominance and punish those who provided the negative feedback. This tendency on the part of narcissists is especially troubling given that nar-

cissists are more likely to perceive hostile intent in the eyes of others (McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Mooney, 2003).

An additional and particularly harmful self-regulatory behavior that may be displayed by narcissists is rape (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002; Bushman et al., 2003). The model guiding this research is consistent with agentic self-regulation. Narcissists are told they cannot have something (sexual access to a woman) and they react by taking it anyway. Narcissists do not have the usual constraint of empathy to restrict this behavior. Narcissists' sense of power and entitlement is preserved, but with tragic consequences for the victim.

The Partners of Narcissists

Given the above, it is reasonable to conclude that narcissists would make lousy dating partners. They are game playing, unfaithful, low in commitment, and selfish. Yet narcissists are strangely adept—maybe more adept than nonnarcissists—at starting romantic relationships. Why do narcissists find it so easy to find romantic partners?

The truth is that narcissists are not all bad. If they were, they would be avoided. Instead, narcissists have many positive qualities. These are located in agentic domains: Narcissists are confident, extraverted, and energetic. They are exciting and, at least in the reports of their dating partners (although not in ratings of photographs [Gabriel et al., 1994]), good looking. These are all attractive qualities. Even Charles Manson—or Scott Peterson for that matter—still has women interested in him, despite his murderous past. Unfortunately for their relationship partners, narcissists' agentic traits are not balanced by communal concerns. Narcissists are not all that interested in caring or intimacy. Finally, add to this mix our speculation that in relationships agentic traits are good for attraction and communal traits are good for relational durability. The result is that narcissists can be very appealing at the early stages of romantic relationships, but not so appealing in the longer term. In a sense, the course of romantic relationships is similar to that found by Paulhus in group interactions (Paulhus, 1998). Namely, narcissists are well liked in initial interactions, but disliked after repeated interactions.

In line with these ideas, we gathered narrative accounts of those who have dated narcissists and nonnarcissists (Brunell et al., 2004; Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003). The main pattern of findings is that narcissists are more confident, outgoing, exciting, and attractive (but not necessarily nice) at the initial stages of relationships. Indeed, relationships with narcissistic partners were reported to be more satisfying during the early stages, but satisfaction level dropped dramatically until it was well below that in relationships with nonnarcissists. Part of this drop was accounted for by the lack of emotional

intimacy in relationships with narcissists, as well as by the narcissists' alleged game playing, infidelity, and overcontrolling behavior. Relationships with nonnarcissists started more slowly, and they were initially less satisfying and consistently less exciting than relationships with narcissists. Relationships with nonnarcissists ultimately became more satisfying than those with narcissists, however, and even at the end of the relationship those relationships with nonnarcissists were more satisfying.

In a sense, relationships with narcissists reflect poor self-regulation on the partners' part, somewhat equivalent to eating a chocolate donut. Relationships with narcissists have the sugary rush consistent with high agency, but lack the nutritious sustenance supplied by communal traits. Hence, dating narcissists results in the satisfaction equivalent of a sugar crash. The difference between donuts and narcissists, of course, is that nobody really believes donuts are healthy. Narcissists, however, can arguably feign communal traits to some extent, these communal traits can reasonably be inferred by the partner, or partners can hope to increase the communal qualities of their partner. This combination of positive agentic qualities and misrepresented, unknown, or potential communal qualities make narcissists hard to avoid.

One additional question involves the personalities of those who date narcissists. A commonly held belief is that people with low self-esteem are attracted to narcissists because they want the abuse. This "doormat model," however, does not hold, on average. When we collect data on past relationships, the far more common finding is that most individuals have dated both narcissists and nonnarcissists. When we examine ongoing relationships that are committed enough that one partner can get the other partner to come to a psychology study, we find that narcissists tend to date other narcissists (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002). This same pattern is found with sociopathy (Krueger, Moffitt, Caspi, Bleske, & Silva, 1998). In marriage, however, we have not found evidence that narcissism correlates across partners.

In sum, narcissists' agentic traits make them satisfying partners in the short term, but they are also associated with more rapid relationship deterioration. The result for narcissists is a churning of relationships—engaging in a series of shallow short-term relationships rather than fewer emotionally deep relationships. This pattern of self-regulation may well work for narcissists. The partners of narcissists, to the extent that they want emotional intimacy, are likely to suffer in the longer term from dating narcissists.

Can Narcissism Ever Be Positive for Relationships?

We conclude our discussion of narcissists' relationships by describing some instances where narcissism can be positive for relationships (beyond, of course, the exciting initial stage). Given the tenets of the agency model, one

possible avenue for improving narcissists' relationships is not to diminish narcissists' agentic self-regulation, but instead to enhance narcissists' communal self-regulation. If narcissists are able to become more communal in their approach to relationships, they would become desirable partners. Indeed, this is a plot in many Hollywood movies, where the narcissistic partner becomes more communal after an intense event. These communal elicitation events include electric shock (Mel Gibson in What Women Want), falling from riches to rags (Hugh Grant in Two Weeks Notice), and being shot in the head (Harrison Ford in Regarding Henry). Plot devices are wonderful things, but they are not appropriate in the lab and have little utility outside of it. Nevertheless, they are consistent with the theoretical possibility that this communal change or shift can happen.

One way that this communal shift could happen is in the context of an ongoing relationship. In a relationship, communal traits could conceivably be elicited by the partner. This is consistent with a range of research on self-concept change in relationships (e.g., Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; see also Strong & Aron, Chapter 17, and Kumashiro, Rusbult, Wolf, & Estrada, Chapter 16, this volume). We found evidence for such a communal shift in a longitudinal study of marriage partners. The narcissists who felt that their partner made them more communal actually became more committed and less interested in alternatives across a period of several months(Campbell, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004). This study strongly suggests a direction for improving the relational functioning of narcissists.

Another line of research looked at narcissism and resilience to relational threat. Relationship partners can at times be exposed to doubts about the other's commitment. If these doubts are not successfully resisted, relational problems can ensue (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001). Consistent with the agency model, it was predicted that narcissists would be more resilient to such doubts. In one study, for example, individuals were asked to list 10 reasons why their partner was committed or was not committed to the relationship. After this threat manipulation, relational commitment and fidelity were assessed. Narcissists were resistant to this threatening information. They found it harder to list reasons why their partner was not committed. Importantly, after this threat, narcissists actually reported being more committed to their relationship than did nonnarcissists. In short, narcissists were particularly adept at resisting information threatening to the relationship. Of course, when narcissists listed reasons why their partners were highly committed to the relationship, narcissists reported less relational commitment and a greater interest in alternative partners. Nevertheless, although there are possibly some circumstances in which narcissists will actually be better partners than nonnarcissists, it is more reasonable to expect that they will be lousy partners than to wait for their positive relationship qualities to emerge.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We have spent a good deal of time discussing the link between narcissism, self-concept, self-regulation, and interpersonal relationships. We hope that we have presented a theoretical model of narcissistic self-regulation that is useful for explaining past findings and generating future research. We also hope that we have conveyed some of the complexities of narcissists' approach to relationships. Narcissism is neither uniformly good nor uniformly bad. Rather, narcissism is associated with a series of trade-offs. It is well suited for providing the narcissist with a positive self-concept and narcissistic esteem in the short term. In the long term, however, the narcissist will have trouble maintaining relationships. Likewise, the partner of the narcissist may get a short-term jolt of satisfaction and excitement from the relationship, but he or she is likely to suffer in the long term from the narcissist's lack of communal qualities. Finally, we hope that we have sketched out a possible strategy for making narcissists better partners—namely, the communal shift.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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