

A CONSTRUCT VALIDITY STUDY  
OF TWO MEASURES OF NARCISSISM

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A DISSERTATION  
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY  
ALLIANT INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
SAN DIEGO

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In Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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By

KRISTINE A. BECKER

2008

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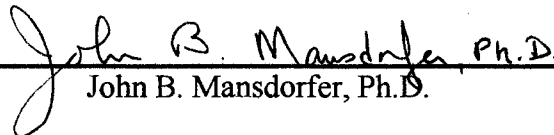
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OF TWO MEASURES OF NARCISSISM

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An abstract of a dissertation  
presented to the faculty of the  
California School of Professional Psychology  
Alliant International University  
San Diego

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Peter F. Briggs, Ph.D.

Date

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the construct validity of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979), as a measure of overt or grandiose narcissism, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale (NPDS; Ashby, 1978; Ashby, Lee, & Duke, 1979), as a measure of covert or hypersensitive narcissism. Results of earlier investigations have repeatedly demonstrated a weak and nonsignificant correlation between the two measures. A rationale for this lack of convergent validity was presented in a review of psychodynamic theory, and discussed in terms of the differences in scale development and construction. To provide validity evidence for the NPI and the NPDS as measures of two different types of maladaptive narcissism, that have an underlying etiological foundation, a pattern of differential correlations between the narcissism scales and three measures of related constructs was predicted. The five self-report inventories were administered to 43 male and 57 female college students. Results indicated significant differences between the correlations of the NPI and the NPDS with the measures of self-concept incongruence (Self-Concept Incongruence Scale; Weedman, Warren, & Marx, 1974) and

depression proneness (Self-Criticism factor of the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire; Blatt, D'Afflitti, & Quinlan, 1976), providing support for the distinction between the NPI and the NPDS as measures of paradoxical narcissistic traits. A positive correlation between the NPDS and the measure of object relations deficits (Bell Object Relations Inventory; Bell, 1995) provided additional evidence for the NPDS as a measure of narcissistic dysfunction. A negative correlation between the NPI and object relations deficits, however, did not substantiate the ties between the NPI and maladjustment. Contrary to expectation, a negative correlation between the two narcissism measures indicated that the scales might be more polarized than suggested by earlier investigations. These results provided further support for the distinction between the scales as measures of overt and covert narcissism, but did not provide evidence of a positive association between the NPI and the NPDS as measures of developmental deficits in narcissistic functioning.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents,  
who have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams.  
They are a constant source of strength and a blessing.

PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With deep gratitude  
to my committee members and to the many friends,  
family, colleagues, faculty, assistants, and administrative staff  
who shared in this endeavor.

Each page is imbued with their generosity and kindness.

PREVIEW



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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

*Overview*

The purpose of this study was to examine the construct validity of two qualitatively different measures of narcissism that are frequently used in research. Results of studies using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979), which is conceptually derived from *DSM-III* behavioral criteria, and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale (Ashby, 1978; Ashby, Lee, & Duke, 1979), which is theoretically driven and empirically derived from the MMPI, repeatedly demonstrate a weak and nonsignificant correlation between the two measures. A rationale for this lack of convergent validity is presented in a review of psychodynamic theory postulating the existence of two forms of narcissism, overt or phallic and covert or hypersensitive, which share an underlying unitary foundation.

A correlation analysis was conducted in the present study to examine the relationship between participants' scores on the two measures of narcissism and scores on each of three measures of personality traits that are associated

with narcissism on both a theoretical and descriptive level. As recommended by Campbell and Fiske (1959) for the analysis of construct validity, both convergent and discriminant validity were assessed.

The objective of this approach was twofold: (a) to provide evidence of the convergent validity of the two narcissism measures relative to core or unitary features, and evidence of significant differences between the measures in relation to narcissistic characteristics that are specific to type or form, and (b) to assess the underlying theoretical model.

#### *Validity Theory*

The concept of validity, which refers to "the appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of the specific inferences made from test scores," is the most important consideration in test construction according to the American Psychological Association (1985, p. 9). A variety of definitions have emerged as psychologists created numerous subcategories of validity over the years. As different types and definitions came to be used, the term "validity," which defined the meaning of tests and measures, began to lose its own meaning.

In 1974 the various types of validity came to be organized under three major headings by a joint committee of the American Psychological Association, the American

Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. Their booklet entitled *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests* (1974), periodically revised and updated (1985; 1999), established guidelines for psychological tests that continue to be popularly received. Though other texts may continue to refer to different types of validity, they can all be contained within the three established categories: content-related, criterion-related, and construct-related validity.

In its simplest terms, validity can be defined as the agreement between a test score or measure and the quality it is intended to measure. Substantial validation is generally an ongoing process which provides evidence spanning all three categories, thereby affording careful evaluation of the instrument in light of any intended use or application. Criterion validity, which assesses the accuracy of the predictive capability of a test relative to some independent measure of the predicted outcome, was most prominent among the three types until the 1950s.

With the advent of personality testing, which examines variables that have no objective criterion against which to validate predictions, greater emphasis was placed on content and construct validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Content validity is concerned with the systematic examination of test content to assess the degree to which the test

representatively samples the set of behaviors that it is intended to sample. Tests that measure achievement and occupational skills require content validation. In these cases the behavioral domain sampled might include factual knowledge, as well as the ability to grasp concepts and apply principles. Essentially, content validity focuses on the external, observable aspects of test construction.

Somewhat less concrete, construct validity assesses the degree to which a test accurately measures a theoretical construct or trait, and requires the gradual accumulation of data from various sources. All data that contribute to the understanding of the nature of the construct, its development, and its manifestations are considered useful in the process of construct validation.

Constructs, such as narcissism, derive from a descriptive model intended to explain and organize observed behavioral responses. A relationship among a number of constructs believed to contribute to identifiable patterns of behavior may be predicted by the explanatory model. In such cases construct validation assesses not only the measurements, but also the underlying model or theory.

In support of validating measurements and examining the relationships among multiple constructs, Willemsen (1974) offers the following premise:

The greater the number of relationships between



the different constructs in our model that are predicted, the less likely it is that results consistent with all predictions could arise by chance alone. (p. 9)

In support of validating the underlying model or theory, Cronbach (1971) asserts that construct validity refers to the degree to which the descriptive and explanatory inferences are "sound." According to Edwards (1970), testing the inferences requires that one "demonstrate that the scores on the scale are correlated with other variables which, in terms of the theory, should be correlated with the trait" (p. 36). As such, construct validation has heuristic value in its contribution to theory building. In fact, rather than resulting in changes to the test or measure, construct validity research often fosters a reevaluation of theory.

#### *Construct Validity Research*

Especially relevant to the validation of measures of personality constructs, in which scores may be affected by a variety of irrelevant variables, are the principles of convergent and discriminant validity. Noted for their proposal of the multitrait-multimethod matrix, a systematic experimental design for assessing convergent and discriminant validity, Campbell and Fiske (1959) emphasized these principles stating that:

For the justification of novel trait measures, for the validation of test interpretation or for the establishment of construct validity, discriminant validity as well as convergent validation is required. (p. 81)

In his recommendations to the American Psychological Association for establishing test standards, Campbell (1960) discussed this validation process, explaining that a test or measure must correlate highly with a test of the construct using different methods, or with other variables with which it should theoretically correlate (convergent validity), at the same time that it should not correlate significantly with variables from which it should differ (discriminant validity).

In accordance with these recommendations, the results of the correlation analysis in this study were examined for evidence of both the convergent and discriminant validity of the two measures of narcissism, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale.

#### *Narcissism Theory*

In research studies on narcissism, the selection of an instrument from which valid inferences may be made is especially challenging due to the multitude of definitions and applications of this construct. The term derives from the Greek myth of Narcissus, the story of a beautiful youth

who refused all offers of love. As punishment for his indifference to the advances of the mountain nymph, Echo, he was made to fall in love with his own image in a pool. Each time he tried to embrace the object of his affection, the image would disappear. Unable to possess his beloved, Narcissus pined away until he was ultimately transformed into the flower that bears his name.

The seeds of the myth were first introduced into psychological literature in 1898, when Havelock Ellis used the term "narcissus-like" as a description of a psychological attitude in his report of a clinical case of male autoeroticism. Since then, use of the term "narcissism" has expanded throughout the years to variously denote an early developmental stage, the libidinal cathexis of the self, specific types of object relationship phenomena, a self-preserving defensive function, and more recently, a measure or level of self-esteem (Pulver, 1970; Rothstein, 1979; Van Der Waals, 1965).

In the forward to her book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (1990/original German publication, 1979), Alice Miller, whose writings have illuminated our understanding of developmental factors contributing to narcissistic disturbance, articulated the problem inherent in efforts to clarify the term as follows:

The more sincerely the psychoanalytic profession

toils for a deeper understanding of the concept of "narcissism," and to elucidate and define it for scientific use, the more the word attracts people to use it in everyday speech. The result of all of this is such multiplicity of meanings that it is difficult to use the word now to define a precise psychoanalytic concept. (p. xvii)

Popular use of the concept was addressed by sociologist Christopher Lasch in his observation of a pervasive focus on self in contemporary society. In his book, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), he theorized that prevailing social conditions fostered narcissistic traits evidenced in everyone to varying degrees. In this context, the term "narcissism" is freely and frequently used as a synonym for egocentrism or selfishness. One area of confusion rests in this selective application of the concept, which does not consider its broader theoretical formulations, or the more recent theoretical and clinical emphasis on healthy narcissism.

Not surprisingly, growing interest in narcissistic traits and behaviors in the population at large paralleled an increased focus on narcissistic disturbances in the clinical realm. In 1975, Giovacchini reported that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who had previously encountered hysterical and obsessive neuroses were seeing

more and more narcissistic patients. The lively debate between psychoanalytic theorists Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut (Kernberg 1970, 1974a, 1974b, 1975, 1984; Kohut, 1966, 1971, 1977, 1978; Kohut & Wolf, 1978) on the etiology, psychodynamics, symptomatology, diagnosis, and treatment of narcissistic patients contributed to a rapidly expanding exploration of narcissistic phenomena. In the past 30 years, empirical investigations have focused on distinguishing normal from pathological narcissistic traits, measuring various characteristics of narcissism, identifying sociocultural influences, and differentiating between narcissism as an enduring trait versus narcissism as a transient state.

Review of the theoretical literature on narcissism indicates that the difficulties encountered in current research attempts to clarify the concept are embedded in the varying perspectives of evolving psychoanalytic thought. Each step in the shift in emphasis, from Freud's libidinal/structural theory, to ego psychology, to object relations, to the more recent self-psychology theory, has brought new implications for the understanding and definition of the term. In spite of major changes, refinements and elaborations, theorists have continued to struggle with the contradictions, inconsistencies, and gaps

in Freud's early postulations throughout almost a century of theory building (Pulver, 1970).

The following review traces the concept of narcissism from its introduction into the psychological literature and Freud's multifaceted conceptualization, through its elaboration by prominent followers, to the current contending theoretical views. Emphasis is on those contributions most pertinent to this study, in particular, the evolving definition of the concept, culminating in object relations theory; the multidimensionality of the construct; and the paradoxical nature of narcissism as a defining personality characteristic.

#### *Evolving Psychoanalytic Perspectives*

Freud's first written reference to the term narcissism dates back to 1910 in an added footnote to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1953). In his initial use of the term, he associated it with a sexual perversion in which a person treats his own body as a sexual object. It was, however, Paul Nacke who actually coined the German equivalent of the term "Narcismus" a decade earlier, in describing a sexual perversion in his summary of a Havelock Ellis paper, in which the term "narcissus-like" was used to describe a psychological attitude (as cited in Strachey (Ed.), 1957, p. 17).

Sadger (1910/as cited in Pulver, 1970) made the first theoretical extension of the term from a perversion to a stage in normal development. In the first published psychoanalytic paper devoted specifically to narcissism, Otto Rank (1911/as cited in Pulver, 1970) further developed the concept. He introduced two dynamic associations, which laid the groundwork for the contemporary focus on healthy narcissism and the identification of overt and covert dimensions of the concept. First, he connected it with self-admiration, vanity, and self-aggrandizement, psychic phenomena not considered overtly sensual; and second, he described the defensive nature of narcissistic self-love. He also referred to "normal feminine vanity," promoting the idea of a nonpathological aspect of narcissism.

At about the same time, Freud expanded along the same lines as Sadger. In his notes on the Schreber case, Freud (1911/1958) elaborated the concept as a normal stage in sexual development occurring between autoeroticism and object love. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913/1955), he also used the concept to explain developmentally normal primitive types of thinking and feeling, such as animism, magic, and omnipotent thought. The issue of normal versus pathological narcissism is one of the theoretical considerations which particularly complicate the empirical research on narcissism.