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Narcissism: Theory and Measurement

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Lack of a suitable measuring device hampered the empirical study of narcissism until Raskin and Hall (1979) developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). The NPI possesses desirable psychometric properties, and in this article I used the scale in a variety of studies. Factor analysis of the scale replicated the four-factor solution found by Emmons (1984): Leadership/Authority, Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration, Superiority/Arrogance, and Exploitiveness/Entitlement. The Exploitiveness/Entitlement subscale was found to correlate with measures of pathological narcissism and affective intensity and variability. The relevance of Linville's (1982) theory of self-complexity-affect intensity for understanding aspects of narcissism is outlined. Implications of the study of narcissism for attribution theory and research are discussed.

Although the 1970s were characterized as the "me generation," interest in narcissism shows no signs of abatement in the 1980s. Three dominant trends can be noted. One trend focuses on narcissism as a cultural or societal entity, contending that society is becoming increasingly narcissistic (Lasch, 1979; Mazlish, 1982; Nelson, 1977; Stern, 1980). One has only to look at the popularity of such books as *The Art of Being Selfish* and *Looking Out for Number One* to see that a major segment of society has become increasingly self-absorbed. Wallach and Wallach (1983) traced the impact of various psychological schools of thought (Freudian, neo-Freudian, humanistic) on the increasing prevalence of selfishness and egoism in society today. The implications of such a trend should not be underestimated. It has been suggested that continuous self-seeking may lessen an individual's willingness to pursue common social objectives (Kanfer, 1979). Also, the potential for social conflict may increase as a result of this trend. For example, Fichten (1984) found that attributions in distressed marital partners reflected narcissistic or egotistic biases. Furthermore, such conditions as racism, sexism, and nationalism can be viewed as examples of a narcissistic tendency manifested at group levels. Fromm (1973) spoke of group narcissism as a sublimation of individual narcissism. The individual satisfies his own narcissistic cravings by belonging to and identifying with a group, such as a political or religious group.

A second trend that can be noted is social psychology's burgeoning literature on a phenomenon known as the self-serving bias (Harvey & Weary, 1984; Snyder, Stephan, & Rosenfield, 1978). This refers to the tendency for people to accept responsibility for successful outcomes and to deny blame for failed outcomes. Greenwald (1980) referred to this phenomenon as beneffectance and included it among two other cognitive biases (egocentricity and cognitive conservatism) with narcissistic overtones that characterize the cognitive processes of individuals.

The third trend focuses on narcissism as a clinical entity. Current psychoanalytic perspectives of narcissism can be found in the writings of Kernberg (1976, 1980) and Kohut (1976). Differences between the two regarding the etiology and treatment of the narcissistic personality have resulted in a lively debate (Millon, 1981). Kernberg sees narcissism developing as a consequence of parental rejection or abandonment. This parental-devaluation hypothesis states that because of cold and rejecting parents, the child defensively withdraws and comes to believe that it is only himself or herself that can be trusted and relied on and therefore loved. Kernberg adheres to a stage model of libidinal development where difficulties arise when there is regression in the developmental sequence of undifferentiated libido followed by autoeroticism, narcissism, and then object love, with narcissistic individuals not reaching the final stage. Kohut, on the other hand, does not see narcissistic libido as being transformed into object love, but rather sees it as following its own course of development into adulthood. Kohut's theory is actually a developmental theory of the self, where pathological narcissism can result from failure to idealize the parents because of rejection or indifference. Yet a third recent theory has been espoused by Millon (1981) and is what he calls a social-learning theory of narcissism. This view sees narcissism developing not as a response to parental devaluation but rather as a consequence of parental overvaluation. The child is treated as a special person, provided with a lot of attention, and led by parents to believe he or she is lovable and perfect. According to Millon (1981), such unrealistic overvaluation will lead to self-illusions that "cannot be sustained in the outer world" (p. 165). Often the child is either the firstborn or is an only child, which contributes to the abundance of attention and special treatment.

Although both the cultural and psychoanalytic approaches are rich in theoretical speculations, they are both fraught with difficulties. Anyone familiar with psychoanalytic formulations

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knows that assumptions and conjecture are often treated as absolute truths, when often in reality they could not even be subjected to empirical scrutiny. The cultural view would hold that there is something unique about this period in history to distinguish it as the age of narcissism. However, if narcissistic traits are formed in childhood, and there is ample agreement that they are, how can society be fostering narcissism in its members? Although Lasch's (1979) intent was to state a cultural trend, Mazlish (1982) held that it is unjustified to describe an entire culture with a single clinical concept. Also, it is unclear as to whether the prevalence of narcissism has actually increased or whether narcissistic individuals are simply more visible today (Dervin, 1982). Millon (1981) states the problems associated with both approaches quite succinctly: "The viability of the narcissistic personality does not stand or fall on the vagaries of the future of psychoanalysis . . . nor does its validity rest on the passing character of contemporary life styles" (p. 165). With all of the current interest in narcissism, it is unfortunate that empirical research on narcissism has lagged so far behind. Little progress can be expected to be made in this area unless testable hypotheses are formulated and subjected to empirical scrutiny. This article is an initial attempt to provide a foundation on which an empirical theory of narcissism can be built.

The Measurement of Narcissism

There have been several attempts to construct an individual difference measure of narcissism, and the results have been mixed. Many of these have been projective instruments, such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Grayden, 1958; Harder, 1979; Young, 1959) and the Rorschach (Exner, 1969; Harder, 1979; Urist, 1977). Ashby, Lee, and Duke (1979) reported the development of an MMPI Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale (NPD), consisting of 19 items from the MMPI. Solomon (1982) found that the NPD distinguished between individuals with healthy and pathological self-esteem. The Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI; Millon, 1982) contains a narcissistic personality subscale, but its validity has yet to be established. Phares and Erskine (1984) have developed a 28-item scale designed to measure the construct of selfism within a social-learning framework. Individuals differ in selfism in the extent to which they construe situations that present problems in need satisfaction in either egotistical or nonegotistical terms. Phares and Erskine prefer the term selfism over narcissism because they consider selfism to be an attitudinal rather than a motivational construct. However, a purely cognitive construct fails to take into account the emotional, motivational, and interpersonal processes underlying narcissistic behaviors (Masterson, 1981).

Raskin and Hall (1979) constructed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), a 54-item, forced-choice questionnaire designed to measure individual differences in narcissism as a personality trait. The construction of the inventory was based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III) criteria for the narcissistic personality disorder. These criteria include (a) a grandiose sense of self-importance and uniqueness, (b) preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, beauty, or ideal love, (c) exhibitionistic—requires constant attention and admiration, (d) entitlement–expectation of special favors without reciprocation, and (e) interpersonal exploitiveness (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Although the inventory is based on the DSM-III criteria, it is only extreme manifestations of those behaviors that constitute pathological narcissism, and the assumption is that when exhibited in less extreme forms these behaviors are reflective of narcissism as a personality trait. This assumption seems warranted because social critics such as Lasch (1979) have argued that narcissistic personality characteristics are prevalent in the general population. Fischer (1984) refers to this form of narcissism as subclinical narcissism. The NPI is to date the only objective self-report inventory of narcissism as a normal personality trait. Its creation has opened the door for the empirical investigation of narcissism.

Previous Studies Using the NPI

Several studies have now been conducted with the NPI. Raskin and Hall (1981) reported an 8-week alternate-form reliability of .72, and these authors also found that scores on the NPI were positively related to Eysenck's extraversion and psychoticism scales. Raskin (1980) found that there was a small but significant correlation between narcissism and creativity, using the Barron Symbolic Equivalents Test. The same author (Raskin, 1981) found that NPI scores were positively related to the use of first-person singular pronouns and negatively related to the use of first-person plural pronouns. Emmons (1981), investigating the relation between narcissism and sensation seeking, obtained significant correlations between the NPI and disinhibition, experience seeking, and boredom susceptibility. LaVopa (1981) found that narcissism was positively related to Machiavellianism in women but not in men and also found that NPI scores were uncorrelated with scores on the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Emmons (1984) factor analyzed the NPI and uncovered four separate factors that he labeled Exploitiveness/Entitlement, Leadership/Authority, Superiority/Arrogance, and Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration. He also found that all of the factors except Exploitiveness/Entitlement were highly correlated with self-esteem. The total NPI score was also positively associated with the need for uniqueness, extraversion, and acting. Peer ratings of narcissism were found to correlate highly with self-reported NPI scores. Watson, Grisham, Trotter, and Biderman (1984) found that scores on the NPI, particularly the Exploitiveness/Entitlement subscale, correlated negatively with two measures of empathy. A negative correlation between that subscale and a measure of social desirability was also observed; however, neither the full scale nor any of the other subscales were significantly related to social desirability. Watson, Hood, and Morris (1984) reported that NPI scores were negatively correlated with intrinsic religious values (indicative of transcending self-centered needs) as measured by the Allport and Ross (1967) religious-orientation measure. Finally, Prifitera and Ryan (1984) found that NPI scores distinguished between narcissistic and nonnarcissistic psychiatric patients. Thus, evidence for the reliability and validity of the NPI in both normal and pathological samples has emerged from a number of different sources.

The purposes of the following studies are (a) to attempt to replicate the factor structure uncovered by Emmons (1984); (b) to examine the relation between the NPI and various measures

of pathological narcissism, selfism, and egocentricity; (c) to test some aspects of certain theoretical formulations of narcissism, such as Cattell's (1957) and Murray's (1938); and (d) to provide further validational evidence for the NPI. Three studies are reported that address in turn each of these three substantive issues.

Study 1

It has been suggested (Comrey, 1973) that factor-analytic results based on dichotomous items may be especially unstable owing to possible extreme item-endorsement splits. Therefore, the NPI was once again factor analyzed to determine whether the factors uncovered by Emmons (1984) would once again emerge in a different sample.

Method

Several different groups of University of Illinois undergraduates (N = 388) were administered the NPI along with several other personality tests. Three hundred eight students were enrolled in introductory psychology and were participating in order to fulfill a course requirement. The other 80 subjects were enrolled in a semester-long course and research project on mood and personality. They received 3 hours of course credit for participating. Twenty-six of the subjects did not complete all of the items, and their data were eliminated from further analyses, leaving a total sample of 362. Questionnaires were completed in group settings.

Results and Discussion

Interitem correlations (phi coefficients) were computed, and the resulting correlation matrix was subjected to a principal-axes factor analysis. The number of factors to be extracted was determined by a joint consideration of Kaiser's eigenvalue criterion and the scree plot of eigenvalues. Using these criteria, four factors emerged, which were then rotated obliquely. The four factors accounted for 70% of the variance. Oblique rotation was used on the assumption that the various hypothetical factors should be related to each other, as it is their combination that defines the trait of narcissism. The NPI items and their respective factor loadings are presented in Table 1. Only items with loadings greater than .35 are included. Because the format of the NPI is that of forced choice, each item actually consists of a dyad of statements. For simplicity, only the narcissistic alternative of each dyad is shown.

The pattern of factor loadings is virtually identical to those uncovered previously (Emmons, 1984), the only difference being the percentage of variance accounted for by each factor. The factors are labeled, in order, Leadership/Authority, Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration, Superiority/Arrogance, and Exploitiveness/Entitlement. The factors reflect to some degree the DSM-III criteria for the narcissistic personality disorder, particularly exploitation and superiority. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of leadership in DSM-III, though several items loading on Leadership/Authority showed the highest correlations with the total scale score and this factor accounted for the most variance.

To examine intercorrelations among the factors, subscale scores were computed for each of the four factors by summing

Table 1
NPI Items and Factor Loadings

Item	Factor			
	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E
I see myself as a good leader.	.72	.11	−.16	−.03
I would prefer to be a leader.	.70	.08	−.16	−.19
I really like to be the center of attention.	.65	.01	.00	.00
I like having authority over other people.	.60	.18	−.06	−.16
I would be willing to describe myself as a strong personality.	.60	.01	.03	.13
I have a natural talent for influencing people.	.58	−.08	.05	.17
I like to be the center of attention.	.55	.01	.09	−.08
I am assertive.	.49	.03	.12	.20
People always seem to recognize my authority.	.44	.14	.20	−.10
I like to look at my body.	.08	.66	−.14	−.04
I like to look at myself in the mirror.	.09	.59	−.13	−.07
I am an extraordinary person.	.02	.57	.07	.05
I like to display my body.	.02	.54	−.03	.07
I have good taste when it comes to beauty.	.02	.51	−.04	−.20
I think I am a special person.	.14	.50	.00	.15
I like to be complimented.	.23	.40	−.28	.14
I am going to be a great person.	.06	.36	.30	−.07
I know that I am good because everyone keeps telling me so.	.05	.35	.15	−.09
Everybody likes to hear my stories.	.19	−.24	.56	−.04
I usually dominate any conversation.	.09	−.12	.54	−.22
I can make anybody believe anything.	.09	−.07	.52	.01
I am a born leader.	.27	.07	.48	.00
I can read people like a book.	−.08	.19	.48	.00
I am apt to show off if I get the chance.	.24	−.04	.44	−.08
People can learn a great deal from me.	−.23	.27	.40	−.04
I always know what I am doing.	−.23	.28	.39	.30
I can usually talk my way out of anything.	.32	−.17	.38	−.11
Superiority is something you are born with.	.02	−.02	.36	.01
I would do almost anything on a dare.	.31	−.17	.35	−.02
I expect a great deal from other people.	.02	.04	.12	.56
I am envious of other people's good fortune.	.00	.02	−.05	.55
I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.	−.05	.02	.05	.52
I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.	.03	.17	.28	.42
I have a strong will to power.	.39	.14	.12	.41
I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.	.19	.19	.02	.38
I find it easy to manipulate people.	.21	.09	.20	.35
I am more capable than other people.	−.14	.25	.29	.35

Note. L/A = Leadership/Authority. S/S = Self-absorption/Self-admiration. S/A = Superiority/Arrogance. E/E = Exploitiveness/Entitlement. Variance accounted for by the factors = 28, 16, 15, and 11, respectively.

Table 2
Factor Intercorrelations

Factors	L/A	S/S	S/A
L/A	—		
S/S	.16	—	
S/A	.57	.40	—
E/E	.45	.40	.44

Note. L/A = Leadership/Authority. S/S = Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration. S/A = Superiority/Arrogance. E/E = Exploitiveness/Entitlement.

the items in that scale. The correlations ranged from .16 to .57, with the average correlation being .42. The subscale correlations are given in Table 2.

The internal consistencies of the full scale and each subscale (or factor) were assessed via Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951). The coefficients obtained were .87, .69, .81, .70, and .68 for the total scale and Factors 1 through 4, respectively, and these are satisfactory (Nunnally, 1978).

The factorial structure of the NPI can be considered replicated in this study. It appears that narcissism, as measured by the NPI, consists of four moderately correlated factors, tapping the domains of leadership, self-admiration, superiority, and interpersonal exploitiveness.

Study 2

Given that the NPI has a stable factorial structure, the next step was to examine the correlations between it and alternative measures of the construct. These included three objective measures: the Narcissistic Personality subscale of the MCMI (Millon, 1982); the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale (NPD; Solomon, 1982); and the Selfism scale (Phares & Erskine, 1984). A projective test, Exner's (1973) Self-Focus Sentence Completion Blank (SFSC), designed and validated to measure egocentricity as a response style, was also administered. The SFSC consists of 30 sentence stems, and the subject is asked to complete the thought begun in each. The responses can be scored as reflecting self-focus, negative self-focus, and external-world focus, as well as in other ways depending upon content. It was hypothesized that scores on the NPI would correlate positively with the self-focus responses and negatively with both the self-focus negative responses and the external-world-focus responses.

Method

Subjects were 48 undergraduates who completed the four measures and the NPI in class for extra credit. For the SFSC, subjects were instructed to read each stem and to complete the thought with the first response that came to mind. The forms were scored independently by two raters, both of whom were blind to the subjects' NPI scores. Each item was scored according to Exner's (1973) criteria. The agreement rate of response assignment between the two raters was .84, a value similar to the reliability coefficients reported in Exner (1973), and items on which raters did not agree were excluded from further analysis. Subjects were also administered the NPI, which was scored in the usual fashion for the total and subscale scores.

Results and Discussion

Correlations between the NPI, the three objective measures of narcissism, and the number of responses in each SFSC category are shown in Table 3. This table shows that the total NPI score correlated highest with the Selfism scale, or what might be considered the measure of normal cognitive narcissism. Interestingly, the NPI subscale that correlated most strongly with the MCMI and NPDS was Exploitiveness/Entitlement. These results support Emmons' (1984) conjecture that the Exploitiveness/Entitlement items tap the maladaptive and possibly pathological aspects of narcissism. Three of the four NPI subscales correlated significantly with the Selfism scale, that is, all except for Leadership/Authority. Turning to the SFSC, the total NPI score and three of the four subscales correlated significantly with the self-focus responses, as predicted. However, only Leadership/Authority correlated significantly negatively with self-focus negative responses, and only Superiority/Arrogance was significantly related to the external-world-focus responses. Interestingly, the self-focus negative responses were positively associated with the Exploitiveness/Entitlement subscale, suggesting once again that this factor is tapping the maladaptive aspects of narcissism. It does appear that egocentricity, as measured by SFSC responses, is a prime component of narcissism, particularly the Superiority/Arrogance subscale. At the same time, these results indicate that the Leadership/Authority component may represent healthier aspects of narcissism.

Study 3

Several theorists (Cattell, 1957; Murray, 1938) have characterized narcissistic individuals as emotionally intense, reacting strongly to events and exhibiting greater fluctuations in their moods. According to DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), included among the diagnostic criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder are "marked feelings of rage, inferiority, shame, humiliation, or emptiness in response to criticism, indifference to others, or defeat" (p. 317). The hypothesis

Table 3
Correlations Between the NPI and Other Measures of Narcissism

		NPI factors			
Measures	Total	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E
MCMI	.27*	.25*	.07	.48**	.31*
NPDS	.12	−.09	.09	−.04	.32**
Selfism	.45**	.01	.25*	.48**	.33**
SFSC category					
Self-focus	.33**	.32**	.15	.60**	.29*
Negative self-focus	−.13	−.38**	−.18	−.08	.28*
External-world focus	−.08	−.11	.10	−.42**	−.23*

Note. $N = 48$. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory. MCMI = Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory. NPDS = Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale. SFSC = Self-Focus Sentence Completion. L/A = Leadership/Authority. S/S = Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration. S/A = Superiority/Arrogance. E/E = Exploitiveness/Entitlement.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Correlations Between the NPI and Mood Variability and Emotional Intensity

Daily measures	Total	NPI factors			
		L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E
PA variability	.27	.16	.22*	.12	.30**
NA variability	.31**	.18	.20*	.11	.26*
Intensity	.18	.18	−.03	−.17	.34**
AIM	.12	.15	.01	−.11	.39**

Note. $N = 62$. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory. PA = positive affect. NA = negative affect. AIM = affect intensity measure.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

that narcissistic individuals typically experience intense emotions and greater mood variability was tested in this study. Daily mood reports were collected on a group of individuals over an extended period of time.

Method

Subjects were 62 (38 women, 24 men) undergraduates enrolled in a semester-long course and research project on mood and personality. They received 3 hours of course credit for participating. The subjects filled out mood reports daily for 42 consecutive days. The mood report consisted of a number of monopolar affect adjective scales, including both positive (happy, pleased, joyful, and enjoyment/fun) and negative (unhappy, depressed, anxious, frustrated, and angry/hostile) emotions. Subjects indicated the extent to which they had felt each of these emotions during the day on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely much*). Initially, composite positive- and negative-affect scores were computed by summing and averaging the positive- and negative-affect words separately. These composite affect scales have reliabilities that approach .90 (Diener & Emmons, 1984). In past research (Diener, Larsen, Levine, & Emmons, 1985), emotional intensity has been described as the strength with which subjects experienced their dominant affect. Intensity is calculated by taking the mean positive-affect score for each subject on days when positive affect exceeded negative affect (positive-affect intensity) and taking the mean negative-affect score on days when negative affect exceeded positive affect (negative-affect intensity). A number of studies have shown that these two intensity scores correlate very highly with each other (*r*s range from .65 to .77). Thus, a composite intensity score based on the sum of mean positive- and negative-affect intensity was computed for each subject. The Affect Intensity Measure (AIM; Larsen, 1984), which assesses the strength or intensity with which individuals typically experience emotions, was also administered.

Variability was operationalized as the standard deviation of the mean positive- and negative-affect scores. This indicates the degree to which subjects fluctuated day to day in their average levels of positive and negative affect. Positive and negative affect are independent in people's lives (Diener & Emmons, 1984); thus, the variability of positive and negative affect were treated and analyzed separately. Subjects were also administered the NPI, along with a battery of other personality questionnaires that were included for the purpose of another study.

Results and Discussion

Table 4 shows the correlations between the NPI and the daily measures of affect intensity and variability. The total NPI score correlates significantly with the variability of both positive and negative affect, indicating that narcissistic individuals do experience day-to-day fluctuations in their moods. Of the four subscales, Self-Admiration/Self-Absorption and Exploitiveness/Entitlement are positively associated with mood variability. Looking at emotional intensity, only the Exploitiveness/Entitlement subscale is significantly correlated with both measures of intensity. This indicates that individuals who have adopted an interpersonal style of exploitation react with strong emotion to experiences in their lives. It is apparent that any general statement regarding emotional reactivity as it relates to narcissism needs to be restricted to the interpersonal-exploitation domain.

General Discussion

Additional evidence for the validity of narcissism as a normal personality trait and the NPI as a measure of that trait has been provided in these studies. The factorial structure of the NPI uncovered by Emmons (1984) was replicated in Study 1. Narcissism, rather than being a unidimensional construct, consists of four moderately correlated factors tapping the domains of leadership, self-admiration, superiority, and interpersonal exploitiveness. Only the Exploitiveness/Entitlement subscale was found to correlate significantly with two measures of pathological narcissism. This finding supports previous claims that this factor represents the maladaptive aspects of the trait, indicating that interpersonal maneuvers may be especially troublesome for narcissistic individuals.

Narcissism and Affect Extremity

Some of the more interesting findings were those regarding affect intensity and variability. Many theorists (Cattell, 1957; Kernberg, 1980; Murray, 1938) have maintained that mood swings and affective extremity are prototypical characteristics of narcissistic individuals. Empirical support for this claim was found in my research. The question becomes, why should narcissism be related to affect intensity and variability? Current work on self-complexity and affect (Linville, 1982, 1985) provides a clue. Self-complexity refers to the capacity to differentiate among aspects of the self, such as one's professional self, one's social self, and one's family self. Linville has found that greater self-complexity results in less extreme and variable moods and fewer fluctuations in self-appraisal. Individuals with simple cognitive representations of themselves are more extreme and variable in their moods than individuals who have complex self-representations. For example, individuals whose concept of self is relatively simple may see themselves in only one social role (as a psychology professor, for example). Thus, affective reactions because of success or failure in this professional domain, such as having an article accepted or rejected, will spill over into other areas of the person's life. On the other hand, if the person views himself as not only a psychology professor but also a father, husband, or high school football coach, affect resulting from success or failure in one domain is less likely to spill over into other domains, resulting in overall milder affective reactions. In the latter case the person maintains distinctions among various aspects of the self (complex self-representation), whereas in the former case professional aspects are

closely tied to all aspects of the person's self-image (simple self-representation). Linville (1982) pointed out that with increasing age, a person's self-concept and self-evaluation become more differentiated. This may explain why affective-intensity scores decline with age (Diener, Sandvik, & Larsen, 1985).

Links between mood swings and positive and negative self-appraisals have been noted by Diener (1984). That is, when people are in a happy mood, they report feeling better about themselves than when they are unhappy. How are these observations related to narcissism? Although narcissism has been found to correlate with high self-esteem (Emmons, 1984), some theorists (cf. Kernberg, 1980) have argued that the superficial appearance of self-assurance masks a deeper narcissistic vulnerability, especially to failure and criticism. Thus, it would be expected that narcissistic individuals would react strongly after both positive and negative experiences, in accordance with their feelings of self-worth. Narcissistic individuals may have simple cognitive representations of themselves, resulting in their showing more extreme swings in mood following success or failure. Add to this the observation that narcissistic behavior has been considered a relatively immature style of responding (Kernberg, 1980; Plutchik, Kellerman, & Conte, 1979), and it is immature individuals who have a simple cognitive representation of themselves; the pieces begin to fall nicely into place. Whether narcissistic individuals actually do have a simple cognitive representation of themselves will have to be empirically documented in future research.

Relevance for Attribution Theory

One of the most widespread and robust findings in attribution theory is that individuals have the tendency to take credit for successful outcomes and to deny blame for failed outcomes. This phenomenon has been referred to as the self-serving bias (Harvey & Weary, 1984), attributional egotism (Snyder et al., 1978), and beneffectance (Greenwald, 1980). This process is believed to serve a self-esteem enhancement or protection function. One might expect such egotistical attributions to be particularly prevalent among narcissistic individuals, given that their self-esteem is especially vulnerable and that they may be motivated to enhance their self-esteem. Those working in the domain of attribution theory have begun to examine the role of motivational processes and individual differences in attributions (Harvey & Weary, 1984). Given the widespread nature of attributional egotism, the role of narcissism might prove especially useful as a moderator variable, as there are individual differences in the extent to which people make egotistical attributions. The causal attributions of narcissistic individuals may also reflect self-presentational concerns (Harvey & Weary, 1984), such as the desires to obtain approval from others or to appear modest. A potential avenue for future research would be the examination of the attributional styles of individuals who differ in the trait of narcissism.

Lastly, attention needs to be drawn to the distinction between normal and pathological narcissism. No one would argue that a certain amount of narcissism reflected in a healthy sense of self-worth and self-confidence is desirable. Both Cattell (1957) and Fromm (1973) have pointed to the positive aspects of narcissism. Interestingly, Fischer (1984) found that high-narcissistic individuals were viewed as having more positive characteristics than were low-narcissistic individuals. Also, in attributional-style therapy (Layden, 1982), individuals with a self-blaming tendency (e.g., depressed persons) are taught in effect to adopt a more narcissistic attributional style. This does not necessarily mean egocentric or conceited, as Layden points out, but rather it is simply recognizing one's own contribution to positive outcomes without overtly exaggerating one's accomplishments to others. Where the distinction is between healthy and pathological narcissism is difficult to specify. Clearly the exploitiveness/entitlement interpersonal style causes individuals some difficulty. Emmons (1984) found that this factor was related to neuroticism, social anxiety, and the interpersonal styles aggressive/sadistic and rebellious/distrustful. Watson et al. (1984) found this aspect of narcissism to be related to a lack of empathy. Perhaps narcissistic individuals exploit and manipulate others to increase their sense of self-worth. Lastly, studies are needed on the relation between subjective well-being, narcissism, defensiveness, and self-esteem in both healthy and pathologically narcissistic individuals. Such efforts will help to expand the nomological network surrounding the construct of narcissism and will aid in differentiating normal and pathological manifestations of the trait.

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