

# Intrapsychic Conflict Versus Developmental Deficit: A Causal Modeling Approach to Examining Psychoanalytic Theories of Narcissism

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Over the past 15 years, disorders of the self have occupied the attention of the psychoanalytic community. In particular, Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut have written extensively about narcissism, but from distinctly different theoretical vantage points. Each theorist has attracted adherents, but the debate between the conflict and deficit models of narcissism has been largely polemical, serving to further polarize the psychoanalytic community.

Using the techniques of causal modeling, the article introduces this powerful data analytic strategy to psychoanalytic researchers and tests a model of narcissism which permits a direct, empirical comparison of some of the ideas of Kernberg and Kohut. In a number of strategic comparisons involving the theoretical underpinnings of narcissism—the structural stability of the self, damaged self-esteem, and grandiosity—these data appear to be more consistent with the deficit model, although various aspects of the conflict model also find support.

## PROBLEM

For the last 15 years the attention of the psychoanalytic community has focused on disorders of the self. In particular, much has been written about narcissistic personality disorder, but from distinctly different theoretical perspectives. Ex-

tending the work of Jacobson (1964) and Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975), Kernberg has emphasized the role of intrapsychic conflict in pathological narcissism. Kohut (1971, 1977) ultimately abandoned intrapsychic conflict as etiologically central in favor of experiential deficit as pivotal in narcissistic pathology. The debate between the conflict and deficit models has been intense and protracted. Numerous papers and articles dealing with the ideas of Kernberg and Konut have been written during this period (Chessick, 1977; Robbins, 1980; Schwartz, 1974; Wallerstein, 1983; Wangh, 1974), but the debate remains essentially polemical serving to further polarize psychoanalysts and psychoanalysis (Gedo, 1980; Lichtenberg & Kaplan, 1983).

Part of the reason for this state of affairs is the difficulty inherent in adducing reliable "data" to inform the discussion. The ethical imperatives and potential professional and personal compromises involved in gaining access to psychoanalytic data are formidable. Even if this were not the case, individual differences in psychoanalysts and patients would make systematic generalizations difficult to develop. Given these constraints, this article applies another data analytic approach, causal modeling, to evaluating in a comparative way the conflict model of Kernberg and the deficit model of Kohut.

## THEORY

Since its inception over 90 years ago, classical psychoanalysis has postulated intrapsychic conflict—the dynamic tension between drive and defense—as the fundamental explanatory mechanism of human behavior. Over the past 15 years, however, the analytic focus on borderline and narcissistic pathology has served as a crucible for both major refinements of, and challenges to, this dominant theoretical commitment.

In the first category, Kernberg (1975, 1976), although supporting the essential validity of the conflict model, has sought to expand its focus by incorporating the infant's experience of the external world of objects as a basis for elaborating the drives and defenses that shape the child's internal reality. Initially these drives are an amalgam of affects and cognitions associated with them, all of which are embedded in a web of object relations.

Over time, these affects and cognitions separate into libidinal and aggressive, positive and negative components, in part as a function of the experiences of gratification and frustration with the object world. As these components emerge they infuse themselves into the mental representations that structure the infant's experience of interaction with the outside world. These self and object representations, now laden with affective shading, bifurcate along yet another dimension as actual and idealized representations, which ultimately find expression as contents in the ego and superego, respectively.

In his work with narcissistic and borderline patients, Kernberg theorized that

the normal processes of differentiation stall and eventually collapse, resulting in a pathological refusion of actual and idealized, self and object, representations. This structural implosion is the result of unmanageable aggression which overwhelms the nascent ego as it struggles to integrate the increasing differentiation of its representational contents. In his model of pathological development, Kernberg wrote:

At first, ego boundaries are fluctuating and fragile, and refusion of self- and object-representations of a good (and, gradually, idealized) type can occur as an early defense against bad, frustrating, or anxiety-producing situations . . . Severe frustrations and the consequent predominance of bad self-object-representations, which become invested with aggressive drive derivatives, interfere with the development of ego boundaries insofar as they determine defensive refusion of primitive, "all-good" self- and object-representations. (1976, p. 66)

When confronted by painful interactions with its objects, the infant tries to reclaim his or her libidinal investment in them. At the same time, the infant's *unmet, but overwhelming, dependency needs* require him or her to protect the remaining part of the investment from the now-burgeoning aggressive components of those object representations. Laboring desperately under the anxiety this conflict generates, the infant erects two principal defenses: projection and excessive splitting. The unmanageable aggression is partially projected out of the internal world onto the external one. The expulsion of these aggressive components further exacerbates the infant's experience of crippling anxiety as he or she struggles to negotiate the "bad external objects." This, in turn, intensifies splitting in order to preserve the ever-weakening remnants of the "good objects" as defensive bulwarks against the bad ones.

As a consequence of this pathological synergism, the synthetic, integrative functions of the ego are severely enfeebled. Good and bad, self and object representations coexist in relatively isolated states. This lack of integration manifests itself in a compromised self-concept, which operates in tandem with an equally impaired concept of others. Not only is the structural integrity of the self weakened, but its predominantly negative affective coloring infects the esteem in which this enfeebled self is held. Subsequently, these enfeebled actual and ideal self-representations defensively refuse and invert, shielding the ego from the painful experiences with, and rageful reactions to, an unrewarding object world. The precipitates of these intrapsychic processes manifest themselves in grandiosity, which is a major part of the constellation of defenses against aggression that characterize, for Kernberg, pathological narcissism.

Parallel to, but fundamentally different from, Kernberg's work is that of Kohut (1971, 1977, 1979, 1984). In Kohut's view, narcissistic pathology is the ultimate end product of the parents' unsuccessful attempts to negotiate the infant's grandiose and idealizing needs.

In order to relieve feelings of helplessness, the infant requires the parent to

serve as a "self-object" (i.e., an object that can perform psychological tasks such as tension-management and self-esteem regulation which the infant is unable to perform for himself). By empathically echoing the infant's normal grandiosity, the parent reinforces the infant's immersion in its imagined omnipotence. In addition to effectively "mirroring" the infant's grandiosity, the parent must also serve as a repository for the infant's primitive idealizations of the parent. These idealizations permit the infant to merge with the omnipotent self-object and thereby ward off the threat of disorganization in the face of helplessness.

In normal development, the parents' capacity to serve as effective self-objects provides the conditions which allow the infant to gradually internalize the functions that they performed. These conditions, which include empathic responsiveness tempered by optimal frustration, permit the infant sufficient time and resources to forge a cohesive sense of self capable of mastering individuation. If, however, the interpersonal environment is unresponsive to the infant's needs, pathological self-development ensues.

More specifically, failure to empathically indulge the infant's omnipotence and grandiosity undermines the sense of efficacy upon which a cohesive self and a positive self-regard rest. Similarly, if the self-object is too disillusioning to provide a powerful, idealizable self-object that the infant can then merge with, the end result is also a pathological self. In the first instance of empathic failure, the infant's normal grandiosity remains arrested at an infantile stage. As the infant develops, these unmet, primitive demands are split off from the emerging ego. Nevertheless, this split-off, archaic grandiosity survives, unreconstructed and unintegrated as the "grandiose self." These archaic feelings continue to demand narcissistic recognition throughout adulthood. Failures of the second kind, painful disillusionments in the parental self-objects, express themselves as inner dreariness and emptiness accompanied by deflated self-esteem. The child in these circumstances continues to seek idealized parental surrogates with whom he can merge as a way of enhancing his fragile self. In either case, the development of the self is thwarted, and consequently it remains structurally unintegrated and affectively impoverished.

These outlines of Kernberg's and Kohut's thinking are admittedly brief, but the major theoretical differences between them are striking. At the most basic level, Kernberg and Kohut disagree about the primacy of aggression in the pathogenesis of disturbances of the self. For Kernberg, intense aggression is one of the major underpinnings of pathological self-development. For Kohut, aggression is not primary; rather, its expression as "narcissistic rage" is secondary to, or a "breakdown product" of, parental failures of one kind or another. Failures of empathy and idealization are the primary etiologic agents responsible for the deficits in, and arrests of, the emerging self.

In this article these organizing ideas of Kernberg and Kohut are comparatively examined in an effort to evaluate their relative predictive power as explanations of narcissistic pathology. In their theoretical writings, it is difficult, if not

impossible, to assess the relative merits of intrapsychic conflict versus developmental deficit because the “confirmatory” empirical data of each theorist is confounded with that of the other. The intent here is to attempt to examine the merits of each theoretical perspective uncontaminated by the other. In this way, it may be possible to cut away some of the theoretical underbrush that currently obscures a clearer view of the issues.

### METHOD

The data presented here are not experimental, actively observational, or clinical per se, nor are they free of the charges of methodological impurity which plague other methods. Rather, they are derived from responses to questionnaires. The details are presented subsequently, but the purpose here is to state their strengths and weaknesses. In terms of their limitations, the primary one involves unconscious distortions of the responses to potentially threatening material. Also, whether and to what extent an array of survey items can effectively tap unconscious or conscious material is an open question to many clinicians, and almost certainly a closed one to others. Nevertheless, several attempts have been made to enhance the quality of these data.

First, the study sample has been deliberately restricted to graduate students in two clinical areas of psychology—clinical and school psychology—and to departments where the emphases are heavily psychodynamic. Unlike many studies in which graduate students in psychology are chosen for reasons of convenience, their selection here represents a premeditated attempt to capitalize on their receptivity to, and appreciation of, psychodynamic issues. Of the 130 individuals who comprise the sample, 91 had been involved in “treatment(s)” averaging nearly 4 (3 to 9) years. This fact would seemingly be an advantage in that most of the individuals would be the beneficiaries of the educative function of psychotherapy in promoting reflective self-awareness that possibly might translate into useful “quasi-clinical” data.

The potential benefits the study conceivably derived from these decisions may, however, have been compromised in other ways. First, these individuals, precisely because they are psychologists-to-be, may have distorted their responses in a manner consistent with their own theoretical biases or those they attributed to the investigator. To try to minimize these sources of potential bias, several precautions were taken. First, nothing of a theoretical nature was mentioned or presented. Second, the investigator did not appear before the subjects, nor were the data collectors informed of the purpose of the study. Interestingly, but only anecdotally, no one correctly perceived the purpose of the study. Third, all subjects were asked not to complete the instruments, without prejudice, if they felt they could not be honest. Fourth, in the interest of not cueing the subjects, no inquiries were made as to the types of treatments individuals were involved in.

Given the psychodynamic orientations of these departments, as well as the average total number of years in treatment ( $M = 3.05$ ), it seems reasonable to assume that much, if not virtually all, of this treatment was psychodynamic in orientation.

Aside from not wanting to cue the respondents, it was unclear that had the respondents been asked, they would have been able to supply reliable data on the theoretical orientations of their therapists. Given their educational backgrounds and interests, it seems naive to suppose that the subjects would not have been able to surmise the general orientations of their therapists, but whether these data could have served as a reliable if crude control for the contaminating effects of suggestibility is not clear (Grunbaum, 1980). Weighing the relative costs and benefits, it was decided not to collect this information. Instead, the number of years in treatment was collected as a proxy for the contaminating effects of suggestibility and was subsequently used as a control variable in the analyses.

As a group, the sample was 40% male and, on average, 30 years of age. Three measures were administered to all subjects. The first of these is a "splitting scale" (Gerson, 1984), with internal consistency reliability of  $r_{tt} = .70$ . Test-retest reliability following a 3-week interval is  $r = .84$ . Validity coefficients in the form of correlations with the Narcissistic Personality Disorder scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) (Ashby, 1978) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965, 1979) are  $r = .25$ ,  $p \leq .04$ , and  $r = .41$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , respectively.

The second instrument administered, the Narcissistic Personality Disorder scale (Ashby, 1978; Ashby, Lee, & Duke, 1979) a reported internal consistency reliability coefficient of  $r_{tt} = .81$ . In terms of validity, Ashby reported that 20 outpatients diagnosed and independently verified as narcissistic personality-disordered had a mean score of 10.0 ( $SD = 3.0$ ) on a scale ranging from 0 to 19. By comparison, 20 carefully screened normals had a mean score of 3.66 ( $SD = 1.1$ ). In another comparison group, 24 non-narcissistic-personality-disordered outpatients had a mean of 3.40 ( $SD = 2.35$ ). In both cases the mean score of the narcissistic-personality-disordered subjects is significantly greater than those of the two comparison groups,  $p \leq .01$ , one-tailed. Solomon (1982) reported that scale was cross-validated on 35 non-narcissistic-personality-disordered patients and 41 narcissistic-personality-disordered patients. Thirteen percent of these cases were false negatives, 14% were false positives, and 86% were accurately evaluated. These figures, as calculated by the present author, imply a positive predictive power of 86% and a negative predictive power of 88% for this scale. Put simply, these figures state that 86% of the individuals diagnosed as narcissistic-personality-disordered were so indicated by the Narcissistic Personality Disorder scale. Eighty-eight percent with negative test results were not, in fact, diagnosed as having the target disorder.

The third measure used in this study is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Rosenberg conceived of self-esteem as the overall attitude that a

person maintains with regard to his or her own worth and importance. His measure is a 10-item scale with reported internal consistency reliability of approximately  $r_{tt} = .80$  (Carmines, 1978). Its test-retest reliability has been reported as  $r_{tt} = .85$  (Silber & Tippett, 1965) over a 2-week interval. Construct validity has been provided in the form of negative correlations with depressive affect ( $r = -.30$ ) and anxiety ( $r = -.48$ ; Rosenberg, 1979), and positive correlations with other measures of self-esteem ( $r = .65$ ; Crandall, 1973) and psychiatric ratings ( $r = .56$ ; Tippett & Silber, 1965).

In the current study, several modifications were implemented with regard to these measures. First, only selected items were used from Gerson's splitting scale. This measure attempted to reflect Kernbergian (conflict) and Kohutian (deficit) psychoanalytic perspectives in one instrument designed to assess splitting. However, in this study, the focus is not on splitting per se; rather, this measure's focus on splitting renders it a particularly useful vehicle for extracting some of the intrapsychic residues of conflict and deficit embedded in this psychological defense.

Both Kernberg and Kohut emphasized the functions that splitting as a defense performs. Kernberg (1975) argued that although splitting is a normal process in development, it becomes pathological to the extent that the child uses it to protect significant others from unmanageable aggression in reaction to frustrations with them. Kohut (1971) too underlined the centrality of splitting as a defense, but he understood it to protect the child from the frustrated need for parental empathy and recognition. In both theories, then, splitting as a defensive operation serves as a "window" on the intrapsychic processes underlying these alternative conceptualizations of narcissistic pathology. In much the same way that one might examine the rings of a tree in order to understand its development, this article attempts to examine current psychic defense as a measurable manifestation of earlier developmental processes. By inspecting the present-day residues of these processes, it may be possible to shed some light on the dim past of the human mind.

The particular items selected from Gerson's scale are listed in the appendix. The specific ways in which these items will be used are outlined in a subsequent section of the article.

With regard to the second measure, the Narcissistic Personality Disorder MMPI scale, one modification was made. One of the 19 items was quite frequently omitted or questioned. Because this item referred to a child's game unfamiliar to a large number of these subjects, this item was deleted from the scale and a total scale score was arrived at by weighting the sum of the remaining items by 19/18. The reliability of this scale in this sample as measured by coefficient alpha is .53. The sample mean and standard deviation are 7.68 and 2.56, respectively. When compared to Ashby's (1978) validation samples, this sample is significantly less narcissistic than the diagnosed, narcissistic-personality-disordered sample ( $M = 7.68$  vs. 10.00,  $p \leq .01$ ), but it is also significantly more narcissistic than the normal control group ( $M = 7.68$  vs. 3.66,  $p \leq .01$ ).

Finally, the Rosenberg scale was modified in two ways. First, one item that was also used in the Narcissistic Personality Disorder scale was deleted to eliminate tautological correlation between these two measures. Also, two items were deleted because they were used to operationally define part of another independent variable. The reliabilities of the original and reduced versions are  $r_{tt} = .84$  and  $r_{tt} = .84$ , respectively. Their correlation is  $r = .98$ , and the average discrepancy between their correlations with other variables in the study is .025.

### Causal Modeling

The technical procedures embedded in causal modeling are not presented here, but the interested reader can find reasonably clear presentations in the appropriate methodological literature (e.g., Joreskog & Sorbom, 1979). For the purposes of this article, a conceptual understanding of the approach is all that is required.

The analysis of covariance structures or causal modeling approach adopted in this article is predicated on a rather straightforward conceptual model. As in traditional or exploratory factor analysis, the pattern of observed relationships among measured variables is presumed to be generated by the inferred existence of latent variables. Although these latent variables cannot be directly observed, information about them can be obtained by examining their effects on the observed variables as reflected by the latter's correlations. Once these latent variables have been "induced" from the pattern of correlations among the observed measures, it is possible to examine relationships among the latent variables themselves. This latter operation is the regression analysis component of causal modeling. Taken together, the factor analytic component, or "measurement model," and the regression component, or "structural model," define the two integrated aspects of causal modeling.

Conceptually, these two components bear a resemblance to the kind of model building an individual analyst applies in individual treatment. From the free associations of the patient (observed variables), the analyst infers from their strength and pattern the presence of unconscious constellations of affect and motive (latent variables). The model of the postulated relationships among these intrapsychic constellations forms the basis of an understanding of the patient's dynamics.

Once the empirical parameter estimates of the measurement and structural models are generated, the model is evaluated for "fit." Based on the parameters of the measurement and structural models, the correlations among the observed variables are predicted. This set of predicted correlations is then compared to the observed correlations. The goodness of fit, or perhaps more appropriately, the badness of fit, between these two sets of relationships is tested by means of a chi-square statistic generated by the estimation procedure. This chi-square test provides an estimate of the probability that the discrepancies observed would be that large if, in fact, the theoretical model were the "correct" model. As is the case in the traditional chi-square test, a large chi-square value and small proba-

bility value would imply that the discrepancies observed are too large to accept the null hypothesis (i.e., the theoretical model could indeed have generated the observed relationships). Unlike the traditional chi-square test, wherein the investigator typically wishes to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between two variables, in the assessment of causal models, the investigator wishes to accept the null hypothesis. This would imply that the discrepancies between the observed and predicted relationships among the observed variables are within the limits of sampling error, or are statistically insignificant. Under these circumstances, the investigator would have some basis for concluding that the postulated theoretical model is consistent with the data. It is important to note, however, that the likelihood a theoretical model is consistent with a set of data is not proof of its validity.

## MODEL SPECIFICATION

### Theoretical Issues

The metapsychological formulations that are at the foundation of the conflict and deficit models, or theories of narcissism, are quite different. The focus of these explanatory models, however, is the same. Both theoretical perspectives agree that the central difficulty in narcissism is the regulation of self-esteem.

The principal source of discomfort is thus the result of the psyche's inability to regulate self-esteem and to maintain it at normal levels; and the specific (pathogenic) experiences of the personality which are correlated to this central psychological defect lie within the narcissistic realm. (Kohut, 1971, p. 20)

. . . There does exist a group of patients in whom the main problem appears to be a disturbance in their self-regard in connection with specific disturbances in their object relationships, and whom we might consider almost a pure culture of pathological development of narcissism. (Kernberg, 1975, p. 227)

In addition to agreement on the problem, there is agreement on a causal link between the self or self-representation and self-esteem:

The normal integrated self and its related integrated conception of others . . . guarantee the "ordinary self-feeling" . . . Jacobson has pointed out that this self-feeling derived from the individual's awareness of an integrated self has to be distinguished from "self-esteem" or "self-regard" which depends upon the libidinal investment of such an integrated self. (Kernberg, 1975, p. 213)

Narcissism embodies those mental operations whose function is to regulate self-esteem (the affective coloring of the self representation) and to maintain the cohesion and stability of self-representation (the structural foundation upon which self-esteem rests). (Stolorow & Lachman, 1980, p. 21)

In a subsequent passage, Stolorow and Lachman, who are two of the leading proponents of the deficit model, equated "experiences of identity confusion" (p. 24) with temporal instability in the structural foundation of the self-representation.

On these points, then, the two theoretical models appear to concur: (a) Problems with respect to regulating self-esteem are primary in narcissistic pathology; moreover, (b) structural aspects of the self are causally implicated in these difficulties. The point of theoretical divergence occurs in the search for an explanation for these structural defects. These theoretical differences in the postulated explanatory mechanisms have been treated earlier in this article, but briefly, the conflict model as outlined by Kernberg (1975, 1982, 1984) attributes this severely compromised self-development to frustrating, painful experiences with the object world. As a consequence, the child pathologically develops excessive, unmanageable aggression which impairs his or her capacity to integrate self and object representations in a normal way. By contrast, the deficit model of Kohut links "self-pathology" to the early, traumatic failures of empathic responsiveness and parental idealizability. As a consequence of these failures in normal development, the "archaic self" remains arrested at the earliest stages of self-development (Kohut, 1971, 1977).

In summary, these two models or theories of pathological self-development agree that there is a structural relationship between compromised self (and object) representations and impairment in the regulation of self-esteem. They disagree on the explanatory mechanisms that account for this relationship. The task and goal of this article is to observe, model, compare, and thereby test for the explanatory power of these competing theoretical models.

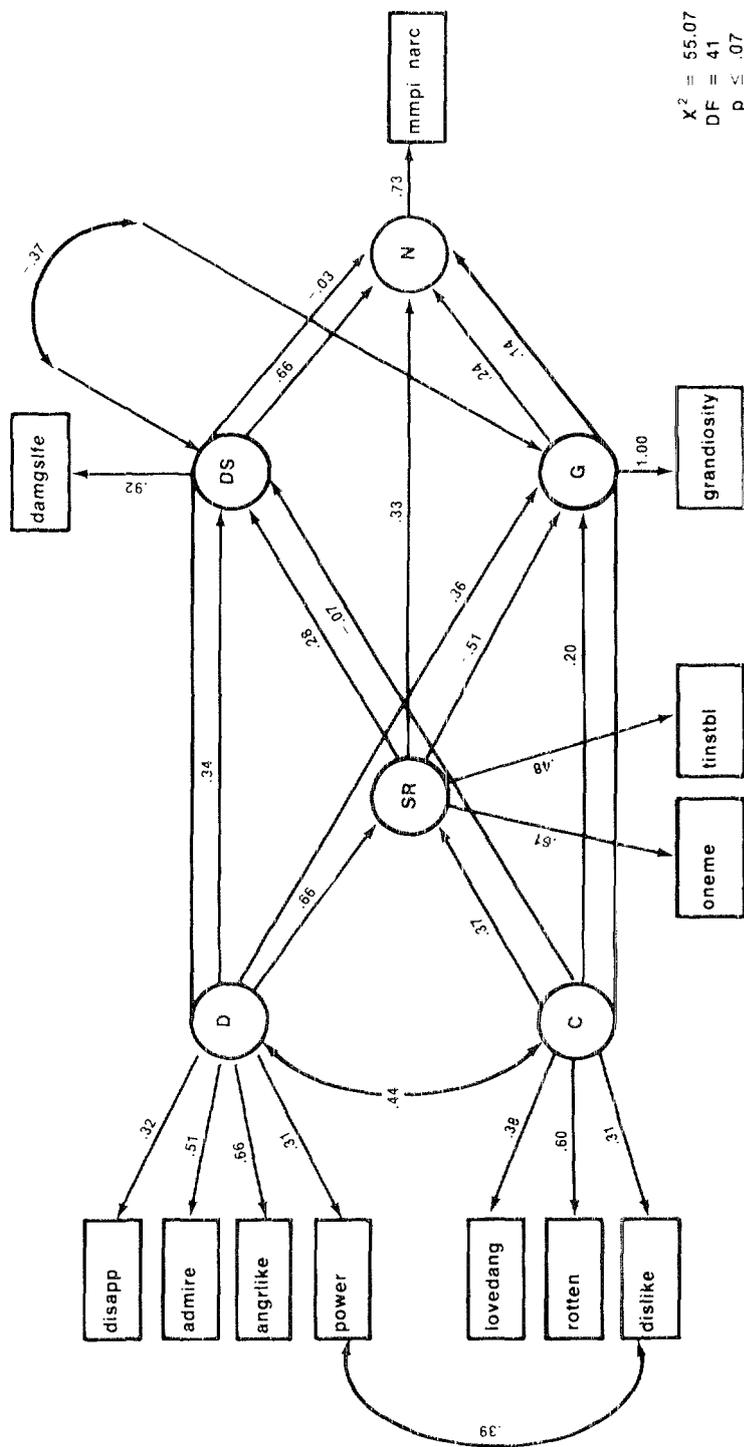
### THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

That part of a causal model which operationally defines the latent constructs in the model in terms of the measured variables is referred to as the measurement model. In Figure 1 this submodel is represented by arrows linking unobserved variables (circles) to observed variables (boxes).

There are six unobserved variables, denoted by circles, in the model. For two of these there is a single indicator variable. Damaged self-esteem (DS) and narcissism (N) are operationally measured by the reduced Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale.

Splitting and temporal instability in the self-representations (SR) are operationally defined by two indicators. One of these is drawn from Gerson's (1984) splitting scale and was designed to measure Kernberg's "identity diffusion" (ONEME) (see the appendix). The other indicator is designed to tap "temporal instability" in the self-representation (TINSTBL), which manifests itself as "experiences of identity confusion" (Stolorow & Lachman, 1980, p. 24).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This item is operationally defined as the absolute difference of the following two items from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale: (a) I feel that I have a number of good qualities (1 = *almost always* to 5 = *never*), and (b) At times I think I am no good at all (1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always*).



$\chi^2 = 55.07$   
 DF = 41  
 p ≤ .07

FIG. 1 The empirical causal model.

The observed variables defining the deficit and conflict latent variables have been selected from Gerson's splitting scale. These items are considered to express the fundamental types of psychopathology in the narcissistic syndromes as defined in these models. From the Kohutian perspective, inadequate recognition and mirroring of the child (ADMIRE) by his parents as well as his traumatic disappointments (DISAPP) in his idealized versions of them (POWER) are the crucible of narcissistic pathology. As a consequence of these failures, the child splits off his unmet grandiose (GRANDIOSITY) and exhibitionistic (ADMIRE) wishes, but continues to demand satisfaction of them even into adulthood. In a related vein, denied a sense of omnipotent well-being through immersion in his parents' imagined power, the frustrated child continues to seek merger experiences as an adult which express the vulnerable, undifferentiated state of the self (ANGRLIKE).

The emphasis on demands for admiration (ADMIRE) and the centrality of inflated self-admiration (GRANDIOSITY) also receive prominent attention in the conflict model. In terms of the first of these, the "inordinate need for tribute from others" (Kernberg, 1975, p. 227), it is fundamentally reflective of unmet libidinal needs. As such, this aspect of narcissistic pathology is modeled as a deficit derivative. On the other hand, the devaluation and envy of others, the dissociated and projected rage and paranoia which may be implied by the power item (POWER) is also modeled as part of the conflict derivatives. For Kernberg, all of these aggressively laden derivatives reflect different aspects of conflicts over dependency, the basic etiological issue in his model of narcissism. Finally, and perhaps most centrally, three additional indicators are included in the measurement model of the conflict derivatives. One of these taps rage and splitting (ROT-TEN); the other two tap sexual and aggressive conflicts over dependency (LOVEDANG and DISLIKE). Each of these is a cornerstone of the fundamental substrata of Kernberg's conflict model of narcissism.

To be sure, Kohut too recognizes "narcissistic rage" as a feature of this clinical syndrome, but he regards its presence as a derivative of, that is, secondary to, primary failures in empathy and idealization. These aggressive components are primary for Kernberg. In his view, the "disappointments" of Kohut's scheme are ploys to rationalize the narcissist's seething rage. Moreover, the idealizing needs of which Kohut writes are, for Kernberg, primitive defenses against the imagined destructive power of this rage (Kernberg, 1975, 1982).

Clearly, each model is cognizant of common presenting features of narcissistic pathology, but they differ with regard to whether these features are primary or secondary to the basic dynamic issues. In view of these fundamental differences in emphasis, the secondary derivatives of each model are not permitted to directly define, in the measurement model, the basic etiological factors of these models. Only the primary derivatives are permitted to define the deficit and conflict models. The secondary sequelae of each model are linked to the primary etiologic features via the intercorrelation of the two primary constellations that

operationally define each model. This correlation between these latent factors is implemented as part of the structural model.

### The Structural Model

There are six latent, or unobserved, constructs that define the structural component of the causal model. Two of these, deficit derivatives and conflict derivatives, are the organizing foci underlying the contrasting models of narcissism embedded in the theoretical writings of Kohut and Kernberg.

From the Kohutian perspective, which places primary interpretational emphasis on libidinal issues, narcissistic pathology (N) is the end product of failures to negotiate one or both of the two principal spheres of self-development: (a) the grandiose self or (b) the idealized parental imago. Inadequate recognition or admiration (ADMIRE) of the child by his parents or traumatic disappointments (DISAPP) in his idealized versions of them (POWER) are the conduits of narcissistic pathology. Failure in the first sphere eventuates in an impoverished SR and, derivatively a diminished DS which, though split off, seeks the recognition (G) that was missing in childhood. Failures of the second kind, idealization of the parental imago, render the child "empty" and feeling helpless. As a result, the child in the adult desperately seeks, through merger and unresolved dependency longings, the "protection" of significant others. In either case, the unmet needs of the child may also find expression in "narcissistic rage" (ROTTEN, LOVEDANG, DISLIKE) at the unresponsive parents or, in adulthood, at their surrogates.

Kernberg acknowledges many of the clinical manifestations of narcissism that Kohut addresses, but he reinterprets them as rationalizations for, and defenses against, the underlying primitive sexual and aggressive conflicts (ROTTEN, LOVEDANG, DISLIKE) which result from the unavailability of "good, internalized objects" upon which the child can depend. Severe, early frustrations (and, perhaps, congenital predisposition) with these early caretakers (LOVEDANG) is the seedbed from which unmanageable aggression (ROTTEN, DISLIKE) grows. At the risk of being overwhelmed by rage at those upon whom he depends, the child splits off this aggression and expels it from the internal world into the external one. In the adult, this early process is visible in a derivative form. For example, devaluation, projection, and displacement (DISAPP, POWER, DISLIKE) are some of the typical defensive derivatives of the early splitting processes that characterize narcissistic development.

This process of splitting "good" and "bad," self and other representations also manifests itself in a structurally weakened SR that struggles desperately to maintain its integrity in the face of powerful disintegrating affects. Ultimately, the child's enfeebled actual and ideal SRs defensively refuse to shield the emerging ego from further frustrating experiences with, and rageful reactions to, an ungratifying external world. The ultimate by-product of this defensive refusion

is the omnipotence and grandiosity (G), a principal component of the psychological configuration which Kernberg calls "pathological narcissism" (N).

## ANALYSIS

### Preliminary Data Analytic Considerations

Prior to presenting the results, several data analytic considerations should be discussed. First, the data are actually input as a partial covariance matrix. Unlike experimental studies wherein random assignment to treatment neutralizes confounding sources of variation, nonexperimental studies typically invoke matching (direct control) or covarying (statistical control) as alternatives. In this study, age, sex, and the total number of years of treatment were partialled from all observed variables. In addition, for those items defining Gerson's splitting scale, respondents were asked, subsequent to completing it, "How difficult (Item X) was (for you) to answer honestly?" Asked in this way, it became possible to covary out both social desirability and that component of measurement error which is attributable to ambiguities in the content or wording of these items.

Second, one of the major advantages of Joreskog and Sorbom's (1985) causal modeling methodology is that it is not necessary to assume that measurement without error is the case. For those latent constructs, such as the deficit and conflict derivatives as well as the self-representation measure, all of which are operationalized as multiple indicator variables, the LISREL computer program (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1985) is able to estimate the degree of measurement error in these constructs and adjust the estimates of the causal parameters accordingly. For other latent constructs, such as DS and N, which were operationalized as single-summed scales, the investigator provided the program with internal consistency estimates calculated separately. The remaining latent variable, grandiosity, is a single item which implies that it is treated as a perfectly reliable indicator of this construct.

Third, the model represented in Figure 1 contains several single-headed (causal relationships) and double-headed arrows (correlational relationships) which require comment. The single-headed arrow from the deficit derivatives to grandiosity does not seem to be clearly theoretically implied in the deficit model. From the Kohutian perspective, the untamed, archaic grandiosity of the narcissist is "split off" from consciousness, and although it seeks recognition, it remains largely unknown to the individual (Kohut, 1971). However, given that this is largely a treated sample, it seems reasonable to surmise that such a path may exist. Also, direct paths, or presumed causal impacts, are included to represent that part of the influence of these libidinal and aggressive derivatives that is unmediated by the SR. These paths are postulated to transmit the direct effects of "internalized object relations" per se.

Finally, the relationship between DS and G is specified as correlational rather

than as causal. The rationale for this specification is as follows: From Kernberg's perspective, the inflated sense of self-importance characteristic of many narcissistic personalities masks, or defends against, unconscious feelings of inferiority and vulnerability. Empirically, this inference implies a negative causal relationship between consciously experienced feelings and unconscious ones. From the Kohutian perspective, self-pathology characteristic of the grandiose self implies, via "the vertical split," a positive correlation between conscious, impoverished self-esteem and conscious disavowal of grandiose feelings or fantasies. Similarly, the dynamics underlying the idealized parental imago type of self-pathology also imply a positive correlation between conscious, diminished self-esteem and conscious feelings of helplessness (i.e., the absence, or inverse, of grandiosity).

Each of these statements or predictions links unconscious or split-off states of mind with typical conscious experience. However, the data at hand measure DS and G. Recognition of this fact implies that conscious reports of experience should be positively correlated so as to minimize intrapsychic conflict.

As such, one would anticipate that DS, as consciously reported, should correlate with lower scores on the grandiosity construct. Similarly, inflated self-admiration should correlate with higher reported levels of self-esteem. Given this reasoning, it seems preferable to consider DS and G as two correlated dimensions of conscious self-esteem rather than as causally connecting an unconscious belief (DS) with a conscious defense against it (G). The double-headed arrow that connects the unique portions of these two latent variables implements this formulation while permitting the model to estimate the effects of libidinal and aggressive derivatives as well as the self-representation on these correlated aspects of the affective components of the self.

## Results

In terms of the measurement model, conventionally, factor loadings of  $\pm .30$  are considered substantively significant in defining a latent variable.

As Table 1 indicates,<sup>2</sup> all indicator factor loadings are greater than .30, and all are statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ). However, most of the composite reliabilities hover around  $r_{tt} = .50$ . This implies that essentially only half of the observed differences among individuals with regard to these latent constructs are true score or "reliable" differences. Fortunately, LISREL extracts this reliable variance for each construct and models the causal relationships among these constructs in terms of these "true score" components. In so doing, the estimated

<sup>2</sup>An initial model in which the power item was allowed to define the constellation of aggressive derivatives was superseded by the present model (see Figure 1). In the initial model, the power item loaded predominantly on the deficit latent construct (.90). In addition, the modest, negative loading of this item on the conflict factor (-.33) was theoretically incompatible with its interpretation as an indicator of devaluation, envy, dissociation, projected rage, or paranoia. It seems to be more consistent with Gerson's intention that it tap failed idealization (Gerson, 1984, p. 160). As such, the model was respecified constraining this indicator to defining the deficit constellation only (see Figure 1).

TABLE 1  
Estimated Indicator Validity Coefficients and Composite Reliabilities

	<i>Validity Coefficient<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>
Deficit Derivatives (D)		
DISAPP	.32	
ADMIRE	.51	.51 <sup>d</sup>
POWER	.66	
ANGRLIKE	.31	
Conflict Derivatives (C)		
LOVEDANG	.38	
ROTTEN	.60	.42 <sup>d</sup>
DISLIKE	.31	
Split Self-Representation (SR)		
ONEME	.61	.46
TINSTBL	.48	
Grandiosity (G)	1.00 <sup>b</sup>	1.00 <sup>b</sup>
Damaged Self-Esteem (DS)	.92 <sup>c</sup>	.84 <sup>c</sup>
Narcissism (N)	.73 <sup>c</sup>	.53 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Based on standardized solution's factor loadings/the variable's standard deviation. <sup>b</sup>Constrained parameter. <sup>c</sup>Estimated independent of model estimation and then constrained. <sup>d</sup>Reliabilities estimated in the presence of error covariation between power and dislike (see Figure 1).

causal parameters of the structural submodel are purged of the biasing effects of this measurement error.

Turning to the structural submodel, Table 2 presents the decomposition of the total causal effects of logically prior latent variables on subsequent ones. Also, Figure 1 pictorially represents the model with the direct components of the total effects, that is, the corrected path coefficients, included. In order to fully understand the pathways by which the deficit and conflict derivatives express themselves, the results are discussed in logical (i.e., theoretically postulated) sequence.

Prior to discussing the causal parameters of the model, it is helpful to provide the reader with interpretive guidelines for evaluating them. For the structural submodel, these parameters are standardized partial regression coefficients (beta) purged of measurement error. In effect, these coefficients represent "net" rather than "gross" causal effects. By simply comparing the relative magnitudes of these coefficients, it is possible to make comparative statements about the relative importance or explanatory power of the various latent constructs. For example, a latent construct with a standardized partial regression coefficient of .40 has twice the explanatory power of another latent construct with a coefficient of .20. In addition to the statements of explanatory power which inhere in these coefficients, there is yet another statistic,  $R^2$ , which expresses, as a percentage, what part of a latent variable's variability is accounted for by the model. This statistic ranges from 0% to 100%. Higher values are indicative of good prediction.

TABLE 2  
Decomposition of Causal Effects of the Structural Model  
(Standardized Solution)

Dependent Variable	Causal Variable	Total Effect	=	Indirect Effects	via	+	Direct Effect
1. Split Self-Representation ( $R^2 = .78$ )	Deficit	.657		—	—	—	.657
	Conflict	.369		—	—	—	.369
2. Grandiosity ( $R^2 = .06$ )	Deficit	.028		-.335	—	—	.363
	Conflict	.011		-.188	—	—	.199
	Split Self-Representation	.510		—	—	—	-.510
3. Damaged Self-Esteem ( $R^2 = .31$ )	Deficit	.526		.187	—	—	.339
	Conflict	.033		.105	—	—	-.072
	Split Self-Representation	.284		—	—	—	.284
4. Narcissism ( $R^2 = .81$ )	Deficit	.541		.256	.088	.225	-.028
	Conflict	.283		.144	.048	-.048	.139
	Split Self-Representation	.390		—	-.124	.189	.325
	Grandiosity	.243		—	—	—	.243
	Damaged Self-Esteem	.664		—	—	—	.664

The structural submodel represents the putative set of causal relationships underlying or "generating" the correlations among the observed variables. These causal relationships cannot only be estimated, but they can also be "decomposed" into "direct" and "indirect" effects which together define the "total causal effect" of one latent construct upon another (Alwin & Hauser, 1975). Direct effects refer to the influence of one construct upon another which is unmediated by intervening constructs. Conversely, an indirect effect refers to that part of a construct's total influence upon another which is transmitted via constructs that intervene between these two variables.

For heuristic purposes, that is, for purposes of comparatively evaluating the deficit and conflict models, these perspectives have been represented as relatively independent of one another. Undoubtedly, this position exaggerates, and in that sense distorts, reality (Eagle, 1984; Wallerstein, 1983). The empirical correlation between the deficit and conflict latent constructs is .44 ( $p \leq .01$ ),<sup>3,4</sup> a moderate association which supports the notion that there is indeed overlap be-

<sup>3</sup>All significance tests are one-tailed.

<sup>4</sup>The moderate correlation between the unique components of the power and the dislike items,  $r = .39$  (see Figure 1), suggests that a relatively small part of the covariation of these two indicators (25%) can be accounted for by the libidinal and aggressive derivatives. On theoretical grounds this is perplexing, but the results of a preliminary exploratory factor analysis indicate that the dislike indicator is essentially a specific factor. Overall, a relatively small portion of its variance is shared with other indicators. Of that portion, relatively more is shared with the power item than with the conflict indicators. Because the power item is not fundamentally a conflict item (see Footnote 2), and only a relatively small part of the dislike item is, the correlation between these two indicators appears in the residuals.

It is possible to represent this correlation as yet a third latent common factor. Given that any correlation between residuals is, by mathematical necessity, independent of (i.e., uncorrelated with) the other latent common factors, this revision of the model would have implied that this third construct is independent of (i.e., unrelated to) the libidinal and aggressive derivatives. Theoretically, this implication is implausible.

Alternatively, the model could be revised as a correlated, three latent construct model, but two considerations militated against this respecification. First, the preliminary factor analysis indicated that factor which expressed the association between the dislike and power indicators was overwhelmingly weighted toward the first item, and, as a factor, accounted for only 14% of the common variance and 5% of the total variance in the indicators. On empirical grounds, then, this factor is clearly a minor one. This fact notwithstanding, the correlated three latent construct model was estimated. The power item loaded unexpectedly weakly negatively on this construct. In addition, this construct showed essentially no relationship to any of the subsequent variables in which it was presumably causally implicated. Given these results, this respecification of the model seems theoretically and empirically indefensible.

Finally, consistent with the status of the dislike item as a relatively weak, specific factor, it was deleted from the model. The reestimated results were quite similar to those obtained with its inclusion in the model. Because it shared some variance with the other conflict indicators, the item was, however, retained.

Considering the results of alternative models, it seemed theoretically and empirically preferable to allow the model to extract that part of the dislike indicator which is related to the other conflict indicators. The remainder is left to correlate with that part of the power item which is unrelated to the libidinal derivatives. These final specifications are reflected in Figure 1.

tween these two sets of derivatives. Yet the very same correlation also indicates that the overlap is less than 20% of their joint variance.

Controlling for their correlation, the differential impact of the libidinal and aggressive derivatives on the compromised self-representation is quite strong. The libidinal derivatives of which Kohut wrote—unmet dependency needs reflecting failure in the self-self-object matrix—are nearly twice as powerful in explaining the structurally damaged self-concept as are the sexual and aggressive sequelae which largely define the conflict model (.66,  $p \leq .01$ , vs. .37,  $p \leq .10$ ; see Table 2).<sup>5</sup>

The deficit and conflict derivatives influence grandiosity directly and also indirectly via the split/uncohesive self-representation. The direct effects represent that part of the total causal effects which is unmediated by the split self-representation. As such, they are postulated to reflect the influence of derivative internalized object representations. In terms of grandiosity, the near-zero total effects of both sets of derivatives mask the countervailing influences of the direct and indirect effects of these constructs. For both the direct and indirect effects, the libidinal or deficit derivatives are almost twice as powerful as the sexual/aggressive or conflict ones (see Table 2).<sup>6,7</sup>

The fact that the direct effects of these derivatives are positive whereas the indirect ones are negative suggests that there are two related, but quite different, ontogenic pathways by which deficit and conflict express themselves. It appears that “pathological” object relations as reflected in the direct effects of either set of derivatives find expression as grandiosity, but it seems equally clear that these disturbances simultaneously damage the self-representation leading to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. Libidinal frustrations seem more strongly implicated in both outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup>Because this analysis utilizes standardized path coefficients, the results are affected by differences in the variances of the observed indicators, quite apart from any differences in the causal processes underlying the model. To check this explanation of the results, the standard deviations of the deficit and conflict indicators were inspected. The average standard deviation of the four deficit indicators is 1.61; that of the three conflict indicators is 1.59. Clearly, these differences could not plausibly explain the observed differences in the causal parameters. Another plausible artifactual explanation could be instability in the parameter estimates resulting from multicollinearity (excessive correlations) among those latent constructs that are causes of other latent constructs. This rival interpretation is also unconvincing because the correlation between the deficit and conflict derivatives is, as just indicated, only .44. Conventionally, correlations greater than .80 are thought to be consistent with the problems associated with multicollinearity—inflated standard errors, deflated  $t$  values, and unstable partial regression coefficients.

<sup>6</sup>For evaluative purposes, negative direct or indirect effects are treated as positive for comparing the magnitude of total causal effects.

<sup>7</sup>None of the significance tests of the direct effects of the deficit, conflict, and self-representation constructs on grandiosity and damaged self-esteem reach the .05 significance level. An inspection of the standard errors of these coefficients reveals that they are somewhat inflated, suggesting that multicollinearity may render these particular parameter estimates somewhat unstable. Although empirically sensible, they should be interpreted with caution subject to independent replication.

With regard to DS, an examination of the antecedents of this constellation of feelings again underscores libidinal frustration as the primary causal agent. The substantial total causal effect of these frustrations is .53, most of which directly expressed (.34) rather than transmitted by way of deleterious effects on the SR (.19). Interestingly, the conflict derivatives do not express their influence as strong, direct, negative effects upon this construct. Rather, these effects are primarily indirectly expressed via the SR. It seems, then, that conflict is implicated in DS by way of its debilitating effect on the development of a healthy self-representation. As was true of grandiosity, the causal impact of the libidinal derivatives is more strongly implicated in these results: .53 vs.  $.105 + (-.072)$  .18.

An examination of the split self-representation shows the anticipated positive relationship to DS, but its effect is roughly half the magnitude of its negative relationship to grandiosity (.28 vs.  $-.51$ ). This finding seems to underscore the particularly devastating effect of a split, uncohesive self-representation on feelings of efficacy and self-actualization even more than on self-regard.

The relationship between DS and the inflated self-admiration reflected in grandiosity displays the expected negative sign,  $r = -.37, p \leq .01$ . This association supports the initial contention that, at the level of conscious self-report, grandiosity would be difficult to disentangle from reported greater levels of self-esteem.

Finally, with regard to the logical end point of this model, Narcissism scale of the MMPI, the deficit derivatives' total effect is essentially twice as large as that of the conflict derivatives (.54 vs. .28). Virtually all of the effect of the deficit derivatives is mediated, or "transmitted," by way of their effects on the structural (i.e., SR) and affective (i.e., and DS) components of the self. A somewhat different pattern of influence is exhibited by the conflict derivatives. Approximately 60% of the effect of these derivatives is mediated by the structural and affective components of the self. The remainder, 40% (.14), is direct.

With respect to the direct causal effects of the affective components of the self (i.e., G and DS), both are positively related to N. The causal parameters are .24 ( $p \leq .10$ ) and .66 ( $p \leq .01$ ), respectively. In terms of these data, DS is nearly three times as strongly implicated in N as is its inverse, G.

Empirical estimates are but one way to evaluate the relative merits of these two models. Net of the magnitudes of these estimates, the direction of their predictions, is also important. Ideally, when two competing perspectives imply theoretical relationships that contradict each other, then a relatively pure, strategic test of the theories is possible. In the present context, consider the causal relationships depicting a part of the general model outlined in Figure 2. From Kernberg's conflict model, one would expect the splitting of the SR to be negatively related to DS, at the level of conscious self-report; and, positively associated with greater levels of reported G. (Grandiosity should be reflected in reported greater levels of self-esteem and grandiosity.) Kohut's deficit model would imply that an uncohesive self would be positively correlated with DS and feelings of helplessness and vulnerability (i.e., an uncohesive self would be negatively predictive of G). Both theories imply the positive association between the residuals of

DS and G. (A negative sign implies a positive correlation because higher scores on DS imply lower levels of self-esteem.) From Kernberg's perspective, reported greater levels of self-esteem (i.e., lower scores on DS) should be correlated with higher scores on grandiosity. Kohut's thinking is also consistent with a positive correlation (but negative sign) here because lower levels of self-esteem (i.e., high scores on DS) should be associated with feelings of insecurity and helplessness (i.e., low scores on G).

Examining the signs (and magnitudes) of the empirical relationships corresponding to these theoretical predictions (Figure 2) shows them to be fundamentally inconsistent with Kernberg's conflict model. These relationships highlight other data which are also inconsistent with Kernberg's model. The direct effects of the sexual/aggressive derivatives are, as postulated by the conflict model, positively predictive of splitting in the self, G, and N. However, the indirect effect of the conflict derivatives via the SR is negative. This pathway by which defensive reactions to dependency are, according to the conflict model, postulated to lead to splitting and grandiosity is empirically supportive of splitting underlying feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. These relationships are theoretically more consistent with Kohut's specification of "narcissistic rage" as a "breakdown product" of unmet dependency needs than they are with Kernberg's "pathological grandiose self." The direction of these relationships, when coupled with the fact that the conflict derivatives' net effects are but half those of the deficit derivatives (.28 vs. .54) would seem to place a considerable burden of proof on the conflict model, or more accurately, certain components of this model (i.e., the

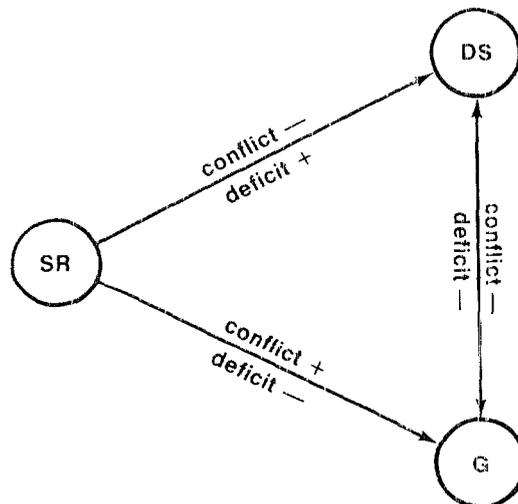


FIG. 2 A strategic subset of the theoretical causal relationships implied by the conflict and deficit models.

theoretical underpinnings of the grandiose self). On balance, these data seem more consistent with the deficit model.

## DISCUSSION

Using the techniques of causal modeling developed by other social sciences for use with observational data, this study attempts to comparatively explore the explanatory models of narcissistic pathology proposed by Kernberg and Kohut. In assessing the evidence provided by this test, the data appear to be more consistent with the deficit model. From a Kohutian perspective, psychological sequelae consistent with the deficiency model exert a major impact on self-pathology which, in turn, finds expression as narcissism. Moreover, essentially all of the effect of this deficiency does seem to be mediated by the structural and affective components of the self.

From a Kernbergian perspective, the data are consistent with the claim that aggression is a major underpinning of narcissistic pathology. Fully one third of the net total causal effects of these libidinal and aggressive constellations are attributable to the latter. However, seen from another vantage point, only one third of the net total causal effect is sexual or aggressive. Moreover, one of the principal theoretical linkages in Kernberg's model (i.e., the relationship between splitting and grandiosity) is unsupported in the data. In any event, most of the causal impact is libidinally derived, a fact which, although incorporated in Kernberg's theory, is not its major focus.

Still, these findings should be treated tentatively and account for but one of what should be many inquiries into psychoanalytic theory (see Edelson, 1984; Eysenck & Wilson, 1973; Fisher & Greenberg, 1977). Perhaps more important, the means (causal modeling) rather than the ends (this particular set of findings) are the more important part of this effort. For far too long the richness and complexity of the psychoanalytic model have stymied the science of psychoanalysis. With the advent of new and powerful data analytic tools, however, researchers may find themselves better equipped to meet the challenge.

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APPENDIX  
Selected Items From the Gerson Splitting Scale

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. When I am angry, everyone around me seems rotten. (ROTTEN)	3.49	1.75
2. My friends don't know how much I'd like to be admired by people. (ADMIRE)	3.76	1.63
3. It's hard for me to get angry at people I like. (ANGRLIKE)	4.21	1.95
4. It's very painful when someone disappoints me. (DISAPP)	5.21	1.39
5. Sometimes I feel that my love is dangerous. (LOVEDANG)	2.54	1.84
6. When I'm in a new situation, there's often one person I really dislike. (DISLIKE)	2.84	1.65
7. Some people have too much power over me. (POWER)	3.63	1.74
8. I often feel that I can't put the different parts of my personality together, so that there is one me. (ONEME)	3.19	1.88
9. Sometimes I feel I could do anything in the world. (GRAND)	4.37	1.82

All items were scored on a 7-point continuum ranging from *not at all true* (1) to *very true* (7).