



To be grandiose or not to be worthless: Different routes to self-enhancement for narcissism and self-esteem

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 13 July 2010

Keywords:

Narcissism
Self-esteem
Self-enhancement
Self-regulation

ABSTRACT

Both narcissists and high self-esteem individuals engage in active self-enhancement to support their positive self-views. However, while narcissists want to assert their superiority, high self-esteem individuals desire to be valued by the social community. These different self-goals suggest that only narcissists can afford to engage in forceful and brazen self-enhancement strategies. Consistent with expectation, in two studies, narcissists exploited self-enhancement opportunities primarily by augmenting self-ratings on positive traits. Individuals with genuine high self-esteem in contrast, self-presented more moderately and also used the more socially accepted discounting of negative traits. Subsequent increased accessibility of positive self-information, only shown by narcissists, indicates that their desire for self-worth is hard to fulfill. These findings continue to illuminate the distinction between narcissism and self-esteem.

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1. Introduction

A highly positive self-view is by definition a central characteristic of narcissistic individuals, as well as those with high self-esteem. Narcissists have an inflated self-concept, they overestimate their intelligence and attractiveness (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994), they fantasize about power (Raskin & Novacek, 1991), and attribute success internally (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). People with high self-esteem are generally self-confident, are often in leadership positions (Rosenberg, 1965), and like high narcissists, they too overestimate their intelligence (Gabriel et al., 1994), and how positively others see them (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Unsurprisingly then, the two concepts are usually moderately to highly correlated (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004). However, there clearly are also important differences between narcissism and high self-esteem. In the definition of narcissism in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed. [DSM-IV]; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), narcissists are described as having not only excessively positive self-views, but in addition also a sense of entitlement – they exploit others and lack empathy for them. These components are not part of high self-esteem individuals.

Campbell, Rudich, and Sedikides (2002) also showed that narcissists and people with high self-esteem differ in the domains in which they have positive self-views. Narcissists were found to perceive themselves as better than others on agentic traits (intelli-

gence and extraversion) but not on more communal traits (morality or agreeableness), whereas high self-esteem individuals perceived themselves as superior in both domains. Moreover, studies which control for the influence of self-esteem when studying narcissism have shown that behaviors, such as, aggression in response to ego-threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) or excessive risk-taking in a gambling task (Lakey, Rose, Campbell, & Goodie, 2008), are specific to narcissism, and are not attributable to its overlap with self-esteem (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

In the present studies, our aim was to examine differences in the strategies narcissists and high self-esteem individuals use to preserve the positivity of their self-view. Hence, in contrast to Campbell et al. (2002), our focus was not on domain or content differences in the positivity of self-view, but rather on the processes through which this positivity is upheld. In particular, we were interested in the question whether these positive self-views are arrived at primarily through augmenting one's positive aspects, or through the discounting of one's negative aspects. Based on the many studies documenting narcissists' assertive promotion of grandiosity (e.g., Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, *in press*), our assumption was that narcissists' primary focus would be on augmenting positive self-aspects rather than discounting negative self-aspects. Preliminary evidence in this direction is provided by an unexpected (and auxiliary) finding in a study by Campbell and colleagues (2002) showing that narcissists self-enhanced on positive, but not on negative items. This was opposed to high self-esteem individuals, who rated the self more positively on both positive and negative traits. The authors speculated that these findings may be an artifact of the content composition of the wordlist. Our argument in contrast is that these

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differences emerge, because narcissists and high self-esteem individuals find different strategies for self-enhancement acceptable and supportive of their self-goals.

1.1. *The self-goals of narcissists and high self-esteem individuals*

The assumption in our self-regulatory processing model is that individual differences are revealed in the self-regulation of one's most central self-goals (Morf, 2006; Morf & Horvath, 2010), and we expect that narcissists and high self-esteem individuals differ in their primary self-goals. According to some clinical theories, narcissists' demonstrations of grandiosity are masking secretly harbored self-doubts and feelings of worthlessness (Akhtar & Thomson, 1982). Consistent with this, research has shown that narcissists' main self-goal appears to be to establish their superiority over others (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). They are permanently looking for opportunities to demonstrate their grandiosity and dominance, for example, by self-promoting in front of important people (Morf, Davidov, & Ansara, submitted for publication). They are also attracted by competitive tasks (Morf, Weir, & Davidov, 2000), presumably because these afford them the opportunity to demonstrate their superior ability. In addition, narcissists have been shown to defend their self-goal against threats, for example by derogating others who provide negative feedback (Kernis & Sun, 1994). Narcissists' self-defensive strategies are often perceived as paradoxical because through their choice of strategies, narcissists risk losing the social audience they need to promote their grandiosity (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). However, when considering the fragility of their grandiose self-views, these behaviors are no longer paradoxical, but simply indicate that narcissists' aggressive self-promotion attempts are of primary importance and dominate any longer term social goals.

Self-esteem in contrast, reflects more communal concerns. According to sociometer theory, trait self-esteem is the result of an individual's lifetime experiences of social acceptances and rejections (Leary, 2004; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Thus, the pursuit of being a valuable member of the social community is central to maintaining self-esteem. This means that any self-promotion attempts have to remain within socially accepted borders in order to decrease the risk of exclusion and to preserve one's status within the group. High self-esteem, in contrast to low self-esteem, individuals are apparently successful in employing such strategies. The problem for low self-esteem individuals seems to be that they are too focused on the avoidance of rejection and as a consequence they do not successfully promote themselves. For example, in a study by Park and Maner (2009), after having received negative feedback about their appearance, high self-esteem individuals expressed an increased desire to seek contact with close others to restore their self-esteem. Low self-esteem individuals on the other hand chose to avoid social contact and instead to engage in activities to improve their appearance (e.g., shopping for clothes), thereby avoiding the risk of further rejection.

The differential self-goals of narcissists and high self-esteem individuals are also reflected in some empirical studies that show differential effects of narcissism depending on whether or not self-esteem was controlled. For example, a positive correlation between narcissism and hubristic pride was only found, when the shared variance between narcissism and self-esteem was removed (Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009). In other words self-esteem suppressed this relationship, presumably because genuine self-esteem is related to authentic pride. Comparably, controlling for self-esteem increased the positive relationship between narcissism and aggression, and the negative relation between self-esteem and aggression increased when controlling for narcissism (Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004; Webster, 2006).

On the other hand, self-esteem can also function as a mediator. For example, the positive association between narcissism and psychological health seems to be completely mediated by self-esteem (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004), whereas genuine self-esteem remained a significant predictor of psychological health. Thus, narcissism without self-esteem is unrelated to psychological health, whereas high self-esteem helps maintain it. Perhaps, the successful pursuit of authentic self-esteem by high self-esteem individuals produces a social network that supports or even promotes health. In contrast, the narcissistic self-goal (i.e., to confirm one's grandiosity) primarily creates a kind of sham self-esteem, based more on illusions of competence, rather than being anchored in social reality, that is not health-promoting.

In short, both narcissists and high self-esteem individuals actively make attempts to embrace positive aspects of the self and to deflect negative ones. However, given their different orientations and concerns they are likely to achieve this via different channels with narcissists unrestrictedly exploiting self-enhancement opportunities, and individuals with genuinely high self-esteem engaging in more moderate self-promotion that takes into account the social desirability of the behavior within the given situation.

1.2. *Different strategies to achieve one's self-goal*

In general, there are two ways to evaluate or present oneself more favorably compared to others: one can either overestimate one's positive traits, or one can underestimate one's negative traits. Indeed, both of these strategies are used to demonstrate that one is better than the average (Alicke, 1985). At first glance perhaps, it seems logical that persons who overestimate their positive traits also underestimate their negative traits. However, as has been shown by Hepper, Gramzow, and Sedikides (2010) different self-enhancement strategies can be characteristic for specific personality types even when these strategies are highly correlated. For example, embracing the positive (e.g., internal attribution of success) and using defensive strategies (e.g., external attribution of failure) was moderately correlated ($r = .42$). But while the use of the former strategy was positively correlated with narcissism and self-esteem, the latter strategy was positively correlated with narcissism, but negatively correlated with self-esteem.

Similarly we assume that both promoting one's positive qualities and denying or down-playing one's negative qualities can be useful to regulate the positivity of one's self. We expect, however, that both selection of strategy and the size of the biases will depend on the individual's self-goals. Genuine high self-esteem individuals are expected to prefer more socially acceptable and rather moderate strategies in order to avoid the risk of social rebuff. Thus, in situations where both possibilities to preserve the positivity of one's self are available, they would be expected to engage primarily in discounting of negative self-aspects, as this is the most socially appropriate route. Narcissists (independent of self-esteem) on the other hand would be expected to aggressively exploit opportunities for self-enhancement on positive self-aspects, as this is the best strategy to demonstrate superiority (cf. Morf & Horvath, 2010; Morf et al., in press). Furthermore, we expect them to forgo the opportunity to discount negative self-aspects, so long as they can go for maximal self-promotion by taking advantage of demonstrating grandiosity. That would be in accordance with the finding that narcissists are strongly motivated to approach desirable outcomes but not particularly motivated to avoid negative outcomes (Foster & Trimm, 2008).

Additionally, the positivity of one's self-view can also be supported through differential accessibility of positive and negative information. For narcissists, we expect their attention to be especially attracted by positive stimuli that are connected with their

self-goal. As a result, one would expect them to have better recall for this positive information compared to nonnarcissists. We expect this to be true even after having engaged in successful self-promotion, because of narcissists' insatiable and bottomless need for self-aggrandizement (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001), which makes it that their goal for self-promotion can never adequately be fulfilled. In contrast, we expected that genuine high self-esteem individuals would show comparable accessibility for positive and negative information after positive self-evaluation. This is based on the assumption that their self-goals are more easily met.

2. The present research

In this research we examined how narcissism and genuine self-esteem predict self-ratings and processing of information representing two categories, namely worthlessness and grandiosity (see Appendix A for all words from the two categories). The purpose of Study 1 was to describe how narcissists and high self-esteem individuals overtly see themselves by having them evaluate the self-descriptiveness of worthlessness and grandiosity adjectives.

Based on the different self-goals of narcissists and individuals with high self-esteem, we expected that narcissism would be the primary predictor for high self-ratings on grandiosity. In contrast, we hypothesized that low self-ratings on worthlessness would only be predicted by genuine self-esteem. For narcissists the simultaneous opportunity to self-enhance on grandiosity was expected to make the down-playing of worthlessness unnecessary, as touting their grandiose horn would sufficiently mask any underlying feelings of inferiority. In addition, we examined whether narcissists, in comparison to high self-esteem individuals, keep potentially self-confirming information chronically activated as a supplementary self-regulation strategy. We expected this to show up in terms of superior recall of grandiosity items for high, as compared to low narcissists following a self-rating task. For people with genuine high self-esteem the self-rating task was expected to have adequately served their self-regulatory needs; therefore no differential recall was predicted for either word category.

In Study 2, in addition to replicating the self-rating task of Study 1, we also explicitly instructed participants to remember half of the grandiosity and worthlessness items and to forget the other half. This paradigm has been used successfully to show individual differences in the information processing for specific material, especially in research on clinical disorders (for a review, see Cloitre, 1998). We expected that narcissists would have difficulties forgetting grandiosity items, as well as remembering worthlessness items. On the other hand, we assumed that the self-goals for individuals with genuine high self-esteem would be adequately met through the self-rating task. Thus, we expected them to implement the instructions as successfully as individuals with genuine low self-esteem.

3. Study 1: self-ratings and accessibility of grandiosity and worthlessness

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Fifty-nine participants (17 men; mean age = 23.81 years; $SD = 5.70$) took part in this web-based study. Two additional participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not complete the entire online task. All participants were recruited through advertisements in the internet, and at local high-schools. In lieu of individual compensation, we raffled off some attractive prizes (i.e., iPods) among participants.

3.1.2. Questionnaires and incidental learning task

3.1.2.1. Narcissism. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979; German version: Schütz, Marcus, & Sellin, 2004) is the most frequently used measure for narcissism in non-clinical populations. The NPI contains 40 forced-choice items and has been demonstrated to be a valid and reliable instrument (e.g., Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

3.1.2.2. Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured with the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965; German version: von Collani & Herzberg, 2003), which is a widely-used instrument with good psychometric properties. The items were answered on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

3.1.2.3. Self-rating and incidental learning task. In this task, participants were asked to rate the self-descriptiveness of adjectives. Each rating started with the presentation of an adjective for 4 s followed by a four second interval within which participants had to indicate their rating by clicking on one of four boxes ranging from "does not describe me" (0) to "describes me well" (3). Trials were separated through the presentation of the letter string "XYZXYZ" for 4 s. The rating task and the time-fixed procedure were designed to hold encoding constant across words and participants. We used 54 adjectives: 14 adjectives each from the categories "worthlessness" and "grandiosity" (see Appendix A), seven positive and negative adjectives each to make the two main categories less obvious, four practice trials, three filler items at the beginning and five filler items at the end of the task to prevent primacy and recency effects. The selection of the stimuli was based on a pilot study, wherein twenty participants rated 160 adjectives on how well they represented the categories worthlessness and grandiosity on a seven-point scale. We selected words with high mean-scores and low standard deviations ($SD < 2$) on the respective categories. For all participants the adjectives were presented in the same random order with the restriction that two words from the same category were never presented in direct succession. Importantly, participants were not informed about the upcoming free recall task, making this an incidental learning task.

3.1.3. Procedure

After participants had completed the two personality questionnaires on the internet, they received a web-link and a participation code for the second part of the study by email. They were asked to make sure that they could work for about 25 min without disturbance before starting the experiment. After completing the self-rating task, participants unexpectedly were asked to write down all the adjectives they could remember within a 5 min period. For this second part of the study we used WEXTOR (Reips & Neuhäus, 2002) a tool to implement web-based experiments.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Descriptive statistics and simple regressions

We calculated mean-scores for the self-ratings of the 14 worthlessness and 14 grandiosity items,¹ and after the correction of spelling errors we calculated the proportion of words correctly remembered for the categories worthlessness and grandiosity. In this study, means and standard deviations of the variables were as follows: NPI ($M = 14.68$, $SD = 6.43$, $\alpha = .83$), RSE ($M = 39.61$, $SD = 6.69$, $\alpha = .92$), self-rated grandiosity ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .56$, $\alpha = .93$), self-rated worthlessness ($M = 0.53$, $SD = .41$, $\alpha = .88$), free recall

¹ Missing values were replaced with mean values. Ten participants missed one or two of the 28 relevant rating (total: <1%).

Table 1
Simple and multiple regressions predicting self-rated grandiosity and worthlessness as a function of narcissism and self-esteem in Study 1 and Study 2.

	Study 1				Study 2			
	Grandiose		Worthless		Grandiose		Worthless	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
<i>Simple regressions</i>								
NPI	0.71	7.55***	-0.42	3.47**	0.42	4.05***	-0.25	2.24*
RSE	0.60	5.70***	-0.65	6.49***	0.37	3.44**	-0.47	4.68***
<i>Multiple regression</i>								
NPI	0.54	4.85***	-0.05	0.38	0.32	2.90**	-0.07	0.58
RSE	0.28	2.54*	-0.62	4.96***	0.23	2.10*	-0.44	4.00***

Note: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory; RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem. Study 1: *N* = 59; Study 2: *N* = 79.

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

grandiosity ($M = 0.26$, $SD = .12$), free recall worthlessness ($M = 0.23$, $SD = .12$). Thus, all participants showed rather low self-ratings on worthlessness, while their self-ratings on grandiosity were around the middle of the rating scale. The NPI and the RSE were correlated ($r = .59$, $p < .001$), and both were associated with higher self-ratings of grandiosity and lower self-ratings of worthlessness at the zero order level (see Table 1 upper part: Simple regressions).

3.2.2. The independent influence of narcissism and genuine self-esteem on self-ratings and recall

To examine the unique effects of narcissism and self-esteem on self-rated grandiosity and self-rated worthlessness we conducted two separate multiple regression analyses with narcissism and self-esteem entered simultaneously as predictors.² As expected, self-rated grandiosity was predicted primarily by narcissism ($\beta = .54$, $t(56) = 4.85$, $p < .001$), but also by genuine self-esteem ($\beta = .28$, $t(56) = 2.54$, $p < .05$). Although that difference did not quite reach statistical significance ($z = 1.41$, $p = .08$, one-tailed test), it tentatively suggests that narcissists use grandiosity to a greater extent.

In contrast, self-rated worthlessness was predicted only by genuine self-esteem ($\beta = -.62$, $t(56) = 4.97$, $p < .05$); whereas narcissism independent of self-esteem ($\beta = -.05$, $t(56) < 1$) was non-significant (see Table 1 lower part: Multiple regression). A Sobel (1982) test revealed that the simple effect of narcissism on self-rated worthlessness was significantly weakened after controlling for self-esteem ($z = -3.61$; $p < .001$). This confirms that the zero-order correlation of narcissism and self-rated worthlessness was fully mediated by self-esteem.

To analyze the two free recall scores we included the self-rating scores as covariates into our regression model to control for the influence of the self-descriptiveness of the adjectives. As expected, regression analysis confirmed the relevance of narcissism ($\beta = .36$, $t(54) = 1.65$, $p = .06$) in predicting the recall of grandiosity items, whereas – somewhat surprisingly – genuine self-esteem was a significant predictor also ($\beta = -.50$, $t(54) = 2.59$, $p < .05$). Importantly however, while narcissism predicted increased recall of grandiosity, genuine self-esteem predicted decreased recall of grandiosity. In contrast to grandiosity, the recall of worthlessness was independent of narcissism, and self-esteem, $t(54) < 1$. It is noteworthy that these effects emerged only when the shared variance between narcissism and self-esteem was statistically removed.

² Gender also initially was examined; however, as there were no gender effects, this variable was subsequently excluded from the analyses of both Study 1 and Study 2.

3.3. Discussion

As expected, self-ratings and recall were differentially influenced by narcissism and genuine high self-esteem. Although both have positive self-views and both tend to self-enhance, each personality type does so via different routes, presumably due to different self-goals. For high narcissists the self-goal of maintaining and confirming a grandiose self is in the foreground and of utmost importance. Thus, self-promotion via self-ratings of grandiosity seems to be their preferred and most useful strategy. This is consistent with other research showing that narcissists seem to take every opportunity to confirm their grandiosity, no matter how socially inappropriate these self-promotion attempts may be (Morf et al., submitted for publication). Furthermore, our finding that narcissists primarily promote their grandiosity, but are less concerned about denying worthlessness, is consistent with their predominantly high approach motivation (Foster & Trimm, 2008). Once they start exploiting these self-promotion opportunities, there seems to be no further need to preserve their grandiose self by disarming marginal threats (i.e., by increased discounting of worthlessness). Importantly, the relationship between narcissism and discounting of worthlessness represented in the zero order level was attributable to the self-esteem component. However, we also want to emphasize that most of the participants strongly discounted worthlessness.

While the self-ratings offer the possibility for an immediate self-affirmation, the free recall data revealed a second self-regulatory strategy. Narcissists showed the anticipated increased recall of grandiosity. This increase, which occurred despite controlling for the self-ratings, indicates that the self-rating task could not sufficiently fulfill their self-goals; they needed still to strive for more. Interestingly, this effect was not accompanied by decreased recall of worthlessness, suggesting that for narcissists their sustained activation of grandiosity annuls the need to suppress any potential ego-threats. Concerning the influence of self-esteem as a possible component of narcissism, the study showed that it mediates the relationship between narcissism and discounting of worthlessness, and suppresses the recall-effects of grandiosity.

High self-esteem, in contrast, is characterized by the self-goal of social inclusion and acceptance. As predicted then, their grandiosity self-ratings remained somewhat more modest. Most important, in contrast to narcissists who self-promoted foremost via enhanced rating of grandiosity, genuine high self-esteem individuals in parallel took the chance to self-enhance through emphasizing that they were not worthless. Thus their selection and degree of self-enhancement is more socially acceptable, and it is consistent with the finding that high self-esteem individuals predominantly show a lacking avoidance motivation coupled with a rather weak approach motivation (Foster & Trimm, 2008). Furthermore, this strategy seems to have sufficiently served their self-goals, as subsequently they even showed decreased recall of grandiosity, when controlling for narcissism.

4. Study 2: self-ratings and instructed recall

In Study 2 we first aimed to replicate the self-rating results, and second, to examine how narcissism and self-esteem influence the ability to forget and remember grandiosity and worthlessness. As in Study 1, participants had to rate the self-descriptiveness of the same adjectives. However, in addition, each adjective was followed by a cue instructing them either to remember or to forget the particular item. The task ended with free recall instructions, but unexpectedly for both to-forget and to-remember items. As in Study 1, we expected that both narcissism (independent of self-esteem) and genuine self-esteem would predict self-overestimation of grandiosity, whereas only genuine self-esteem would predict

discounting of worthlessness on the self-ratings. Second, we expected that for narcissists the instruction to forget information that represents grandiosity and to remember information representing worthlessness would be difficult to implement because these tasks are in conflict with their habitual way of processing information. Thus we hypothesized that they would remember more grandiosity words they were instructed to forget, and remember less worthlessness words they were instructed to remember. In contrast, we expected that genuine self-esteem would not influence the implementation of either instructions (neither for worthlessness nor grandiosity), because the self-rating task should have afforded individuals with genuine high self-esteem sufficient opportunity to confirm their social worth.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

Participants were recruited and rewarded the same way as in Study 1. Eighty-eight participants started the directed forgetting task. Nine participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not complete the entire online task. Therefore the final sample contains 50 women and 29 men (mean age = 25.42 years; $SD = 7.37$).

4.1.2. Questionnaires and instructed recall procedure

We used the same questionnaires to measure self-esteem, and narcissism as in the first study. In the self-rating task, participants again had to evaluate 54 adjectives. The adjectives, their order, as well as their temporal sequencing (4 s presentation, 4 s for the rating and 4 s between the trials) remained the same. However, in addition, this time participants were instructed to remember or forget half of the words. After each rating either “XXXXXX” appeared in red color on the screen, indicating that the word should be forgotten, or “EEEEEE” (in green color) was displayed, classifying a word as “to remember” (E stands for “erinnern”, the German word for “remember”). Participants were informed that they would have to recall all the “EEEEEE”-cued words at the end of the task. To emphasize the importance of the forgetting and remembering instructions they were told to try hard to adhere to the “to forget” instruction, because it would be impossible to remember the whole list. Half of the 14 worthlessness and 14 grandiosity adjectives were followed by the remember instruction, the other half by the forget instruction (see Appendix A). Order of cues was random with the restriction that the same cue never was presented more than 3 times in a row. At the end of the rating task, participants unexpectedly were instructed to write down *all* of the adjectives they could remember during a five minute period, irrespective of the previous instruction.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Descriptive statistics and simple regressions

We calculated the proportion of worthlessness and grandiosity words recalled separately for the two instruction conditions: to-remember-grandiosity ($M = 0.34$, $SD = .21$), to-remember-worthlessness ($M = .24$, $SD = .21$), to-forget-grandiose ($M = .18$, $SD = .14$), and to-forget-worthlessness ($M = .18$, $SD = .15$). Means and standard deviations of the other variables were as follows: NPI ($M = 14.58$, $SD = 5.79$, $\alpha = .78$), RSE ($M = 40.70$, $SD = 5.55$, $\alpha = .86$), self-rated grandiosity ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .50$, $\alpha = .90$), self-rated worthlessness ($M = 0.57$, $SD = .39$, $\alpha = .85$). The means were very similar to those of Study 1, and again, the NPI and the RSE were positively correlated ($r = .41$, $p < .001$), and both were associated with higher self-rating of grandiosity and lower self-rating of worthlessness (see Table 1 upper part: Simple regressions). Narcissism and self-esteem were not significantly related with any free recall score ($|rs| < .14$, $ps > .16$).

4.2.2. Independent influence of narcissism and genuine self-esteem on self-ratings and recall

To examine the unique effects of narcissism and self-esteem on the two self-rating scores we used the same regression model as in Study 1. As with the simple regressions, the results of Study 1 were successfully replicated. Self-rated grandiosity again was predicted by narcissism ($\beta = .32$, $t(76) = 2.91$, $p < .01$), as well as by genuine high self-esteem ($\beta = .23$, $t(76) = 2.07$, $p < .05$) (see Table 1 lower part: Multiple regression). The two betas did not differ significantly ($z = 0.41$, *ns.*). For self-rated worthlessness, genuine self-esteem was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.44$, $t(76) = 4.00$, $p < .001$), whereas narcissism ($\beta = -.07$, $t(76) < 1$) had no influence when self-esteem was controlled. Again a Sobel (1982) test revealed that the simple effect of narcissism on self-rated worthlessness was fully mediated by self-esteem ($z = -2.77$; $p < .01$).

To check whether participants followed the recall instructions, recall scores first were analyzed using a General Linear Model with a 2 (instruction: to forget vs. to remember) \times 2 (word-category: worthlessness vs. grandiosity) within participants design and narcissism and self-esteem as two continuous variables (mean-centered). This analysis revealed the expected main effect for instruction (i.e., better recall of “to-remember” than “to-forget” words), $F(1,76) = 23.37$, $p < .001$, which did not interact with either narcissism or self-esteem (both $F_s < 1$). Thus, the manipulation was successful for all.

Next, we conducted separate regression analyses on the four specific recall scores (“to-remember”-grandiose, “to-forget”-grandiose, “to-remember”-worthless, “to-forget”-worthless) using the same regression model as in Study 1. As expected, self-esteem had no effect on any of the recall scores, all $t_s < 1$. However, in contrast to our expectations the same was true for narcissism (independent of self-esteem), all $t_s < 1.2$. Narcissists showed neither better recall of grandiosity words they were instructed to forget, nor worse recall of worthlessness words they were instructed to remember, relative to nonnarcissists.

4.3. Discussion

In this second study we successfully replicated the main self-rating results of Study 1. When examining the unique effects of each personality construct, individuals with high self-esteem as expected self-promoted again through low self-ratings on worthlessness, thus denying their own worthlessness. In contrast, high narcissists did not make use of this self-enhancement strategy. On the other hand, both personality types self-promoted via high self ratings on grandiosity. Thus as in Study 1, narcissists exploited the more direct and perhaps more risky strategy, while genuine high self-esteem individuals used a two pronged approach, namely moderate self-enhancement on positive self-aspects and simultaneous discounting of negative self-aspects.

However, we found no evidence for our expectation that narcissism, in contrast to self-esteem, would moderate directed forgetting and remembering of grandiosity and worthlessness. Narcissism neither differentially affected the recall of to-forget grandiosity items nor to-remember worthlessness items. Though we can only speculate, a possible explanation might be that the competitive achievement-like character of the task sufficiently increased narcissists' motivation to rehearse worthlessness and to forget grandiosity items when instructed accordingly, even though this would otherwise not come easily or naturally to them.

5. General discussion

The present two studies were designed to examine differences in the self-views of narcissists and high self-esteem individuals and in

their strategies for regulating them. Although the two constructs are to some degree overlapping, there are also important differences between them. For example, narcissists primarily self-enhance in agentic domains, whereas high self-esteem individuals additionally self-enhance in communal domains (Campbell et al., 2002). The disinterest of narcissists in communal traits (e.g., morality) concurs with the assumption that narcissists see others primarily as an audience for their self-presentation in the pursuit of their self-goal to demonstrate and confirm their grandiosity, whereas high self-esteem individuals want to affirm their worth for the social community. We expected these different self-goals to be reflected in their respective self-ratings and the processing of stimuli representing grandiosity and worthlessness (cf. Morf & Horvath, 2010).

As expected, in both studies narcissists bragged about their grandiosity in a self-rating task, whereas genuine high self-esteem individuals were somewhat more moderate in their self-enhancement on grandiosity, that difference was not statistically significant. Perhaps, some of the adjectives we used to represent grandiosity were not extreme enough to induce modest ratings for individuals with genuine high self-esteem. However, the most relevant finding was not that difference per se, but that individuals with genuine high self-esteem simultaneously down-played their worthlessness—a strategy not shown by narcissists independent of their self-esteem component. We want to emphasize that although in Study 1 the correlation between narcissism and self-esteem was quite high, the same results were obtained as in Study 2, in which the correlation was in a typical range. That shows the stability of this effect.

In addition, narcissists (independent of self-esteem) also showed enhanced spontaneous recall for grandiosity items after the self-rating task (Study 1). This may mean that by way of an additional self-regulation strategy, they also process grandiosity-related items more deeply, perhaps especially when simultaneously confronted with information regarding worthlessness. That narcissists continued to spontaneously recall the grandiosity items suggests that their self-goal remained activated, despite the enhanced self-ratings on grandiosity. Perhaps in contrast to those with genuine high self-esteem, narcissists never feel that their positive self-views have been adequately affirmed—making this striving addiction-like and bottomless, a Sisyphean endeavor (Brown & Bosson, 2001).

5.1. Different routes to self-affirmation

Thus, our findings not only indicate that genuine self-esteem and narcissism are constructs with different underlying self-goals, but also that these self-goals define the utility of different self-regulation strategies. For individuals with genuine high self-esteem, the positive category appears to have been (partly) too extreme and thus exploiting it would have interfered with their goal of preserving social acceptance. We assume that as a result, they chose a more modest and more socially accepted demonstration of their grandiosity, both in terms of degree of self-enhancement and by adding a second more modest strategy of down-playing their negative aspects.

Narcissists on the other hand, exploited the self-promotion opportunity on the grandiose traits to the fullest, but did not use the strategy of discounting worthlessness. Presumably, when assertion of their superior positive characteristics is a possible strategy, then the denial of worthlessness may become irrelevant to them, because it is no longer threatening to them. The opportunity to self-aggrandize on positive adjectives seems to provide them sufficient self-affirmation and masking of inferiority, at least in the absence of any additional external threat. This preference for outright blatant self-promotion might also explain why Campbell et al. (2002) obtained a better-than-average effect for narcissists only on positive but not on negative adjectives. In contrast to the authors' explanation that their negative adjectives might have been too communal and therefore not self-relevant for narcissists,

our findings suggest that even with more agentic adjectives, narcissists would not have shown discounting.

The present findings notwithstanding, we do not mean to imply that narcissists will not also at times use the other route, for example if self-promotion on positive aspects is not an option available. Furthermore, when ego-threats exceed the possible gains from self-aggrandizing strategies, one would expect narcissists to engage in enhanced disclaiming of worthlessness in the self-rating task in addition to continuing to elaborate their grandiosity, perhaps even exceeding the level of discounting shown by high self-esteem individuals. Then again, if the self-goal continues to remain threatened, narcissists likely in addition also will have to employ other more powerful means of self-regulations. They might for example become derisive or even aggressive toward others (e.g., Kernis & Sun, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993; Stucke, 2003). In the absence of excessive threat however, our findings support that narcissists' most preferred strategy is to self-affirm via brazen aggrandizing self-promotion, rather than employing more moderate and socially tailored – thus more self-protective strategies. This concurs with findings that narcissists embrace an approach rather than an avoidance orientation (Foster & Trimm, 2008). The findings are also in line with the idea that narcissists represent the ultimate self-enhancer personality (Morf et al., in press).

5.2. The relation between narcissism and self-esteem

In our studies the expected differences between narcissism and self-esteem only emerged clearly when we controlled for their shared variance. While focusing on genuine self-esteem seems to be relatively unproblematic, reporting effects of narcissism independent of self-esteem might be perceived as questionable given its relatively high correlation and theoretical overlap with explicit self-esteem. However, there are several reasons why it is important to examine the constructs' respective unique contributions.

Foremost, at the conceptual level there is a clear distinction between genuine or authentic self-esteem and narcissism, which is thought to represent a kind of sham, false (Akhtar & Thomson, 1982), or fragile self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). Accordingly, the mask model (e.g., Bosson et al., 2008) assumes that narcissists have deep-seated feelings of inferiority, but they have learned to overwrite them at least on an explicit level. Consistent with these assumptions, some empirical studies have found that narcissists' high explicit self-esteem is often accompanied by low implicit self-esteem (Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003; Zeigler-Hill, 2006). Thus, genuine high self-esteem is not necessarily a component of narcissism. As a result (as mentioned in the introduction), the role of self-esteem as a component of narcissism can vary greatly – operating sometimes as a suppressor, other times as a mediator, or contributing nothing at all.

Furthermore, there is growing consensus that there are two types of narcissism that differ in terms of self-esteem, namely grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (e.g., Bosson et al., 2008; Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008; Foster & Trimm, 2008). Although they share many of the typical narcissistic characteristics, these two subtypes differ in terms of their level of explicit self-esteem, with grandiose narcissists reporting high, and vulnerable narcissists relatively low self-esteem (Cain et al., 2008; Rose, 2002). Thus, even at the explicit level, high self-esteem is not a necessary component of narcissism. Interestingly, in one of our other studies (Horvath & Morf, 2010) the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, a measure of grandiose narcissism (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979) and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory, a measure of vulnerable narcissism (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009) showed no significant zero-order correlation ($r = .06$; n.s.). The partial correlation between the two measures when controlling for self-esteem, however, was significant ($r = .24$; $p < .05$). Thus, the

“self-esteem-free” parts of both subtypes are more similar, and thus might capture a core feature of narcissism.

All together, these points underscore the importance and necessity of understanding the interplay of narcissism and self-esteem in order to determine the nature and direction of their respective contributions, and for comprehending when and how they diverge in terms of their psychological functioning.

6. Conclusions

The current findings support our contention that individual differences are reflected in the self-regulation of one’s most relevant self-goals (e.g., Morf & Horvath, 2010). Understanding under which circumstances and through what means a self-goal is accomplished affords a looking glass into the dynamic “if... then...” (Mischel & Morf, 2003) constellations that drive and identify a personality type or subtype. High self-esteem individuals choose more socially accepted routes to affirm the self, revealing social relatedness as their central concern. Narcissists in contrast, put all their stakes on affirming their grandiosity and pursue unbounded blatant self-promotion. While “not to be worthless” seems to help uphold the positive self-views for high self-esteem individuals, for high narcissists only “to be grandiose” will do. Narcissists seem to prefer direct offense while more moderate strategies (e.g., down-playing worthlessness) move in the background, when grandiosity can be pursued. These differences may translate into important social consequences, with narcissists putting a much greater strain on their social environment, often resulting in negative outcomes in the long term, even if they successfully self-enhance in the short-run.

Acknowledgments

Preparation of this article was supported in part by Grant PP001-68722 from the Swiss National Science Foundation awarded to the second author. This research was conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the first authors’ doctoral dissertation at the University of Bern. We would like to thank Loredana Torchetti, Mathias Allemand, the editor and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

Appendix A

Grandiosity and worthlessness words used in both studies

Grandiose		Worthless	
superior ^a	ausgezeichnet	exchangeable ^a	austauschbar
brilliant ^a	grossartig	irrelevant ^a	bedeutungslos
gifted ^a	hochbegabt	limited ^a	beschraenkt
perfect ^a	perfekt	deficient ^a	fehlerhaft
phantastic ^a	phantastisch	inferior ^a	minderwertig
phenomenal ^a	ueberragend	futile ^a	unnuetz
excellent ^a	vortrefflich	worthless ^a	wertlos
admirable ^b	bewundernswert	trivial ^b	belanglos
first-rate ^b	erstklassig	expendable ^b	entbehrlich
fabulous ^b	fabelhaft	replaceable ^b	ersetzbar
ingenious ^b	genial	useless ^b	nutzlos
grandiose ^b	grandios	redundant ^b	ueberfluessig
outstanding ^b	hervorragend	incompetent ^b	untauglich
exemplary ^b	vorbildlich	unimportant ^b	unwichtig

In Study 2, two word lists were created (marked by superscript a and b, respectively). For some participants, words from list (a) were randomly designated “to forget”, while for other participants “to forget” instructions were attached to words from list (b).

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