

# Narcissism and Romantic Attraction

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A model of narcissism and romantic attraction predicts that narcissists will be attracted to admiring individuals and highly positive individuals and relatively less attracted to individuals who offer the potential for emotional intimacy. Five studies supported this model. Narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, preferred more self-oriented (i.e., highly positive) and less other-oriented (i.e., caring) qualities in an ideal romantic partner (Study 1). Narcissists were also relatively more attracted to admiring and highly positive hypothetical targets and less attracted to caring targets (Studies 2 and 3). Indeed, narcissists displayed a preference for highly positive–noncaring targets compared with caring but not highly positive targets (Study 4). Finally, mediational analyses demonstrated that narcissists' romantic attraction is, in part, the result of a strategy for enhancing self-esteem (Study 5).

From the perspective of the modern observer, the ancient Greek myth of Narcissus can be viewed as a tale of romantic attraction. The handsome youth Narcissus wanders the world refusing romantic offers from a variety of eligible others, none of whom he deems worthy of his love. Eventually, he finds himself in a dark wood staring into a pool of water. It is here that he discovers the face of the person he loves staring back at him. This person he so adores is himself. Narcissus's attraction freezes him on the spot; he dies, and eventually turns into a flower.

The story of Narcissus yields interesting insights into the nature of narcissism and romantic attraction. The myth suggests that, in the domain of narcissism, romantic attraction is bound up with a focus on the self and a lack of attention to others. The former is evident in Narcissus's gaze at his own reflection, and the latter is evident in his refusal to form relationships with those who desire him. What drives this pattern of romantic attraction in narcissists? The myth of Narcissus suggests that self-love, which in modern psychological terms may be translated as self-enhancement (i.e., the desire to maintain or increase the positivity of the self-concept), underlies narcissists' romantic attraction.

The goal of the present research was to understand the relation between narcissism and romantic attraction. Arguably, this brief exposition of the myth of Narcissus reveals a theme central to the romantic life of narcissists, elements of which are an attention to the self, a relative lack of intimate contact with others, and a strategy for self-esteem regulation. I trace this theme through the

theory and research on narcissism. I then present a theoretical model of narcissism and romantic attraction. Finally, I present five empirical investigations that validate and extend this model.

## Narcissism and Interpersonal Relationships

### *Defining Narcissism*

Historically, narcissism has been conceptualized in several ways, including paraphilia, pathological self-love, healthy self-esteem, extreme introversion, and personality type (Baranger, 1991; Freud, 1931/1950, 1914/1957). Although the focus of the present research is on the personality trait of narcissism, the current conceptualization of narcissism is seen most clearly in the description of narcissistic personality disorder.<sup>1</sup> A narcissist is grandiose (i.e., thinks he or she is better than others or is special), eager for admiration, hypersensitive to criticism, lacking in empathy for others, and exploitative (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; see also Akhtar & Thompson, 1982; Westen, 1990). In reviewing the literature on narcissism and interpersonal relationships, I highlight three interrelated elements of narcissistic behavior that have direct bearing on the present research: (a) inflated self-concept, (b) poor interpersonal relationships, and (c) related patterns of self-regulation. The review begins with psychodynamic theory, followed by an overview of personality and social psychological research.

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<sup>1</sup> The current conceptualization of narcissism is the result of both clinical intuition and observation and empirical research in social and personality psychology. The majority of clinical observation and theory reviewed in this article conceptualizes narcissism as a personality disorder. The majority of research from social and personality psychology reviewed in the present research conceptualizes narcissism as a personality dimension on which the nonclinical population is normally distributed (Raskin & Hall, 1979). Accordingly, I use the term *narcissists* to describe both individuals with the disorder and individuals falling on the upper end of the personality dimension. I use the term *nonnarcissists* to describe individuals falling on the lower end of the personality dimension.

### *Psychodynamic Background*

When viewed with an eye toward understanding narcissism and romantic attraction, the psychodynamic literature offers several useful insights. The starting point for examining this literature is Freud's *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (Freud, 1914/1957). In this monograph, Freud distinguished between "anaclitic" (attachment) type individuals and "narcissistic" type individuals. The anaclitic type, on the one hand, directs his or her love outward. Originally, the love object is the mother and father. Later, love objects are substitutes for the parents, hence the classic notion of marrying one's parent. The narcissistic type, on the other hand, directs his or her love inward. According to Freud, the love object becomes "(a) what he himself is (i.e., himself), (b) what he himself was, (c) what he himself would like to be, (d) someone who was once part of himself" (p. 90). Freud clearly implicates the role of the self in narcissistic object choice; unfortunately, Freud is not more specific as to what this object choice may include, with the exception of suggesting homosexuality as a possibility.

Two other psychodynamic theorists, Kernberg (1975) and Kohut (1977), have influenced considerably our understanding of narcissism. Both commented on the inflation of the narcissistic self, and both noted the relation between this inflation and poor interpersonal functioning; however, the etiology of narcissism described by these two theorists differs in ways that have implications for the present research.

Kernberg (1974, 1975) theorized that narcissism emerges from a childhood lacking adequate love from a caregiver, especially in the pre-Oedipal years (roughly before age 3). Narcissism is developed as a defense against feelings of abandonment or loss as well as the rage associated with this abandonment. This defensive narcissism is carried into adulthood and plays a significant role in close relationships. The implications of this proposed etiology of narcissism are twofold. First, underneath the inflated self-image, the narcissist is constantly at risk of experiencing intense feelings of fear, abandonment, and doubt. Second, the narcissist strives to maintain an inflated self-image in close relationships to protect the self from this experience of abandonment. For example, narcissists may become romantically involved with individuals whom they perceive unconsciously as representing a parent. The narcissist then expects this parent substitute to fill the void originally left in childhood by the emotionally unavailable parent. This tactic, however, usually does not work as planned because few romantic partners are perfect enough to take the place of the longed-for loving parent. Instead, narcissists get involved with what they perceive to be the ideal partner, have what they feel is a highly positive relationship, and then break off that relationship as soon as the partner is seen as a real (i.e., flawed) individual (Akhtar & Thompson, 1982; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Kernberg, 1974; Masterson, 1988).

Kohut (1977) described a different etiology of narcissism. Narcissism is a normal aspect of infant development. Narcissism is maintained through two strategies: mirroring and idealization. Mirroring refers to the parents' displays of love and affection toward and validation of the child. Idealization refers to the child's belief that the parent is a perfect, almost godlike, human being. Idealization presumably maintains the child's narcissism by (a) heightening the value of the mirroring, because it comes from such an important source, and (b) heightening the child's self-worth by

associating the child with an important figure. According to Kohut, this childhood narcissism will gradually fade as the mirroring and the idealization processes slowly diminish and are replaced by more realistic views of self and other. If these narcissistic needs are not met, however, the individual will maintain a defensive and inflated self-image and will try to meet these mirroring and idealization needs in the context of adult interpersonal relationships (Akhtar & Thompson, 1982; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983).

In summary, three observations emerge from the psychodynamic literature regarding narcissistic interpersonal relationships. First, narcissistic relationships are in the service of self-enhancement. Second, narcissists lack the ability to experience genuine intimacy. This is the result of two related forces: a view of interpersonal relationships primarily as a source of self-enhancement and a fear of abandonment. Third, self-enhancement in narcissistic relationships is likely to take two channels: (a) seeking admiration from others (Kohut's, 1977, mirroring) and (b) associating the self with idealized others (Freud's, 1914/1957, p. 90, attraction to "what he himself would like to be"; Kernberg's, 1974, 1975, idealization; and Kohut's, 1977, idealization).

### *Personality and Social Psychological Evidence*

The personality and social psychological literature presents evidence that narcissism is associated with both the self (e.g., self-focus and hostility) and a relative indifference to interpersonal relationships (e.g., lack of empathy and lack of need for intimacy). Additionally, narcissism is associated with a style of interpersonal self-regulation. Narcissists appear adept at using interpersonal relationships to enhance the self-concept.

Narcissism is associated with attentional self-focus (Emmons, 1987), such as the pervasive use of the pronoun "I" in an unstructured and unrehearsed speech (Raskin & Shaw, 1988). Narcissism is also related positively to self-esteem (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991a, 1991b) and the need for uniqueness (Emmons, 1984). Narcissism is associated positively with an increased need for power as measured by the Thematic Apperception Test (Carroll, 1987). Finally, narcissism is correlated positively with hostility (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995) and is located on the "agency" dimension of the interpersonal circumplex (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), both of which point to a relation of narcissism to interpersonal dominance and competitiveness.

The relation between narcissism and several relationship-oriented variables has also been examined. The results of these studies show that narcissism is related to both a general lack of empathy and perspective taking (Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984) and a diminished need for intimacy (Carroll, 1987). In addition, narcissism correlates negatively with agreeableness (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). Finally, narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, endorse relatively more pragmatic and game-playing love styles in ongoing romantic relationships, while at the same time reporting less selfless love (Campbell & Foster, 1999a).

Several studies have reported a relation between narcissism and the willingness to enhance the self at the cost of diminishing others. John and Robins (1994), for example, asked participants to engage in a group discussion. These participants rated their performances in relation to the performance of others in the group. Outside judges also made performance ratings. By comparing judges' ratings to participants' self-ratings, John and Robins were

able to demonstrate a link between narcissism and the reporting of inflated self-appraisals. These findings have been replicated using converging methodologies (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998). Another study compared participants' ratings of their own attractiveness and intelligence (*vis-à-vis* other college students) with ratings made by judges (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994). Narcissism was related to the overestimation of the participants' own attributes in comparison with those of others. Morf and Rhodewalt (1993) took a somewhat different approach. Participants in their study worked on a self-involving task (a "social sensitivity" test) in a group setting. After taking the test, all participants were informed that they did not perform as well as did a similar other. As predicted, narcissism was positively correlated with the derogation of that similar other. Similarly, other researchers asked participants to work with a close other on a dyadic task for which they received randomly determined success or failure feedback (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 1999). After receiving the feedback, participants attributed responsibility to either themselves or their partner. Narcissism was found to be related to the self-serving bias. That is, narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, attributed success to the self but attributed failure to the partner. This finding, in part, may be the result of narcissists' tendency to respond to self-threats with negative affect, particularly shame or anger (Gramzow & Tangney, 1992; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998).

Another interpersonal self-regulation strategy adopted by narcissists is the seeking of admiration. Narcissists, more than nonnarcissists, may maintain the positivity of the self by means of exhibitionistic displays designed to elicit admiration from others. Researchers using self-report methodologies have found that narcissists' self-esteem is driven, in part, by grandiosity or feelings of importance (Raskin et al., 1991a, 1991b). For example, narcissists maintain an active fantasy life containing visions of power, glory, or fame (Raskin & Novacek, 1991). In addition, individuals who were asked to describe narcissistic acquaintances reported that these acquaintances acted in ways designed to impress others, such as talking loudly or flaunting money (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). Indeed, narcissism is related to self-reported exhibitionistic displays (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). Finally, researchers have examined narcissists' liking of a same-sex evaluator (Kernis & Sun, 1994). Participants were given randomly generated positive or negative feedback on an interpersonal task by an evaluator and were then asked to rate feedback diagnosticity, evaluator competence, and evaluator attractiveness. When the feedback was positive, narcissism was associated positively with high ratings of feedback diagnosticity, evaluator competence, and evaluator attractiveness. An opposite pattern of results was observed in negative-feedback situations.

In summary, findings from the personality and social psychological literature are as follows. First, narcissism is positively associated with several self-concept variables such as self-focused attention, self-esteem, and agency. Second, narcissism is negatively associated with several intimacy-related variables such as empathy, agreeableness, and the need for intimacy. Third, these two observations are part of a larger pattern of self-regulation in which narcissists both derogate others and seek the admiration of others to enhance the self.

## A Model of Narcissism and Romantic Attraction

### Overview

In the preceding review of the literature, I have traced a simple theme: Narcissists display a propensity to attend to the self and to distance themselves from potentially close relationships. This is related to a self-regulatory strategy in which narcissists view interpersonal relationships as an opportunity to increase the positivity of the self-concept. This self-regulatory strategy has been proposed by psychodynamically oriented theorists to play a role in romantic relationships, and it has, in part, been demonstrated empirically in nonromantic relationships by social and personality psychologists.

The focus of the present investigation is on narcissism and romantic attraction. Given that the same theme that underlies narcissists' behavior in interpersonal relationships will likely underlie narcissists' attraction to potential romantic partners, the literature suggests that narcissistic romantic attraction will be defined by three elements: an attention to the self, a lack of intimacy, and a related strategy for enhancing the self. How will these elements manifest themselves in romantic attraction? On the basis of the extant literature, I propose a model of narcissism and romantic attraction, which, for expositional clarity, I refer to as the *self-orientation model*. Narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, will be more attracted to *self-oriented* targets and less attracted to *other-oriented* targets.

### Self-Oriented Targets

Past literature suggests two strategies for narcissistic self-enhancement that may be reflected in romantic attraction. I refer to these as *admiration* and *identification*. Admiration involves receiving praise from a romantic partner. For example, a partner who tells the narcissist that he or she is very attractive enhances the narcissist's self-concept by means of admiration. The knowledge that interpersonal feedback plays a role in the development of the self-concept has a long history in psychology. It is evident both in the early work on symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and in more recent experimental work on identity negotiation (Swann, 1983). The importance of admiration in romantic attraction has also been noted (Campbell & Foster, 1999b). Narcissists' predilection to seek admiration is evident in (a) Kohut's (1977) construct of mirroring described earlier, (b) Kernis and Sun's (1994) experimental demonstration that narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, find an individual who provides them with positive feedback to be more interpersonally attractive than one who provides them with negative feedback, and (c) Buss and Chiodo's (1991) finding that narcissism is related to exhibitionistic acts.

The second self-enhancement strategy proposed to play a role in narcissistic romantic attraction is identification. Identification is a process by which the self-concept is enhanced by means of a relational association with a highly positive or valued other. For example, if a narcissist is dating a famous movie star, the narcissist's own self-concept will be enhanced. Identification with a highly positive other as a general strategy for self-enhancement is evident in the psychodynamic literature (A. Freud, 1936). Experimentally, identification with a group has been shown to aid the maintenance of self-esteem in Tajfel and Turner's (1986) work on

social identity theory and in Cialdini et al.'s (1976) concept of basking in reflected glory. Identification has also been described as a central component in the development of romantic relationships as part of a larger self-expansion model (A. Aron & Aron, 1986; E. N. Aron & Aron, 1996). Additionally, identification has been demonstrated to positively influence romantic attraction and ongoing relationships (Campbell & Foster, 1999b; Schuetz & Tice, 1997). The importance of identification to narcissists has been postulated by Freud (attraction to "what he himself would like to be," 1914/1957, p. 90), Kernberg (1974, 1975; idealization), and Kohut (1977; idealization).

If narcissists are more likely than nonnarcissists to achieve their self-enhancement goals in romantic relationships by means of the processes of admiration and identification, one can assume that narcissists, more than nonnarcissists, will be romantically attracted to targets that are likely to provide the potential for admiration and identification. These targets would be admiring individuals and highly positive (e.g., attractive and successful) individuals. Together, I call these self-oriented targets, because they suggest that the perceiver's focus is on the self instead of on the relationship.

### *Other-Oriented Targets*

I also hypothesize that narcissism will be related negatively to romantic attraction to targets who display the potential for providing intimacy or caring (i.e., other-oriented targets). Although this issue has not been studied empirically, the psychodynamic literature suggests that emotional intimacy is less desirable to the narcissist for several reasons. First, emotional intimacy may not allow for the enhancement of the self that narcissists seek. Someone who knows the narcissist well, including his or her faults, may not be willing to engage in outright flattery. Similarly, an emotionally intimate relationship may reveal narcissists' "true" (i.e., not inflated) self and the accompanying negative affect (Kernberg, 1975; Masterson, 1988). For example, a narcissist who is in a relationship involving mutual self-disclosure will find it more difficult to retain an overly positive self-image. Finally, narcissists may simply not be interested in intimacy to the extent that nonnarcissists are interested. Instead, the narcissists' attention may be directed toward the self (Raskin & Shaw, 1988).

Two of these potentially intimate relationships involve a romantic partner who (a) expects caring and mutual self-disclosure (i.e., caring partner) or (b) has several emotional needs to be satisfied through the relationships (i.e., needy partner). Together, these are termed other-oriented targets because they suggest that the perceiver's focus is on the relationship instead of on the self. Narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, will be less attracted to other-oriented targets.

### *Summary*

The self-orientation model predicts that narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, will be more romantically attracted to individuals who offer the potential for self-enhancement by means of the process of admiration or identification. Narcissism, therefore, will be positively related to romantic attraction toward individuals who admire the narcissist or who are highly positive and offer the narcissist the possibility of identification. Narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, will be less romantically attracted to individ-

uals who offer the possibility of intimacy. This potential intimacy can take the form of caring for the narcissist or being emotionally dependent on the narcissist. Narcissists, therefore, will be relatively less attracted to individuals who are caring or needy.

### *The Present Research*

Thus far, I have traced the theme of narcissists' focus on the self vis-à-vis relatedness through past theory and research. I have also presented a model of narcissism and romantic attraction. The third step in the direction of understanding the relation between narcissism and romantic attraction is to validate empirically and to extend my theoretical model. Toward this goal, I conducted five empirical investigations.

In Study 1, I used a free-response methodology to illuminate the preference for romantic partners expressed by narcissists and nonnarcissists. Participants were asked to list the most important qualities of an ideal romantic partner. If the self-orientation model of narcissism and romantic attraction is valid, narcissistic participants should prefer ideal romantic partners who possess self-oriented qualities rather than other-oriented qualities. In Study 2, I used an experimental approach to test each of the predictions of the self-orientation model. These include a positive relation between narcissism and attraction to self-oriented targets (i.e., targets suggesting the potential for advantageous self-regulation by means of admiration and identification) and a negative relation between narcissism and attraction to other-oriented targets (i.e., targets suggesting the potential for caring or emotional dependence). In Studies 3–5, I further examined and extended the self-orientation model of narcissism and romantic attraction by building upon the experimental methodology used in Study 2. In Study 3, I examined the interactional nature of the relation between partner qualities (i.e., admiration and identification) and attraction: Are these paths interactive or independent? Study 4 contained the most direct test of the self-orientation model by pitting highly positive and caring qualities in a potential romantic partner against each other. Finally, in Study 5, I used a mediational design to determine if, indeed, self-enhancement needs drive narcissists' romantic attraction to self-oriented vis-à-vis other-oriented targets.

### *Study 1*

Study 1 provided an initial test of the self-orientation model. Within a free-response paradigm, participants were asked to list qualities or characteristics of their ideal romantic partner. These responses were then coded to reflect each of the four dimensions in the model: admiration, identification, care, and emotional neediness. I predicted that narcissists would list self-oriented qualities as most important in an ideal romantic partner, whereas nonnarcissists would list other-oriented qualities as most important in an ideal romantic partner.

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Design*

Participants were 102 (80 women, 22 men) undergraduate students. These participants were selected from a larger group of 150 because their scores fell in the upper and lower third of the narcissism distribution.

Participants in all five studies were enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and participated in the research as partial fulfillment of a course option. Participants in all five studies were tested in groups of up to 20 by either a male or a female experimenter.

The independent variable was narcissism (narcissist vs. nonnarcissist). Coded descriptions of qualities of participants' ideal romantic partner served as the dependent variable.

### Procedure and Materials

**Personality measure.** Narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979). The NPI contains 40 forced-choice items (range = 0–40). In this study, high narcissism scores were 18 or above; low narcissism scores were 11 or below. The NPI is designed for use in normal (i.e., nonclinical) populations, although there is evidence that it is useful in clinical samples as well (Prifitera & Ryan, 1984). The NPI is the most frequently used measure of narcissism in normal populations and exhibits good reliability and validity (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

**Ideal partner descriptions.** Participants were asked to imagine their ideal romantic partner. They were then asked to list the five most important qualities of their ideal romantic partner. The most important quality was to be listed first, followed by the second, third, fourth, and fifth most important qualities.

### Results

#### Data-Analytic Strategy

The data-analytic strategy for Study 1 had two steps. First, the qualities that participants listed as most important in an ideal romantic partner were coded on dimensions derived from the self-orientation model. Second, qualities listed as most important by narcissists and nonnarcissists were compared with chi-square analyses.

#### Coding Descriptions

The most important qualities in an ideal romantic partner listed by participants were coded on four primary dimensions: (a) qualities referring to the ideal partner admiring the participant (*admiring*; e.g., "admiring," "interested in me," "respectful"), (b) qualities referring to the ideal partner being highly positive or ideal (*perfect*; e.g., "ambitious," "confident," "good looking"), (c) qualities referring to the ideal partner being caring (*caring*; e.g., "caring," "compassionate," "thoughtful"), and (d) qualities referring to the ideal partner being emotionally needy (*needy*; e.g., "clingy," "dependent," "needs me"). To retain consistency, I use these four terms (i.e., admiring, perfect, caring, needy) throughout this article.

Two additional categories were used in the coding: (a) qualities referring to the ideal partner having a sense of humor (*humor*; e.g., "funny," "humorous") and (b) qualities referring to the ideal partner possessing values or honesty (*values*; e.g., "honest," "interested in family life," "moral"). Although humor and values were coded as separate categories, I tentatively considered them to be subcategories of perfect and caring, respectively. Humor reflects a positive quality of a partner, and values reflect a focus on interpersonal relatedness.

These coding schemes used were based, in part, on a pilot study of 18 participants. Two research assistants, who were unaware of

the narcissism condition of the participants, coded the responses independently in the present study. The level of agreement between coders was 94%. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

#### Analyzing Responses

The most important quality reported by each participant was placed into one of the six coding categories or an "other" category. There were too few admiring ( $n = 3$ ) or needy ( $n = 1$ ) responses to analyze. The focus, then, was placed on the perfect and caring responses.

A chi-square was used to examine the number of perfect and caring responses made by narcissists and nonnarcissists,  $\chi^2(1, N = 42) = 3.68, p < .026$ . The pattern of responses was consistent with predictions. Narcissists ( $n = 13$ ) listed a perfect quality more frequently than did nonnarcissists ( $n = 5$ ). In contrast, nonnarcissists listed more caring qualities ( $n = 15$ ) than did narcissists ( $n = 9$ ; see Table 1).

This pattern remained when the humor and values qualities were added to perfect and caring, respectively,  $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 5.63, p < .009$ . Narcissists ( $n = 20$ ) listed more perfect-humor qualities than did nonnarcissists ( $n = 8$ ), whereas nonnarcissists listed more caring-values qualities ( $n = 35$ ) than did narcissists ( $n = 25$ ). Eighty-eight of the 102 most important qualities listed by participants (86%) were accounted for with the inclusion of the humor and values qualities.

#### Summary

The results of Study 1 were consistent with the self-orientation model. On the one hand, narcissism was related to desiring a romantic partner whose most important quality was being self-oriented (e.g., ambition, physical attractiveness, or confidence). Narcissists preferred a partner who enabled self-enhancement by means of identification (i.e., perfect). On the other hand, nonnarcissists reported qualities related to caring (e.g., caring, considerate, and intimate) to be more important in an ideal romantic partner. This pattern of responses remained stable when humor was added to the category of perfect and values were added to the category of caring. This study served as an important first step in testing the model because it demonstrated the predicted pattern of responses in a highly unstructured face-valid procedure.

One unexpected finding emerged from Study 1. Qualities reflecting admiration and emotional neediness were not desired highly by either narcissists or nonnarcissists. Although this finding

Table 1  
Study 1: Narcissism and Description of Ideal Romantic Partner

Narcissism	Description of ideal romantic partner			
	Perfect	Caring	Perfect and humor	Caring and values
High	13	9	20	25
Low	5	15	8	35
Total	18	24	28	60

Note. Values reflect number of participants describing quality as most important in ideal romantic partner.

is not inconsistent with the self-orientation model, it does suggest that the most important elements in the model will reflect idealization and caring. I paid careful attention to this possibility in the remaining studies.

## Study 2

Study 1 supported the self-orientation model using a free-response method. This method had several benefits, including, as mentioned, high face validity. Nevertheless, Study 1 lacked precision because the qualities of the romantic partners were generated by participants rather than manipulated experimentally. In particular, Study 1 did not test two specific links in the model: admiration and neediness.

I designed Study 2 to investigate experimentally the relation between narcissism and attraction to self-oriented targets (i.e., targets suggesting the potential for advantageous self-regulation by means of admiration and identification) and other-oriented targets (i.e., targets suggesting the potential for caring or emotional dependence). I predicted that narcissism would be related to a pattern of romantic attraction that emphasizes self-oriented targets vis-à-vis other-oriented targets. More specifically, narcissism would be positively correlated with attraction to the admiring target and the perfect target. At the same time, narcissism would be negatively correlated with attraction to the targets who are caring or emotionally dependent.

## Method

### Participants and Design

Participants were 110 undergraduate students (59 women, 51 men). One male participant was dropped for failing to complete the questionnaire, leaving a total of 109. The design was mixed with four factors. The categorical independent variables were gender (female, male), target (admiring, caring, perfect, needy), and order of target presentation. Target was the within-participants variable. One continuous variable, narcissism, was used. Additionally, a continuous measure of self-esteem was included as a covariate. A romantic-attraction rating served as the dependent variable.

### Procedure and Materials

**Overview.** Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire booklet. The first part of the booklet contained the measures of narcissism and self-esteem. The second part led participants through a written scenario involving a social gathering. Participants were then asked to rate four hypothetical targets (an admiring individual, an individual who offered the potential for identification, a caring individual, and an emotionally dependent individual) on romantic attractiveness. Finally, participants were asked to rank order these targets on romantic attractiveness.

**Personality measures.** Two personality measures, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) and the NPI, were administered to participants in that order. The RSE (range = 10–90) is a 10-item measure of global self-esteem. Both the reliability (Fleming & Courtney, 1984) and validity (Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Lorr & Wunderlich, 1986) of this measure are satisfactory.

**Attraction scenario and targets.** Participants were asked to imagine that they were at a party with a group of friends and strangers. They were then asked to imagine that a friend introduced them to four persons of the opposite sex (i.e., targets). Later in the evening, the same friend described these four persons in more detail.

Each of the four targets was designated with a pair of initials, thus allowing for representation of either a male or a female. For representational clarity, and consistent with Study 1, I refer to the targets as admiring, perfect, caring, and needy. The first two targets, admiring and perfect, were designed to tap into narcissistic self-enhancement by means of admiration and identification (i.e., self-oriented targets). The second two targets, caring and needy, were designed to tap into intimacy needs (i.e., other-oriented targets).

The first target, admiring, was described as someone who thought the participant was "terrific," the "best looking person at the party," "very charming," and "one of the most intelligent people he (she) had ever met." The second target, perfect, was described as "a really great person," "very popular and good-looking," "one of the top students at the school," one of "the best soccer players in the nation," and "someone who may enter the Olympics before attending medical school." The third target, caring, was described as a "really caring," "sensitive, sharing, compassionate, and friendly" individual who is "looking for a person to date with whom he (she) could be close, intimate friends." The final target, needy, was described as someone who needs "someone to care for him and love him," and someone who has "a lot of emotional needs" and who "really likes to talk through problems."

**Attraction dependent measure.** Participants completed the dependent measures of attraction for each of the four targets in a randomized standard order. The romantic attraction measure consisted of five items, which were measured on 7-point scales. I chose these items because they measure romantic attraction, or the extent to which one evaluates a target as a potential romantic partner (Foster, Witcher, Campbell, & Green, 1998). First, participants responded to the question, "How attractive do you find this person?" with scale anchors of *not at all* (1) and *very* (7). Next, participants responded to the questions, "How desirable would you find this person as a dating partner?" and "How much would you actually like to date this person?" with scale anchors of *not at all* (1) and *very* (7). Participants then answered the question, "How would you feel about yourself if you were dating this person?" with scale anchors of *very bad* (1) and *very good* (7). Finally, participants responded to the question, "How do you think your friends would feel about you if you were dating this person?" with scale anchors of *disapproving of me* (1) and *approving of me* (7).

After the rating task, participants rank ordered the four targets on each of the five items. After the completion of this task, participants were debriefed, thanked, and excused.

## Results

### Data-Analytic Strategy

The data-analytic strategy in Study 2 had four steps. First, I generated descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent measures. Second, I examined the relation between narcissism and romantic attraction with correlations and regression analyses. Third, I replicated these analyses with self-esteem in the model. Finally, I examined the relation of narcissism to the romantic-attraction rankings.

### Personality Measures

Participants reported an average NPI score of 17.36 ( $SD = 6.88$ ) and a median of 17.00 (range = 5–35). Participants reported an average RSE score of 74.17 ( $SD = 11.58$ ) and a median of 76.00 (range = 38–90). The correlation between the measures was significant,  $r(107) = .27, p < .004$ .

Table 2  
*Study 2: Correlations Between and Rankings of Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Attraction*

Variable	Target of attraction				
	Admiring	Perfect	Caring	Needy	Index
Correlations					
RSE	.02	.17†	.02	.01	.07
NPI	.16†	.24*	-.21*	-.01	.28**
Authority	.14	.20*	-.03	-.02	.18†
Exhibitionism	.03	.15	-.23*	.05	.16†
Superiority	.19*	.10	.03	.08	.08
Entitlement	.14	.21*	-.18†	-.09	.29**
Exploitativeness	.04	.15	-.27**	-.02	.21*
Self-sufficiency	.01	.20†	-.03	-.08	.16†
Vanity	.20*	.01	-.17†	.04	.15
Rankings					
Mean NPI	20.46	19.12	14.45	14.33	
Cell size	13	51	40	3	

Note. RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.  
 †  $p < .10$  (marginally significant). \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Creation of Attraction Rating Scales

The five attraction items that referred to the admiring target were summed to create an index of romantic attraction. This new composite measure had a mean of 24.27 ( $SD = 5.96$ , range = 8–35). The internal consistency of the composite romantic attraction scale was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ . The same procedure was followed for each of the remaining three targets. For the perfect target, the internal consistency of the attraction index was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ . This index had a mean of 27.11 ( $SD = 5.63$ , range = 10–35). For the caring target, the internal consistency of the attraction index was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ . This index had a mean of 28.10 ( $SD = 5.97$ , range = 7–35). For the needy target, the internal consistency of the attraction index was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ . This index had a mean of 18.35 ( $SD = 6.67$ , range = 5–35).

### Narcissism and Attraction Ratings

The self-orientation model predicts that narcissists will be attracted to potential romantic partners who satisfy needs of the self by means of the process of admiration and identification (i.e., admiring and perfect). However, narcissists will be relatively less attracted to potential romantic partners who offer intimacy (i.e., caring and needy). As an initial test of this model, I created a new variable by summing attraction to the admiring and perfect targets and subtracting from this the sum of the attraction to the caring and needy targets. I use the term *self-orientation index* to describe this new variable ( $M = 5.04$ ,  $SD = 13.22$ , range = -33–36). The use of this new variable served two purposes: (a) It was a proxy for self-orientation in attraction, and (b) it removed the within-participants variance in the design.

An initial regression analysis revealed no gender or order effects. I dropped these variables from the model and will not discuss them further. Next, I examined the relation between narcissism and the self-orientation index of attraction. As predicted, this relation was significant,  $r(107) = .28$ ,  $p < .004$  (see Table 2). I then

examined the role of self-esteem in this relation by using participants' NPI and RSE scores as predictor variables and the self-orientation index as the outcome variable in a regression analysis. The effect of self-esteem was not significant,  $\beta = -.008$ ,  $t(106) = -.080$ ,  $p < .936$ ; however, the effect of narcissism remained significant,  $\beta = .277$ ,  $t(106) = 2.851$ ,  $p < .005$ . The observed effect was driven by narcissism and not the related variable of self-esteem.

To obtain a more precise view of the effect, I decomposed the self-orientation index into the four targets (i.e., admiring, perfect, caring, and needy). Narcissism was associated marginally and positively with attraction to the admiring target,  $r(107) = .16$ ,  $p < .091$ ; positively with attraction to the perfect target,  $r(107) = .24$ ,  $p < .013$ ; and negatively with attraction to the caring target,  $r(107) = -.21$ ,  $p < .027$ . Narcissism was not associated with attraction to the needy target,  $r(107) = -.01$ ,  $p < .905$ . All of these findings are consistent with the model except for the lack of a negative relation between narcissism and attraction to the emotionally dependent target.<sup>2</sup>

To better understand the relation between narcissism and attraction, I examined the correlations between the seven facets of narcissism and romantic attraction (see Table 2). Although interpreting several correlations without a priori hypotheses is problematic, several interesting findings are noted. First, nearly all of the correlations are in the expected direction. This suggests that all the facets of narcissism correlate with the dependent measures in

<sup>2</sup> Certain questions on the NPI ask about the need for attention or admiration. This may account for the results of Study 2. This issue can be addressed empirically by eliminating the attention-admiration items from the NPI and reassessing the attraction effects. Correlations after removing four items (7, 26, 30, 38) that have to do with admiration are essentially the same as those reported with the entire NPI: for the self-orientation index,  $r = .27$ ,  $p = .004$ ; for admiring,  $r = .15$ ,  $p = .11$ ; for caring,  $r = -.22$ ,  $p = .019$ ; for perfect,  $r = .24$ ,  $p = .014$ ; and for needy,  $r = -.002$ ,  $p = .98$ .

a similar way and that these findings are not simply driven by one or two facets of narcissism (e.g., vanity or superiority). Second, certain facets of narcissism are related to attraction toward specific targets, and in most of these cases the reason for this relation is interpretable. For example, attraction to the admiring target is strongly related to vanity and superiority, whereas attraction to the perfect target is strongly related to entitlement. In addition, the negative relation between narcissism and attraction to the caring target is most evident in individuals who were high on the dimension of exploitativeness.

### *Narcissism and Attraction Rankings*

Participants rank ordered the four targets on the measures of attraction. To analyze these data, I used the target ranked most attractive by each participant (i.e., admiring, perfect, caring, needy) as the predictor variable in an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The outcome variable was narcissism. This overall main effect of target was significant,  $F(3, 103) = 5.05, p < .003$  (see Table 2). Inspection of the cell means revealed a pattern of findings similar to the attraction-rating data. To analyze these effects, I contrasted the self-oriented cells (admiring and perfect) with the other-oriented cells (caring and needy). This difference was significant,  $F(1, 103) = 5.99, p < .016$ . I did not compare all four cells because of widely disparate cell sizes. The main effect of target remained significant even when self-esteem was used as a covariate,  $F(3, 102) = 4.59, p < .005$ . Overall, the ranking data are consistent with the model. The participants who ranked either of the self-oriented targets (admiring and perfect) as most attractive were significantly more narcissistic than participants who ranked either of the other-oriented cells (caring and needy) as most attractive. This finding, as the covariate analysis demonstrates, is not driven by the overlap of narcissism with self-esteem.

### *Summary*

The results of Study 2 supported the self-orientation model. Narcissism was positively related to attraction to self-oriented targets as opposed to other-oriented targets. When this overall finding was decomposed into specific targets, the model was confirmed in the case of three of four targets (i.e., admiring, perfect, and caring). Attraction to the target who was considered needy was not negatively related to narcissism as the model would predict. This finding is consistent with the general lack of romantic interest for needy targets expressed in Study 1. Indeed, only 3 participants in Study 2 ranked the needy target as most attractive. It is interesting, however, that these participants had an average NPI score of 14.33—descriptively below the sample average of 17.36. Overall, rankings of attraction yielded similar results to the ratings of attraction. The average narcissism score of the participants who ranked the self-oriented targets as more attractive were higher than the average narcissism score of the participants who ranked the other-oriented targets as more attractive. Finally, although narcissism and self-esteem were correlated, adding self-esteem to the models did not eliminate the effect of narcissism. I also found no independent effects of self-esteem. These results rule out a simple self-esteem explanation of these findings and suggest that the nonshared variance in narcissism plays an important role in romantic attraction.

### Study 3

One important question not addressed in Studies 1 and 2 involves the interactive nature of the two paths toward narcissistic self-enhancement, namely, admiration and identification. In the literature, these two processes have typically been conceptualized independently. A plausible argument, however, could be made for an interactive relation between these two strategies. A narcissist will be more attracted to an individual who is nearly perfect and is very admiring of the narcissist than he or she will be to a target who is imperfect and admiring or perfect and disdainful. Why might this be the case? It may be due to the threat for the narcissist associated with becoming romantically attracted to a perfect target. The threat is that the target will not return the narcissist's attraction, thus reducing the positivity of the narcissist's self-concept. If the target admires the narcissist, however, this threat should be diminished, thereby increasing the potential for self-enhancement by means of identification. Similarly, admiration from a perfect target will do far more for the narcissist's self-esteem than will admiration from an imperfect target.

In addition to the question of interaction, there is also another issue left unaddressed in Study 2. This study did not contain targets with low levels of the qualities of interest (e.g., noncaring, nonperfect, nonadmiring). If the self-orientation model is correct, narcissism should interact with these qualities. For example, narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, should display an enhanced preference for perfect vis-à-vis nonperfect targets. Demonstrating the links in the model using this more complex design would further confirm the tenets of the model.

I addressed both these issues in Study 3 using an experimental paradigm similar to that used in Study 2 but containing high and low levels of the qualities of interest (i.e., admiring, perfect, caring). I predicted that, for narcissists, the effects of admiration and identification would be interactive. Specifically, narcissists would find targets who are both admiring and highly positive (i.e., perfect) more attractive than either an admiring target or a highly positive target. I also predicted that the results of Study 3 would replicate those of Study 2 in that narcissists would show a preference for perfect and admiring targets and a lack of preference for caring targets. I did not include an emotionally needy target in Study 3 because participants did not show a preference for the needy target in the first two studies.

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Design*

Participants were 156 (92 women, 64 men) undergraduate students. The design was mixed with six factors. The categorical independent variables were perfect (high, low), admiring (high, low), caring (high, low), gender (female, male), and order of target presentation. Perfect, admiring, and caring were within-participants variables. One continuous variable, narcissism, was used. Additionally, a continuous measure of self-esteem was included as a covariate. A romantic-attraction rating served as the dependent variable.

#### *Procedure and Materials*

The experiment was similar to Study 2 in that it required participants to complete a questionnaire booklet. The first part of this booklet contained personality measures (i.e., NPI and RSE); the second part contained a



scenario and eight targets for participants to rate. Participants were asked to imagine that they were at a party with a group of friends and strangers. Participants then were asked to imagine that a friend introduced them to eight persons (i.e., targets) of the opposite sex. Later in the evening, the same friend described these persons in more detail.

As in Study 2, each target was designated with initials, thus allowing for representation of either a male (for female participants) or a female (for male participants) target.<sup>3</sup> The ratings of romantic attraction were the same as those used in Study 2. Ranking measures were not included.

## Results

### Data-Analytic Strategy

First, I generated descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent measures. Second, I examined the relation between narcissism and romantic attraction using regression analyses. Finally, I replicated these regression analyses with self-esteem in the model.

### Descriptive Statistics

Participants reported an average NPI score of 16.39 ( $SD = 6.47$ ) and a median of 17.00 (range = 2–31). Participants reported an average RSE score of 72.32 ( $SD = 11.82$ ) and a median of 74.00 (range = 32–90). The correlation between the measures was significant,  $r(154) = .23, p < .004$ .

Romantic-attraction ratings were created in the same way as in Study 2. The attraction score for each of the five items in the romantic-attraction index was averaged to create an attraction rating for each of the eight targets. Cronbach alphas for these targets were high, ranging from .93 to .96.

### Narcissism and Attraction Ratings

These data were analyzed in a mixed model, with perfect, admiring, caring, and narcissism as independent variables and with romantic attraction as the dependent variable. Gender and order did not interact with narcissism, so they were not included in the model. As in Study 2, the analyses were conducted both with and without self-esteem as a covariate. As expected, there were main effects of perfect, admiring, and caring. On average, individuals reported greater attraction to perfect than to nonperfect targets, to admiring than to nonadmiring targets, and to caring than to non-

Table 3  
Study 3: Narcissism and Attraction to  
Perfect and Caring Targets

Level	Narcissism	
	High	Low
Perfect target		
High	4.18	4.02
Low	2.39	2.57
Caring target		
High	4.03	4.16
Low	2.53	2.43

Note. Numbers refer to predicted values.

Table 4  
Study 3: Narcissism and Attraction to  
Perfect  $\times$  Admiring Target

Target	Narcissism	
	High	Low
High admiring		
High perfect	5.19	4.96
Low perfect	2.95	3.21
Low admiring		
High perfect	3.18	3.09
Low perfect	1.81	1.92

Note. Numbers refer to predicted values.

caring targets. These are not discussed because they are not directly relevant to the article.

**Perfect.** As predicted, there was a Perfect  $\times$  Narcissism interaction,  $F(1, 154) = 3.862, p < .051$ . This interaction was also evident when self-esteem was used as a covariate,  $F(1, 153) = 4.193, p < .042$ . To better understand the pattern of data underlying this interaction, I calculated predicted values (see Table 3). Consistent with hypotheses, the pattern of predicted values demonstrates that the effect of perfect is greater for narcissists than for nonnarcissists.

**Admiring.** There was no significant Admiring  $\times$  Narcissism interaction,  $F(1, 154) = 0.001, p < .971$ . This interaction was also not evident when self-esteem was used as a covariate,  $F(1, 153) = 0.391, p < .532$ . As predicted, however, there was a marginally significant Admiring  $\times$  Perfect  $\times$  Narcissism interaction,  $F(1, 154) = 2.674, p = .10$ . This interaction was significant when self-esteem was used as a covariate,  $F(1, 153) = 4.443, p < .037$ .

To better understand this triple interaction, I first decomposed the interaction on the variable of admiring. I then examined the relation between narcissism and attraction reported for high- versus low-perfect targets separately for the high-admiring and low-admiring conditions. In the high-admiring condition, narcissism was associated positively with attraction to the high-perfect compared with the low-perfect target,  $\beta = .180, t(154) = 2.274, p < .024$ . In the low-admiring condition, narcissism was not associated with attraction to the high-perfect compared with the low-perfect target,  $\beta = .015, t(154) = 1.135, p < .258$ .

I calculated predicted values (see Table 4). Consistent with hypotheses, the pattern of predicted values demonstrated that narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, show a greater preference for the target who admires them and is perfect and a lesser preference for the target who admires them and is not perfect. This pattern, although similar, is not as pronounced in the low-admiring condition.

**Caring.** Consistent with predictions, there was a marginally significant Caring  $\times$  Narcissism interaction,  $F(1, 154) = 2.777,$

<sup>3</sup> Although the initials could represent male or female targets, the pronouns used in each description were gender specific (i.e., female participants were presented with male targets and male participants were presented with female targets). Therefore, data from self-identified homosexual participants (Study 3,  $n = 2$ ; Study 4,  $n = 1$ ) were not used.

$p < .098$ . This interaction was also evident when self-esteem was used as a covariate,  $F(1, 153) = 3.057, p < .082$ . To better understand the pattern of data underlying this interaction, I calculated predicted values (see Table 3). Consistent with the hypotheses, the pattern of predicted values demonstrates that the effect of caring is greater for nonnarcissists than for narcissists.

### Summary

Study 3 was designed to extend the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in two ways. First, the design of Study 3 made it possible to examine the interactive effects on romantic attraction of partners who are admiring and perfect. Narcissists displayed a relative preference for targets who were both admiring and highly positive. Second, the design of Study 3 made it possible to replicate the results of Study 2 using targets that contained both high and low levels of the three qualities of interest. Indeed, the use of this methodology revealed results that were generally consistent with those of Study 2. Narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, were more attracted to perfect targets and were less attracted to caring targets. However, narcissists did not display enhanced romantic attraction for admiring targets, except when those admiring targets were also perfect. This is an important qualification to the self-orientation model. Therefore, Study 4 focused on the most important qualities in distinguishing romantic partners preferred by narcissists from those preferred by nonnarcissists. Specifically, Study 4 examined targets who were perfect and caring.

### Study 4

The first three studies uncovered the proposed link between narcissism and romantic attraction. Specifically, narcissism is associated positively with attraction to individuals who offer the potential to enhance the narcissist's self-concept by means of identification (i.e., perfect individuals), particularly when these individuals admire the narcissist, and is associated negatively with attraction to caring individuals. Study 4 was designed to provide a highly definitive test of this theoretically predicted pattern of romantic attraction. In Study 4, I presented participants with a clear-cut choice between two targets. One target was perfect but not caring, whereas the other target was caring but not perfect. I predicted that, even in this situation, narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, would be more attracted to the perfect-noncaring target than to the caring-nonperfect target.

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Participants were 51 (32 women, 20 men) undergraduate students. The design was mixed with four factors. The categorical independent variables were gender (female, male), target (perfect-noncaring, caring-nonperfect), and order of target presentation. Target was the within-participants variable. One continuous variable, narcissism, was used. Additionally, a continuous measure of self-esteem was included as a covariate. A romantic-attraction rating served as the dependent variable.

#### Procedure and Materials

The experiment was similar to Studies 2 and 3 in that it required participants to complete a questionnaire booklet. The first part of this

booklet contained personality measures (i.e., NPI and RSE); the second part contained a scenario and two targets for participants to rate.

Participants were asked to imagine that they were at a party with a group of friends and strangers. Participants then were asked to imagine that a friend introduced them to two persons (i.e., targets) of the opposite sex. Participants were told that the targets had "positive impressions" of them. Later in the evening, the same friend described these persons in more detail.

As in Studies 2 and 3, each target was designated with a pair of initials. After reading a description of the targets, participants rated and ranked them on attractiveness. These measures of romantic attraction (i.e., rating and ranking) were the same as those used in Study 2.

### Results

#### Data-Analytic Strategy

The data-analytic strategy for Study 4 was similar to that used in Study 2. I began by generating descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent measures. Then I examined the relation between narcissism and romantic attraction using correlation and regression analyses. Next, I replicated these analyses with self-esteem in the model. Finally, I examined the relation of narcissism to the romantic-attraction rankings.

#### Descriptive Statistics

Participants reported an average NPI score of 16.72 ( $SD = 6.42$ ) and a median of 17.50 (range = 3–29). Participants reported an average RSE score of 71.36 ( $SD = 14.24$ ) and a median of 75.00 (range = 29–90). The correlation between the measures was significant,  $r(50) = .32, p < .021$ .

The five attraction items that referred to the perfect-noncaring target were summed to create an index of romantic attraction. This new composite measure had a mean of 20.02 ( $SD = 6.78$ , range = 6–35). The internal consistency of the composite romantic attraction scale was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ . For caring-nonperfect, the internal consistency of the attraction index was also high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ . This index had a mean of 23.04 ( $SD = 5.44$ , range = 5–32).

#### Narcissism and Attraction Ratings

I created a new variable by subtracting attraction for the caring-nonperfect target from the perfect-noncaring target ( $M = -3.02$ ,  $SD = 9.97$ , range = -21–30). As in previous studies, I refer to this as the self-orientation index. The use of this new variable served two purposes: (a) It represented self-orientation in relation to other-orientation in attraction, and (b) it removed the within-participants variance in the design.

An initial regression analysis revealed no gender or order effects. I dropped these variables from the model and will not discuss them further. Next, I examined the relation between narcissism and the self-orientation index of attraction. As predicted, this relation was significant,  $r(50) = .35, p < .011$ .

I then examined the role of self-esteem in this relation by using participants' NPI and RSE scores as predictor variables and attraction as the outcome variable in a regression analysis. The effect of self-esteem was not significant,  $\beta = -.126, t(49) = -.895, p < .375$ ; however, the effect of narcissism remained significant,  $\beta =$

.388,  $t(49) = 2.768$   $p < .008$ . The observed effect was driven by narcissism and not the related variable of self-esteem.

To obtain a more precise view of the effect, I decomposed the self-orientation index into the two targets (i.e., perfect-noncaring, caring-nonperfect). Then I correlated the ratings of these two targets with narcissism. Narcissism was associated positively with attraction to the perfect-noncaring target,  $r(50) = .49$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Narcissism was not associated with attraction to the caring-nonperfect target,  $r(50) = -.02$ ,  $p < .862$ .

Finally, I examined the correlations between the seven facets of narcissism and romantic attraction (see Table 5). As in Study 2, all of the correlations with the self-orientation index were in the expected positive direction. Also as in Study 2, the entitlement facet had the largest correlation (descriptively) with the self-orientation index. This correlation reflects the large correlation of entitlement with attraction to the perfect-noncaring target.

### Narcissism and Attraction Rankings

The attraction ranking provided what is arguably the clearest test of the hypotheses. Participants were given a choice between the two targets. Participants rank ordered the two targets as to who was more attractive as a dating partner. To analyze these data, I used the target ranked most attractive by each participant as the predictor variable in an ANOVA. The outcome variable was narcissism. This overall main effect of target was significant,  $F(1, 50) = 5.38$ ,  $p < .024$ . Inspection of the cell means revealed a pattern of findings similar to the attraction-rating data. The average narcissism score of the individuals who found the perfect-noncaring target more attractive ( $n = 16$ ,  $M = 19.69$ ) was significantly higher than the average narcissism score of the individuals who found the caring-nonperfect target more attractive ( $n = 36$ ,  $M = 15.40$ ). The main effect of target remained significant even when self-esteem was used as a covariate,  $F(1, 49) = 6.24$ ,  $p < .016$ . On the basis of these findings, narcissism is not only associated with a relative preference for the perfect-noncaring versus caring-nonperfect target, but also, when given a choice between a perfect-noncaring individual and a caring-nonperfect individual, narcissists exhibit an absolute preference for the perfect-noncaring individual.

Table 5  
Study 4: Correlations Between Narcissism,  
Self-Esteem, and Attraction

Variable	Target of attraction		Index
	Perfect-noncaring	Caring-nonperfect	
RSE	.03	.04	.00
NPI	.49**	-.02	.35*
Authority	.42**	.07	.24†
Exhibitionism	.26†	-.05	.20
Superiority	.30*	.10	.14
Entitlement	.55**	-.14	.45**
Exploitativeness	.27†	-.13	.26†
Self-sufficiency	.28*	-.04	.21
Vanity	.10	.03	.05

Note. RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.

†  $p < .10$  (marginally significant). \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Summary

Study 4 provided the most compelling test of the self-orientation model thus far. Participants were presented with two targets that were diametrically opposed: a target that was perfect but not caring and a target that was caring but not perfect. As predicted by the model, narcissists preferred a perfect target who did not want intimacy over the caring target who was less than perfect. This preference was not just evidenced in a handful of participants. Over 25% of participants found the perfect-noncaring target to be more attractive, and these participants ( $M = 19.69$ ) reported narcissism scores above the sample mean ( $M = 16.72$ ).

### Study 5

In the first four studies, narcissism has been linked to a specific pattern of attraction. Narcissism is positively associated with attraction to perfect individuals, particularly when these individuals admire the narcissist, and is negatively associated with attraction to caring individuals. This preference on the part of narcissists has been associated theoretically to a self-regulatory process; that is, narcissists are attracted differentially to these perfect-noncaring individuals as part of a strategy for maintaining a positive self-concept.

In Study 5, I tested more directly the proposition that narcissists' pattern of romantic attraction is indicative of an interpersonal self-enhancement strategy. I examined the role that self-enhancement needs (both in terms of esteem and status) play in mediating the link between narcissism and attraction to perfect-noncaring rather than caring-nonperfect others.

In addition to examining the mediational role of self-enhancement, I looked at similarity as another potential mediator of the narcissism-attraction link. Research on attraction has shown that individuals are attracted to others whom they perceive to be similar (Byrne, 1971). Arguably, narcissists' attraction to the perfect-noncaring target may be the result of the narcissists' perceived similarity to that target. Indeed, even Freud (1914/1957) hinted at the role of similarity in narcissists' choice of partners when he noted that a narcissist is likely to be attracted to "what he himself is" (p. 90).

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Participants were 68 (49 women, 19 men) undergraduate students. The design was mixed with four factors. The categorical independent variables were gender (female, male), target (perfect-noncaring, caring-nonperfect), and order of target presentation. Target was the within-participants variable. One continuous variable, narcissism, was used. Additionally, a continuous measure of self-esteem was included as a covariate. Ratings of status, esteem, similarity, and romantic attraction served as the dependent variables.

#### Procedure and Materials

This study was identical to Study 4, with one exception. Specifically, five questions that measured the mediators were presented to participants before the romantic-attraction dependent measure. As in Study 4, participants completed the NPI and the RSE. Next, participants were asked to imagine that they were at a party with a group of friends and strangers.

Participants then were asked to imagine that a friend introduced them to two persons (i.e., targets) of the opposite sex. Participants were told that the targets had "positive impressions" of them. Later in the evening, the same friend described these persons in more detail. Participants were then asked to respond to a series of questions about the targets.

Five 7-point scales were used to measure the three mediators. Status was measured with two items: "How popular would you feel if you were dating this person?" and "How important would you feel if you were dating this person?" Esteem was measured with two items: "How positive would you feel about yourself if you were dating this person?" and "How much self-esteem would you have if you were dating this person?" Similarity was measured with one item: "How similar are you to this person?" All of these questions were responded to on 7-point scales with anchors of *not at all* (1) and *very* (7), except the second self-esteem item which had anchors of *very little* (1) and *very much* (7).

Finally, participants rated and ranked the targets on attractiveness. These measures of romantic attraction (rating and ranking) were the same as those used in Study 4.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Participants reported an average NPI score of 16.85 ( $SD = 6.80$ ) and a median of 17.00 (range = 3–35). Participants reported an average RSE score of 72.82 ( $SD = 12.68$ ) and a median of 75.00 (range = 30–90). The correlation between the measures was significant,  $r(66) = .50, p < .0005$ .

The five attraction items that referred to the perfect–noncaring target were summed to create an index of romantic attraction. This new composite measure had a mean of 17.28 ( $SD = 6.04$ , range = 7–30). The internal consistency of the composite romantic attraction index was high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ . For caring–nonperfect, the internal consistency of the attraction index was also high, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ . This index had a mean of 20.82 ( $SD = 6.18$ , range = 7–35).

### Strategy for Mediation Analyses

**Overview.** Demonstrating the mediational role of importance, esteem, and similarity in the narcissism–attraction relation required five steps (Baron & Kenny, 1986). For the sake of clarity, I label these steps A–E. Step A is a demonstration of the link between narcissism and attraction to the self-oriented versus other-oriented targets (i.e., self-orientation index). This step is essentially a replication of Study 4. Step B is a demonstration of the link between narcissism and the mediators (i.e., importance, esteem, and similarity). Step C is a demonstration of a link between the mediators and attraction. Step D involves demonstrating that when narcissism and one of the three mediators are placed in a regression model with attraction as the dependent variable, the effect of narcissism will drop to nonsignificance and the effect of the mediator will remain significant. This step was repeated for each of the three mediators. Finally, Step E involves demonstrating that when narcissism and the three mediators are placed simultaneously in a regression model with attraction as the dependent variable, the effect of narcissism drops to nonsignificance and the effects of the mediators remain statistically significant.

**Step A: Narcissism to attraction (a replication).** The first step in the mediational analyses involved replicating the results of Study 4, that is, by demonstrating a link between narcissism and

attraction to a self-oriented versus other-oriented target. I began by creating a new variable (i.e., self-orientation index) by subtracting caring–nonperfect from perfect–noncaring ( $M = -3.54$ ,  $SD = 9.70$ , range =  $-27$ – $17$ ).

An initial regression analysis revealed no gender or order effects. I dropped these variables from the model and will not discuss them further. Next, I examined the relation between narcissism and the self-orientation index of attraction. As predicted, this relation was significant,  $r(66) = .32, p < .007$ . This result replicates the results of Study 4. This effect remains significant when placed in a regression model with self-esteem,  $\beta = .355, t(65) = 2.636, p < .010$ . The effect of self-esteem is not significant in this model,  $\beta = -.061, t(65) = -.450, p < .654$ .

When this result was decomposed into specific targets, narcissism correlated positively with attraction to the perfect–noncaring target,  $r(66) = .26, p < .036$ , and negatively with the caring–nonperfect target,  $r(66) = -.26, p < .031$ . The latter finding is statistically significant, which differs from Study 4, but is consistent with theory.

To examine target rankings, I used the target ranked most attractive by each participant as the predictor variable in an ANOVA. The outcome variable was narcissism. I found a marginally significant main effect of target,  $F(1, 66) = 2.875, p < .095$ . The average narcissism score of the individuals who found the perfect–noncaring target most attractive ( $n = 23, M = 18.78$ ) was higher than the average narcissism score of the individuals who found the caring–nonperfect target most attractive ( $n = 45, M = 15.87$ ). The main effect of target remained marginally significant even when I used self-esteem as a covariate,  $F(1, 65) = 3.339, p < .072$ .

**Step B: Narcissism to mediators.** The next step in examining the mediational role that status, esteem, and similarity play in the positive relation between narcissism and attraction was to establish a relation between narcissism and each of the three mediators. (The value of each of these mediators was calculated in the same way as the dependent variable; the value for the caring–nonperfect target was subtracted from the value for the perfect–noncaring target.) Correlations demonstrated a positive relation between NPI scores and status,  $r(66) = .40, p < .001$ ; esteem,  $r(66) = .35, p < .003$ ; and similarity,  $r(66) = .49, p < .0005$ .

**Step C: Mediators to attraction.** Next I examined the associations between each of the three mediators and the dependent measure. Correlations demonstrated a positive relation between attraction and status,  $r(66) = .40, p < .001$ ; esteem,  $r(66) = .70, p < .0005$ ; and similarity,  $r(66) = .65, p < .0005$ .

**Step D: Narcissism and a single mediator to attraction.** To determine the mediational role of these three variables, I placed each variable separately in regression analyses with narcissism as the other predictor and attraction as the dependent measure. If the predicted mediation is occurring, the effect of narcissism should drop to nonsignificance, whereas the effect of the mediator should remain significant. This was indeed the case for each of the three mediators: (a) status,  $\beta = .323, t(65) = 2.651, p < .010$ ; NPI,  $\beta = .195, t(65) = 1.600, p < .114$ , (b) esteem,  $\beta = .663, t(65) = 6.999, p < .0005$ ; NPI,  $\beta = .091, t(65) = .966, p < .338$ , and (c) similarity,  $\beta = .645, t(65) = 5.961, p < .0005$ ; NPI,  $\beta = .008, t(65) = .078, p < .938$ . All three of these variables mediated separately the narcissism–attraction link.

*Step E: Narcissism and three mediators to attraction.* As a next step, I conducted a regression analysis in which all three mediators and narcissism simultaneously served as predictors and attraction served as the dependent measure. The standardized regression coefficients associated with two mediating variables remained significant: esteem,  $\beta = .450$ ,  $t(63) = 4.240$ ,  $p < .0005$ , and similarity,  $\beta = .391$ ,  $t(63) = 3.645$ ,  $p < .001$ . The standardized regression coefficients associated with narcissism,  $\beta = -.062$ ,  $t(63) = -.636$ ,  $p < .527$ , and status,  $\beta = .090$ ,  $t(63) = .939$ ,  $p < .351$ , were not significant.

The aforementioned analysis demonstrated that esteem and similarity play independent mediating roles in the narcissism–attraction link. The effect of status as a mediator, however, appears to be more complex. One possibility is that status mediates the link between narcissism and esteem. This was tested in a regression model with narcissism and status as predictors and esteem as the dependent measure. Indeed, status,  $\beta = .380$ ,  $t(65) = 3.228$ ,  $p < .002$ , mediated this relationship, and the mediation was partial because the effect of narcissism remained marginally significant,  $\beta = .199$ ,  $t(65) = 1.693$ ,  $p < .095$ . Similarity was substituted for esteem and the analysis was repeated. Status,  $\beta = .158$ ,  $t(65) = 1.353$ ,  $p < .181$ , did not mediate the link between narcissism,  $\beta = .427$ ,  $t(65) = 3.669$ ,  $p < .0005$ , and similarity. In a final model, esteem,  $\beta = .633$ ,  $t(64) = 6.186$ ,  $p < .0005$ , mediated the link between narcissism,  $\beta = .069$ ,  $t(64) = .693$ ,  $p < .491$ , and status,  $\beta = .082$ ,  $t(64) = .787$ ,  $p < .434$ , and attraction. The overall mediational model is displayed in Figure 1.

*Avoiding a potential criticism.* One potential criticism with this mediational model is the similarity between the mediators, particularly esteem, and the attraction-dependent measure, which contains two items that may be viewed as tapping self-esteem. All analyses involving the dependent measure were thus replicated with these two self-esteem measures removed from the dependent measure. The results did not change. The NPI,  $r(66) = .28$ ,  $p < .023$ , and the mediators—status,  $r(66) = .36$ ,  $p < .002$ ; esteem,  $r(66) = .63$ ,  $p < .0005$ ; and similarity  $r(66) = .64$ ,  $p < .0005$ —all correlated with the dependent measure. When all four of these measures were placed in a simultaneous regression analysis, the same pattern of results emerged. The effects of esteem,  $\beta = .382$ ,  $t(63) = 3.171$ ,  $p < .002$ , and similarity,  $\beta = .465$ ,  $t(63) = 3.954$ ,  $p < .0005$ , remained significant. The effects of narcissism,  $\beta = -.113$ ,  $t(63) = -1.078$ ,  $p < .285$ , and status,  $\beta = .090$ ,  $t(63) = .878$ ,  $p < .383$ , dropped to nonsignificance.

## Summary

Consistent with the self-orientation model, Study 5 provided an empirical demonstration of the mediational role of self-enhancement in narcissists' preference for perfect rather than caring romantic partners. Narcissists were attracted to self-oriented romantic partners to the extent that the narcissists perceived these potential romantic partners as providing a source of self-esteem. Furthermore, these potential romantic partners were more likely to be seen as a source of self-esteem to the extent that they provided the narcissist with a sense of popularity and importance (i.e., social status). Narcissists' preference for romantic partners reflects a strategy for interpersonal self-esteem regulation.

Narcissists also were attracted to self-oriented romantic partners to the extent that these others were viewed as similar. The mediational roles of self-enhancement and similarity were independent. That is, narcissists' romantic preferences were driven both by a desire to gain self-esteem and a desire to associate with similar others.

## General Discussion

### Overview

The goal of this research was to develop and test a theoretical model of narcissism and romantic attraction. As originally outlined, the self-orientation model predicted that narcissists would be attracted to admiring others and highly positive others who offered the potential for identification (i.e., self-oriented targets). At the same time, narcissists would be relatively less attracted to caring and emotionally needy others (i.e., other-oriented targets). The model proposes that these preferences are driven, in part, by narcissists' desire to gain and maintain self-esteem.

The results of five studies supported and extended the self-orientation model. In Study 1, narcissists, in contrast to nonnarcissists, reported spontaneously that it was most important for an ideal romantic partner to be self-oriented rather than other-oriented. The majority of traits that participants generated in Study 1 were coded as perfect and caring. Participants reported very few traits that were coded as admiring or emotionally needy. In Study 2, participants were presented with four hypothetical targets. Each target corresponded to a potential romantic partner with qualities relevant to the self-orientation model. These targets were self-oriented (i.e., perfect and admiring) and other-oriented (i.e., caring and needy). Consistent with the self-orientation model,

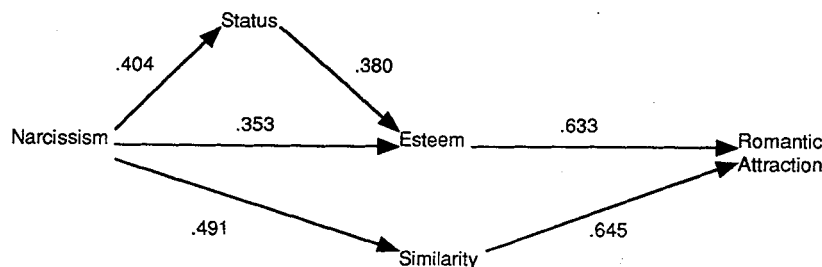


Figure 1. The mediational role of status, esteem, and similarity in the relation between narcissism and attraction to a self-oriented target. Numbers refer to standardized regression coefficients (all  $ps < .05$ ).

narcissists, in contrast to nonnarcissists, displayed a preference for the self-oriented targets and a corresponding lack of preference for the other-oriented targets. When romantic attraction was examined at the level of the individual target, narcissists exhibited a preference for the admiring and perfect target and an aversion to the caring target. No relation was found between narcissism and neediness. This finding, coupled with the findings in Study 1, resulted in emotionally needy targets not being examined in the remaining studies. Study 3 served as a conceptual replication of Studies 1 and 2, with an important extension. I designed Study 3 so that the potential interaction between the qualities of the hypothetical targets (i.e., admiring, perfect, and caring) could be examined. The results of Study 3 were consistent with those of Studies 1 and 2 in important ways. Narcissists showed a preference for perfect targets and an aversion to caring targets. In contrast to Study 2, narcissists did not display a general preference for admiring targets. Instead, narcissists displayed a preference only for admiring targets who were also perceived as highly positive. Apparently, being admired by an inconsequential other was not sufficient to differentially stimulate narcissists' attraction.

I designed Study 4 to definitively test the core postulates of the self-orientation model. Participants were presented with two hypothetical targets: a perfect individual who was not caring (i.e., perfect-noncaring) and a caring individual who was not perfect (i.e., caring-nonperfect). As predicted, narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, reported a higher level of romantic attraction for the perfect-noncaring target than for the caring-nonperfect target. Finally, in Study 5, I directly examined the predicted mediational role of self-esteem regulation in narcissists' romantic attraction. The results of Study 5 confirmed the prediction that narcissists are romantically attracted to self-oriented versus other-oriented targets because they are seeking romantic partners who will elevate and maintain their self-esteem. In part, this self-esteem maintenance is achieved because narcissists believe that becoming romantically involved with these self-oriented partners will make the narcissists feel important and successful socially. In addition, similarity mediated the relation between narcissism and attraction. The mediational role of similarity was independent of the mediational role of esteem.

### *Modifications*

Five studies, with converging methods, produced results consistent with the self-orientation model of narcissism and romantic attraction. Narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, are more attracted to self-oriented targets and less attracted to other-oriented targets. This reflects a strategy on the part of narcissists to maintain self-esteem (i.e., self-enhance). Importantly, these results also suggest extensions of and modifications to the model. First, contrary to initial predictions, narcissists' style of romantic attraction is not distinguished readily by a preference for (or lack of) emotionally needy targets. Indeed, emotionally needy targets are typically found unappealing by both narcissists and nonnarcissists. Second, the role of attraction to admiring targets is more complex than suggested in the initial model. Narcissists prefer admiring others, but this preference is pronounced when the admiring others are also highly valued. This finding is consistent with the view of narcissists' romantic attraction as a reflection of underlying self-enhancement motivation. It is clear that being admired by a highly

valued other will enhance the positivity of the self more than will admiration from an unappealing other.

### *Attraction to Caring Others*

It is important to elaborate on the negative association between narcissism and attraction to caring targets. Compared with nonnarcissists, narcissists displayed less preference for caring others. However, both narcissists and nonnarcissists preferred caring others to noncaring others. Narcissists do not strongly dislike caring others.

Why is this the case? The focus of the present work was on the role of self-enhancement in mediating narcissists' preference for perfect versus caring romantic partners. Study 5 uncovered direct evidence for this process (as well as for a mediational role of similarity). Narcissists' relative lack of attraction to caring targets is the result of narcissists finding these caring targets to be less enhancing and less similar. It is possible, however, that other mediators may play a role in this relationship. In particular, narcissists' lack of romantic preference for caring-nonperfect targets may be shaped by (a) the trouble or work it would take to date these individuals, (b) the independence or freedom that would be lost when dating these individuals, (c) the caring or affection that would need to be expressed to these individuals, and (d) the physical attractiveness of these individuals.<sup>4</sup>

I conducted an additional study to test each of these four mediating variables. The study was essentially a replication of Study 5 that included the aforementioned four potential mediators. With 292 participants, the primary findings of the study were replicated. Narcissists preferred the perfect-noncaring target versus the caring-nonperfect target ( $r = .18, p = .006$ ). However, narcissists did not respond differentially to any of the four potential mediators mentioned above,  $r$ s ranged from .00 ( $p = .96$ ) to .05 ( $p = .43$ ). Given the large number of participants and the replication of the results of previous studies, these findings strongly suggest that the four mediators do not account for narcissists' attraction to perfect-noncaring targets.

### *Implications*

The self-orientation model has several important implications relevant to both the understanding of narcissism in romantic relationships and, more generally, the role of the self in romantic relationships. These implications suggest several lines of future research.

### *Narcissism and Romantic Relationships*

Given that narcissists look for perfection more than caring in romantic partners, what are the implications for narcissists' romantic relationships and future research? First, narcissists may become involved in romantic relationships that lack intimacy, while at the same time enhancing their self-esteem by means of association. This pattern of relating romantically may have some benefits (notably self-esteem) but may lack durability, particularly when the ability of the partner to provide self-esteem wears thin. For example, as clinicians have noted, a narcissist's relationship with

<sup>4</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

an attractive "trophy" spouse may end when that trophy ages or loses a prestigious job (Masterson, 1988). Future research could examine this question in detail, perhaps by examining the duration of narcissists' romantic relationships or the stressors that potentially may end narcissists' romantic relationships.

Second, narcissists may display communication patterns within the context of romantic relationships that are hostile and egocentric. Indeed, researchers have reported that individuals with inflated self-conceptions display self-centered communication styles during interactions with peers (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995). These communication styles, if displayed by narcissists, may enhance the narcissists' self-esteem but may also have a negative effect on relationship duration. Specifically, the narcissists' partners may leave the relationship in response to the lack of equality in interpersonal communication. One interesting possibility for investigating the association between narcissism and communication patterns would be to examine accommodation strategies in romantic relationships (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Narcissists would likely accommodate less than would nonnarcissists. That is, narcissists would behave in ways that are destructive rather than constructive to the romantic relationship.

Third, one finding from Study 5 involved the role of similarity in narcissistic romantic attraction. Narcissists were attracted to perfect-noncaring others not only because they viewed these individuals as sources of self-esteem, but also because they saw these others as similar to themselves. Apparently, narcissists, compared with nonnarcissists, view themselves as perfect and noncaring. An interesting and related line of inquiry for future research would be to examine the moderating role of narcissism on the similarity-attraction link. Are narcissists more attracted to similar others than are nonnarcissists? This question, although not addressed directly in the present research, is suggested by Freud's (1914/1957) early thoughts on narcissism, particularly his observation that the narcissist is attracted to "what he himself is . . . [and] what he himself would like to be" (p. 90). Even more interesting is the second part of Freud's observation. Perhaps narcissists, in contrast to nonnarcissists, will be more strongly attracted to individuals similar to their ideal self (LaPrelle, Hoyle, Insko, & Bernthal, 1990). Both of these questions could be examined in future research.

Finally, the present study relied on two research methods, both of which provided converging evidence for narcissists' attraction to self-oriented romantic partners. Future research may be directed toward replicating these findings with different methods. In particular, research using behavioral measures (e.g., a simulated dating service or dating game with confederates playing different roles) would help to strengthen confidence in the present findings. Such research may also uncover additional differences or similarities between narcissists and nonnarcissists. For example, narcissists' preference for admiring others may be more (or even less) pronounced when such behavioral measures are used.

### *Self-Regulation and Romantic Relationships*

The results of these five studies also have implications for relational functioning that extend beyond the realm of narcissism. The present research is relevant to the broader question, How are romantic relationships used to regulate the self-concept? The results of the present research suggest that individuals approach

romantic relationships as an arena for self-esteem maintenance. This observation is consistent with other reported findings. For example, research has found that individuals consider self-esteem maintenance to be an important reason for entering romantic relationships (Sedikides, Oliver, & Campbell, 1994). Researchers viewing romantic relationships from a social-exchange perspective have theorized that self-esteem is a central reward of romantic involvement (Homans, 1961). Researchers have also noted the importance of self-enhancement to attraction (Campbell & Foster, 1999b). The present article confirms the important role of romantic relationships in enhancing the self.

Do narcissists use romantic relationships to regulate the self in ways beyond self-enhancement? For example, do narcissists' romantic relationships evidence differentially a desire to expand the self by increasing the size of the narcissists' self-concept (A. Aron & Aron, 1986; E. N. Aron & Aron, 1996) or improve the self by gaining skills and abilities (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995)? This is an empirical question. On the one hand, narcissists' lack of desire for caring suggests less willingness to expand the self in romantic relationships, at least when that expansion entails incorporating the other into the self. On the other hand, narcissists are attracted to others who offer the possibility of enhancing the self by means of association. Perhaps narcissists do seek expansion in romantic relationships, but only when that expansion of the self leads to enhancement of the self. Similar arguments could be made for the self-improvement motive. On the one hand, narcissists may avoid potential romantic partners who offer the potential to improve the self. This is because seeking to improve the self may suggest that the self is in some way flawed and, thus, this can be perceived as a threat. On the other hand, narcissists may become involved with others who offer improvement if that improvement will lead to further self-enhancement. Examination of these and other motives would be a fruitful avenue for future research.

### *Personality and Romantic Relationships*

The present research also demonstrates the utility of using personality or individual-difference variables in the study of romantic relationships. Traditionally, literature on romantic relationships has, with a good deal of success, focused on the social environment (e.g., Rusbult, 1980, 1983). The present research nominates the personality variable of narcissism as an important contributor to romantic relationships, at least in the initial stages of attraction. Narcissism thus may be added to a growing list of personality variables that play a role in romantic relationships. Other examples include self-esteem (A. Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995; Dion & Dion, 1975), psychological individualism and collectivism (Dion & Dion, 1991), and attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Understanding the interface between personality and romantic relationships will require a great deal of additional research in a variety of domains, including romantic attraction, love, commitment, and relationship dissolution. Nevertheless, this work will eventually result in a more comprehensive understanding of romantic involvement.

### *Conclusion*

What is the impact of narcissism on romantic attraction? The results of the present research are clear. Narcissists, compared with

nonnarcissists, are more romantically attracted to others who offer the potential to enhance the self by means of identification and admiration. In contrast, narcissists are less attracted to others who offer the potential for caring. These findings suggest a range of possibilities for future research on narcissism and romantic relationships. At a broader level, the present research also represents an example of the successful integration of a personality variable (i.e., narcissism), a self-process (i.e., self-enhancement), and a relationship outcome (i.e., romantic attraction). The glimpse into human behavior afforded by the present research would have been greatly diminished by excluding any of these factors. Similar efforts in the future may be well served by simultaneously examining personality, the self, and interpersonal relationships.

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