

NARCISSISM AND THE USE OF FANTASY

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This study examined the relationship between narcissism and the use of daydreams and fantasy in samples of 129 and 193 subjects. In sample 1, it was found that (1) narcissistic individuals experience achievement, heroic, sexual, hostile, self-revelation, and future-oriented daydreams; and (2) these six types of daydreams represent a coherent "narcissistic" fantasy style. In sample 2, narcissistic individuals who were experiencing higher levels of daily stress report using more self-admiration, power and revenge, and suffering fantasies to cope with stress. **The narcissistic theme of entitlement is uniquely related to narcissistic fantasy and the narcissists' use of sustaining fantasies to cope with stress.** Results are consistent with clinical literature on the narcissistic personality.

This study examined the relationship between narcissism and the use of fantasy. The *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM-III-R; American Psychiatric Association, 1987) recognizes "a preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love" as one of nine criteria that define the narcissistic personality. This recognition is based on clinical observation and theorizing by Freud (1914), Jacobson (1975), Kernberg (1975), Kohut (1971), Murray (1964), and Reich (1960), who portray **the narcissist as one whose inner experience is dominated by grandiose images of the self and idealized others.** These grandiose images (1) represent wished-for states of fulfillment and perfection that shape the narcissist's mental activity and social behavior, and (2) are used to regulate self-esteem, especially when the narcissist's cravings for perfection are frustrated by real events in the world.

If the narcissist is governed by grandiose fantasies of omnipotence, what is the nature or form of these fantasies? In other words, **is there a fantasy style that characterizes narcissistic experience?**

Freud (1908/1959) notes that motivating wishes fall into two groups: ambitious or egoistic fantasies that enhance the subject's personality, and erotic ones. Jones (1913/1964) describes the narcissistic "God complex" as an unconscious belief that involves fantasies of power, wealth, omniscience, and protecting the weak. Murray (1955), in his case study of American Icarus, reports that the narcissistic Grope's most recurrent fantasy was of "landing on a desert island in the Pacific with a band of followers, discovering an inexhaustible spring of water and an abundant food supply, and then founding a new civilization with himself as king and lawgiver" (p. 624). According to Murray, this was one of many fantasies that revolved around themes of money, power, fame, and glory.

Tartakoff's (1966) "Nobel Prize Complex" refers to gifted people who are preoccupied with "Dreams of Glory" that involve applause, wealth, power, or social prestige.

Copies of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory will be sent without charge to anyone who desires to use it for research purposes. Requests should be addressed to Robert Raskin, Tulsa Institute of Behavioral Sciences, 1620 East 12th St., Tulsa, OK 74120.

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According to Tartakoff, these people are dominated by two kinds of fantasies: (1) active omnipotent fantasies of being the "powerful one," and (2) passive fantasies of being the "special one," chosen by virtue of possessing exceptional talents and gifts. Volkan (1979) and Modell (1975) describe "glass bubble" or "cocoon" fantasies that narcissists use to maintain the illusion of needing nothing from others because they are the source of their own emotional sustenance. Horowitz (1975) refers to "reflections of glory" that narcissists use to bolster self-esteem when threatened by stressful life events.

Bach (1977) distinguishes between self- and other-related fantasies. Self-related fantasies are narcissistic because they "have to do with the origins and vicissitudes of self-directed drives and desires" (p. 281). He identifies four self-related fantasies characteristic of narcissistic disturbance: the "wise baby" fantasy concerns the origin of the self's uniqueness and perfection; the "death of the self" fantasy concerns loss of perfection and imprisonment within a world of limitations; the fantasy of the "double," or "companion," concerns the origins of self-love; and the fantasy of the "rope to another world" concerns the search for transcendence of earthly limitations.

Although clinical lore portrays the narcissist as using grandiose fantasies to regulate self-esteem, no research evidence validates the narcissist's fantasy-proneness or the existence of a characteristic narcissistic fantasy style.

We present two studies that examined relationships between narcissism and the use of fantasy. The first examined relationships between narcissism and a variety of imaginal processes and fantasy styles; the second investigated the relationships between narcissism and the sustaining fantasies that individuals use to cope with stress.

STUDY 1

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 129 University of California at Berkeley undergraduates who participated in order to receive partial credit for a departmental experiment requirement. Sixty-two were males, and 67 were females (average age = 19.1 years; $SD = 1.18$ years).

Measures

Narcissism is measured with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979; Raskin, & Terry, 1988). The NPI is a 40-item forced choice inventory that measures narcissism in nonclinical populations. Numerous studies support the validity of the NPI as a viable measure of narcissism (Auerbach, 1984; Bennett, 1988; Biscardi & Schill, 1985; Carrol, 1987; Emmons, 1984, 1987; Prifitera & Ryan, 1984; Raskin & Novacek, 1989; Raskin & Shaw, 1988; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Shulman & Ferguson, 1988; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Bidderman, 1984). In addition to a full-scale narcissism score, the NPI assesses seven components of narcissism: authority, exhibitionism, entitlement, self-sufficiency, exploitativeness, superiority, and vanity. (See Raskin & Terry, 1988, for a description of the components.)

Fantasy style is assessed with the Imaginal Processes Inventory (IPI; Singer & Antrobus, 1970, 1972). The IPI is a 344-item inventory that examines the inner experience of individuals by sampling stylistic characteristics of thought, fantasy, and daydreaming. The IPI yields 28 subscale scores, which reflect different characteristics of daydreaming and mental style. Of these 28 characteristics, Achievement, Heroic, Sexual, Hostile, Self-revelation, and Future-oriented daydreams reflect the narcissistic fantasies described in the DSM-III-R and clinical literature. Accordingly, narcissism should be correlated positively with each of these fantasy styles.

Procedure

All subjects completed the NPI and the IPI.

RESULTS

Correlations between the NPI and the 28 IPI scale scores reveal several significant relationships. Narcissism shows positive correlations with Achievement ($r = .45, p < .001$); Heroic ($r = .44, p < .001$); Sexual ($r = .37, p < .001$); Hostile ($r = .23, p < .01$); Self-revelation ($r = .23, p < .01$); and Future-oriented ($r = .29, p < .01$) daydreams. The NPI also correlates positively with Positive Reactions in Daydreaming ($r = .24, p < .01$); Acceptance of Daydreaming ($r = .19, p < .01$); Bizarre and Improbable Daydreams ($r = .19, p < .01$); Interpersonal Curiosity ($r = .20, p < .01$); Mechanical Curiosity ($r = .23, p < .01$); and Need for External Stimulation ($r = .18, p < .01$). The NPI shows negative correlations with Boredom ($r = -.25, p < .01$) and Present in Daydreams ($r = -.19, p < .01$). There are no gender differences among these NPI and IPI correlations.

A principal components analysis of the IPI Achievement, Heroic, Sexual, Hostile, Self-revelation, and Future-oriented daydreaming scales suggests that these daydreaming categories represent a global narcissistic fantasy style. The analysis produced a one-component solution ($\lambda = 2.77$) that accounts for 46% of the variance among the six scales. Additionally, scale loadings on the principal component ranged from .30 (Self-revelation) to .82 (Heroic), which suggests that these six types of daydreams represent a coherent fantasy style. Principal component scores were generated to index this fantasy style and correlated with subjects' narcissism scores. Results show that narcissism is substantially related to this fantasy style ($r = .50, p < .001$).

Next, a series of multiple regression analyses examined whether the components of narcissism differentially predict the daydreaming styles that narcissists tend to experience. First, however, correlations among the seven NPI components were examined for potential multicollinearity problems. Correlations ranged from .08 to .44 with an average correlation of .26. These coefficients are well below the magnitude that defines multicollinearity problems (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). In the regression analyses, Achievement, Heroic, Sexual, Hostile, Self-revelation, and Future-oriented daydreams are treated as the dependent variables, respectively, and the seven NPI components are entered simultaneously into the equations as the independent variables.

Table 1

NPI Components that Make Unique Contributions to the Prediction of Narcissistic Fantasy Styles

IPI daydreaming styles	RSQ	NPI components	Beta	Simple r
Achievement daydreams	.36***	Entitlement	.499***	(.58)
Heroic daydreams	.25***	Entitlement	.348***	(.45)
Sexual daydreams	.20***	Vanity	.202*	(.30)
Hostile daydreams	.20***	Entitlement	.499***	(.43)
Self-revelation daydreams	.17**	Exhibitionism	.245***	(.31)
Future-oriented daydreams	.15**	Self-Sufficiency	.209*	(.29)
Principal component scores for IPI narcissistic fantasies	.34***	Entitlement	.427***	(.53)

Note.—All F -tests for significance were associated with 7 and 121 df . $N = 129$.

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

Table 1 presents the NPI components that make unique contributions to the prediction of the six IPI narcissistic daydreaming scales. NPI entitlement makes unique contributions to the prediction of Achievement, Heroic, and Hostile daydreams; vanity predicts Sexual daydreams; exhibitionism predicts Self-revelation daydreams; and self-sufficiency uniquely predicts Future-oriented daydreams. In addition, when the seven NPI components are regressed on the principal component scores that index the global IPI narcissistic fantasy style, only entitlement makes an independent contribution to the prediction equation.

It is interesting to note that the seven NPI components used as independent predictors accounted for more total variance in the dependent variables than they do as an aggregate full-scale narcissism score. For example, the full-scale NPI accounts for 20% and 19% of the variance in Achievement and Heroic Daydreams, respectively, whereas the seven NPI components account for 36% and 25% of the variance in the same two daydreaming styles.

STUDY 2

This study examined relationships between narcissism and subjects' use of sustaining fantasies. Sustaining fantasies (Harder & Zelin, 1984; Zelin et al., 1983) describe the thoughts and images people have when trying to cope with stressful experiences. More specifically, sustaining fantasies are believed to be adaptive cognitive processes that help people cope with difficult situations. They are the repetitive fantasies, easily retrieved into consciousness, that an individual uses to create a situation that is either more ideal or counter to the situation that is causing the stress. These fantasies are viewed as necessary for adaptive coping because they enable the individual to restore self-esteem and emotional equilibrium in the face of stress (Harder & Zelin, 1984; Zelin et al., 1983). An example of a sustaining fantasy is the adolescent, rejected for a date by a girl, who finds himself imagining striking out the side in an important baseball game (Zelin et al., 1983).

The concept of sustaining fantasies is similar to emotion-focused forms of coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Stone & Neale, 1984). This type of coping regulates distressing emotions and includes wishful thinking, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987).

Overall, the concept of sustaining fantasies is consistent with theories of fantasy function in narcissistic individuals. Kohut (1971), Jacobson, (1964), Kernberg (1975), and Reich (1960) describe narcissistic fantasies as more likely to occur under conditions of stress and view the function of these fantasies as a way to protect, restore, stabilize, or repair the individual's sense of cohesion and well-being. Accordingly, daily levels of stress are examined in relationship to individuals' use of sustaining fantasies.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 193 undergraduates at University of California at Berkeley who participated in partial fulfillment of a department experiment requirement. Eighty-four were males and 109 were females (average age = 19 years; $SD = 1.49$ years).

Measures

Sustaining fantasies are assessed with the Sustaining Fantasy Questionnaire (SFQ; Zelin et al., 1983), which consists of 88 thoughts that subjects rate in terms of how much each thought helps them when they are experiencing discomfort. Examples of the SFQ

items are, "thinking about the beauties of nature, like a beautiful sunset," "thinking of really torturing someone I hate," "being a star athlete," and "knowing God will protect me." Responses to the SFQ yield 10 sustaining fantasy scale scores that reflect subjects' use of Self-admiration, Power and Revenge, Competitive, Aesthetic, Belief in and Use of God, Suffering, Withdrawal and Needing Protection, Death and Illness, Love and Closeness, and Restitution fantasies. Zelin et al. (1983) report alpha reliabilities for the 10 SFQ scales that range from .67 to .90.

Subjects' level of daily stress is assessed with the Revised Daily Hassles Scale (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988; Folkman et al., 1987; Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981; Lazarus & Folkman, 1989). Subjects indicate whether each of 57 items was a hassle for them during the previous week, and for each item that was, rate whether the experience was somewhat, moderately, or extremely severe. A total hassle severity score is computed by summing all severity ratings.

Narcissism was measured with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979; Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Procedure

All subjects completed the NPI, SFQ, and Revised Daily Hassles scale.

RESULTS

Subjects' gender was correlated with the NPI and its 7 component scales, daily stress, the 10 SFQ scales, and subjects' total use of sustaining fantasies. No substantial relationships were found. Consequently, subsequent results are reported for the total sample.

If narcissists are preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, brilliance, power, etc., and if narcissists use fantasy to manage stress, then narcissists who are experiencing higher levels of daily stress should report the use of more total sustaining fantasies, self-admiration, power and revenge, and competitive fantasies.

Table 2 presents multiple regression analyses in which narcissism and total hassle severity scores were entered simultaneously as independent variables to predict total sustaining fantasies and each of the 10 SFQ content scales. Narcissism and hassles severity make unique positive contributions to the prediction of subjects' total use of sustaining fantasies and use of self-admiration, power and revenge, and suffering fantasies. Whereas narcissism and hassle severity jointly predict subjects' use of competitive fantasies, only narcissism makes a unique contribution to this prediction. In addition, total hassle severity shows unique positive relationships; 9 of the 11 fantasy scores indicated that the use of these sustaining fantasies is related to higher levels of stress.

Multiple regression analyses examined whether the seven NPI components differentially predict subjects' use of sustaining fantasies. To check for potential multicollinearity problems the seven NPI intercomponent correlations were examined. Correlations range from .18 to .42 with an average of .31. These are within acceptable limits. The NPI components and total hassles severity scores were entered simultaneously as independent variables to predict subjects' use of total sustaining fantasies and the 10 sustaining fantasy styles.

Table 3 shows that the seven NPI components differentially predict subjects' use of sustaining fantasies. For example, higher levels of entitlement, lower levels of self-sufficiency, and higher levels of stress make unique contributions to the prediction of power and revenge fantasies, whereas, higher levels of superiority, lower levels of self-sufficiency, and higher levels of stress are significant predictors of self-admiration fantasies. Again, it is worth noting that the seven NPI components account for more total variance in sustaining fantasies than they do as an aggregate total narcissism score. For example, the full scale NPI and stress scores account for 20% of the variance in Power and Revenge fantasies, while the seven NPI components and stress scores account for 35% of the variance in this sustaining fantasy style.

Table 2
Regression of NPI and Stress on Sustaining Fantasy Styles

Sustaining fantasies	RSQ	Independent variables	Beta	Simple <i>r</i>
Total fantasies	.17***	NPI	.145*	(.17)
		Stress	.376***	(.38)
Power & Revenge	.21***	NPI	.186**	(.22)
		Stress	.404***	(.41)
Self-admiration	.08***	NPI	.161*	(.18)
		Stress	.231***	(.25)
Competitive	.04**	NPI	.174**	(.18)
		Stress	.082	(.10)
Suffering	.13***	NPI	.137*	(.17)
		Stress	.330***	(.33)
Protection	.10***	NPI	.088	(.12)
		Stress	.299***	(.30)
God	.07**	NPI	.097***	(.12)
		Stress	.234***	(.26)
Death	.18***	NPI	.057	(.09)
		Stress	.416***	(.40)
Restitution	.04**	NPI	.025	(.04)
		Stress	.200**	(.20)
Aesthetic	.02	NPI	-.052	(-.04)
		Stress	.145*	(.14)
Love	.01	NPI	.023	(.02)
		Stress	.067	(.06)

Note.—All *F*-tests for significance are associated with 2 and 190 *df*. *N* = 193.

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

Table 3
NPI Components that Make Unique Contributions to the Prediction of Narcissistically Oriented Sustaining Fantasies

Sustaining fantasy style	RSQ	Independent variables	Beta	Simple <i>r</i>
Total Fantasies	.24***	Entitlement	.163*	(.26)
		Self-sufficiency	-.224**	(-.06)
		Stress	.339***	(.38)
Power & Revenge	.35***	Entitlement	.390***	(.42)
		Self-sufficiency	-.243**	(-.04)
		Stress	.313***	(.41)
Self-admiration	.15***	Superiority	.201**	(.21)
		Self-sufficiency	-.167*	(-.03)
		Stress	.269***	(.33)
Suffering	.20***	Exhibitionism	.210**	(.28)
		Self-sufficiency	-.167**	(-.03)
		Stress	.269***	(.33)
Competitive	.07	Exploitativeness	.152*	(.19)

Note.—All *F*-tests for significance are associated with 8 and 184 *df*. *N* = 193.

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

DISCUSSION

These studies tested the clinical observations that narcissistic people tend to (1) experience fantasies that concern success, power, and glory, and (2) use a characteristic type of fantasy to manage their stressful experiences. Our results confirm these observations.

Study 1 found that narcissistic individuals show an inclination to experience achievement, heroic, sexual, hostile, self-revelation, and future-oriented daydreams. Results also suggest that these daydreaming styles represent a coherent general fantasy style that is substantially related to narcissism. In addition to these specific daydreaming contents, narcissistic individuals report more acceptance of their daydreams, more positive reactions in their daydreams, and fewer daydreams that take place in the present. Apparently the imaginings of tomorrow are more promising for the narcissist than the happenings of today. This view is consistent with the clinical belief that narcissists use grandiose fantasy as a defense against depression (DSM-III-R; American Psychiatric Association, 1987; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971; Miller, 1979).

The results of Study 2 support the clinical observation that narcissists cope with stressful experiences by imagining themselves in more ideal situations. In particular, narcissistic persons who are experiencing higher levels of daily stress tend to experience (1) power and revenge fantasies in which they see themselves in a powerful position able to impose punishment on those who have wronged them, and (2) self-admiration fantasies in which they imagine themselves and others admiring their fine qualities of competence, consideration, wisdom, greatness, and attractiveness. In addition, narcissists also have suffering fantasies in which they are longstanding victims of deprivation and suffering. Although suffering fantasies may not place the narcissist in the best of all possible worlds, there are exhibitionistic and grandiose satisfactions and feelings of specialness associated with being the one who suffers.

Results from both studies show that the components of narcissism differentially relate to the daydreaming and fantasy styles examined. For example, narcissistic entitlement is related uniquely to achievement, heroic, and hostile daydreams, and power and revenge fantasies; vanity is related uniquely to sexual daydreams; superiority is related uniquely to self-admiration fantasies; exhibitionism is related uniquely to self-revelation daydreams and suffering fantasies; and self-sufficiency is related uniquely to future-oriented daydreams and several of the sustaining fantasy styles.

Several points follow from these observations. First, entitlement plays a central role in most narcissistic fantasy. Narcissistic people believe the world owes them special privileges and exemptions from normal social demands (DSM-III-R; American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Unfortunately, the world tends not to reinforce these beliefs. Consequently, narcissists are forced to resort to fantasy in order to obtain the privileges and exemptions they believe they deserve.

Second, in four of the five analyses presented in Table 3, there is evidence of a suppression effect that involves narcissistic self-sufficiency. The simple correlations between Self-sufficiency and Total Use of Fantasies, and the use of Power and Revenge, Self-admiration, and Suffering fantasies are zero. However, within a context of the other narcissism components and subjects' level of stress, lower levels of Self-sufficiency become a significant predictor of these fantasy styles. Modell (1975) and Volkan (1979) argue that narcissistic self-sufficiency is used as a defense against unconscious feelings of dependency. The observation that lower levels of self-sufficiency (or higher levels of dependency) and higher levels of stress lead to greater use of sustaining fantasies is consistent with their views.

Third, the seven NPI components jointly predict more total variance in daydreaming and fantasy style than they do when treated as an aggregate full-scale score. This apparent augmentation in prediction may be artifactual. It could be a function of the

increased number of degrees of freedom (and subsequent increase in the range of possible variances) associated with a multiple regression analysis in which seven independent variables are regressed on the dependent variable, as opposed to a bivariate regression analysis in which only one independent variable is regressed on the dependent variable. On the other hand, it may be that the differential weighting of the NPI components reflects a typology of narcissism. Perhaps, as these data suggest, there are real differences between narcissists who are most characterized by entitlement and self-sufficiency and those who are most characterized by superiority and self-sufficiency. Although the idea of narcissistic subtypes has been addressed in clinical literature (Bursten, 1978), systematic research that examines this issue is needed.

Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan (1991) report that narcissism, grandiosity, and self-esteem are interrelated. They (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, in press) also present evidence that supports the view that narcissists use grandiosity and interpersonal dominance to manage hostility and regulate their self-esteem. The results of the present studies are consistent with this model. The results show that narcissists have heroic and achievement-oriented daydreams and use self-admiration fantasies to cope with their stress. This suggests that narcissistic grandiosity is tied to fantasies that bolster the narcissist's self-esteem when he or she is feeling threatened. In addition, narcissistic individuals also have hostile daydreams and use power and revenge fantasies to manage stress, which suggests that they: (1) are prone to experience anger and hostility, and (2) use grandiose fantasy to manage these feelings in a way that helps them maintain a sense of positive self-regard.

Finally, these results have implications for research on stress and coping, for clinical diagnosis, and for the treatment of narcissistic personalities. Because narcissists use a characteristic form of fantasy to cope with stress, it is reasonable to assume that other personality types use other kinds of fantasies to cope with stress. Consequently, we suggest that stress and coping research would benefit from incorporating the different DSM-III-R personality syndromes into its research paradigm to help differentiate intrapsychic coping processes further. These results also suggest that clinicians might profitably attend to their clients' daydreams and fantasies. Clients who present themselves in heroic and self-admiring terms, who are obsessed with what they are going to achieve in the future, who are preoccupied with their sexual exploits, and who look forward to vanquishing their enemies are most probably expressing a narcissistic personality disorder. Moreover, in treating these individuals it is important to recognize that their grandiosity is a manifestation of their efforts to cope with stress and bolster their self-esteem. When viewed in these terms, grandiose fantasy is not only a vulnerability for the narcissist, it is also a resource. Consequently, the fantasy life of the narcissist should have a primary role in the clinical treatment of these individuals.

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