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CHAPTER

61 Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Evolutionary Roots and Emotional Profiles

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the construct of narcissism, reviews its evolutionary origins, and explores its relationship with emotions. Narcissism is presented as a personality trait with grandiose and vulnerable expressions, as well as a personality disorder characterized by extreme levels of narcissism combined with impairment. Some discussion surrounds whether grandiose and vulnerable expressions of narcissism should be conceptualized as distinct, stable traits versus oscillating narcissistic states. Evolutionary topics include the heritability of narcissism, the genetic foundations of narcissism, evolutionarily grounded strategies, including mating and survival strategies, that may have facilitated sexual and natural selection of narcissistic traits, as well as critiques of existing theory in this literature. The emotion section focuses on the emotional experiences of narcissists, paying particular attention to how these experiences contrast, depending on whether narcissism is more grandiose or vulnerable. Attempts are made throughout the chapter to identify connections between the conceptual, evolutionary, and emotion literatures.

Keywords: narcissism, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, evolution, emotion

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Introduction

The goals of this chapter are threefold. First, we will introduce readers to the construct of narcissism, beginning with its literary roots and continuing with its clinical and general personality manifestations. We will mostly adhere to a trait-theory perspective when describing narcissism; that is, we will present narcissism as a constellation of interrelated traits that have the potential to create intrapersonal and interpersonal dysfunction, potentially leading to a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Thus, although we highlight research that focuses on NPD specifically, we assert that research focusing on the more general personality traits that comprise narcissism (e.g., grandiosity, vulnerability, antagonism) provides a solid framework for understanding narcissism as a personality trait as well as a personality disorder (Crowe et al., in press).

Next, we provide an overview of the literature that discusses the evolutionary origins of narcissism. This section focuses on topics such as heritability, genetic foundations (or lack thereof), evolutionarily grounded strategies including mating strategies and survival strategies, and critiques of existing theory in this literature.

p. 1198 We will then conclude by reviewing the literature on the emotional experiences of narcissists. This section focuses on emotions that are central and recurrent in the lives of narcissists and focuses on the evolutionary relevance of these experiences. Although the conceptual, evolutionary, and emotion literatures pertaining to narcissism have been largely distinct from one another—with the exception of Joey Cheng's work (Cheng et al., 2010; Tracy et al., 2011), which brings the three literatures together—whenever possible, we highlight connections among these literatures.

Origins of the Construct

The term "narcissism" has ancient mythological roots; specifically, Ovid's poem *Echo and Narcissus* tells the story of unrequited love between Narcissus, a dashing but self-absorbed and cruel hunter, and Echo, a mountain nymph who falls hopelessly in love with him (Ovidius Naso & Raeburn, 2004). In the 1,200 years since the story of Narcissus famously gazing longingly at his own reflection in a pond, the term "narcissism" still retains some of its original meaning, although it has also morphed into a complex constellation of personality traits and a psychological disorder.

Contemporary discussion of narcissism dates to the work of Havelock Ellis (1898), who described it as a pathological sexual disorder, and Sigmund Freud (1914), who described it as a normal stage of child development. Heinz Kohut (1977) and Otto Kernberg (1975) played important roles in continuing to define narcissism as a pathological syndrome and were integral in making narcissism an official diagnosis with the inclusion of NPD in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1980). NPD continues to appear in the current, fifth edition of the DSM (DSM-5; APA, 2013).

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NPD, Narcissistic Personality, and Grandiose versus Vulnerable Narcissism

The DSM-5 description of NPD includes the following nine criteria (a total of five or more are required to receive a diagnosis): (1) grandiose self-importance, (2) preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited power, brilliance, etc., (3) belief that one is special and unique, (4) need for excessive admiration, (5) sense of entitlement, (6) being interpersonally exploitative, (7) lacking empathy, (8) envious of others, and (9) arrogant and superior attitude and behavior (APA, 2013). These symptoms mostly reflect grandiose content (e.g., grandiose self-importance), and largely exclude vulnerable expressions of narcissism, although not entirely (e.g., being envious of others is a vulnerable quality; Krizan & Johar, 2012). This asymmetry has led to criticism, as some scholars assert that the DSM definition of NPD fails to adequately capture the more vulnerable side of the disorder, such as feelings of insecurity and shame (Skodol et al., 2014).

The grandiosity and vulnerability schism that pervades the NPD literature is also found in the more general narcissistic personality literature. NPD is a disorder of personality—the personality trait of narcissism. A straightforward way to think about NPD is that it is a pathological form of narcissistic personality. That is, narcissistic personality (or narcissism, for short) becomes NPD when the constellation of traits that comprise narcissism create significant impairment or distress (Miller, Lynam, Hyatt, et al., 2017). There are myriad ways in which narcissistic traits can create impairment or distress. To some degree, though, the type of impairment or distress experienced depends on whether narcissism is characterized by higher levels of grandiosity versus vulnerability. For example, vulnerable narcissism is linked to a variety of negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression (Kaufman et al., 2020; Weiss & Miller, 2018), whereas grandiose narcissism is unrelated to these types of negative emotions (although this becomes more complicated in older age groups; Hill & Roberts, 2011), but ↳ more so connected to interpersonal dysfunction, such as
p. 1199 romantic game-playing and infidelity (Campbell et al., 2002; Foster & Brunell, 2018).

According to several prominent and current theoretical accounts of narcissism, it is useful to conceptualize narcissism as three interrelated dimensions (Ackerman et al., 2019; Crowe et al., 2019). Using the language of the trifurcated model (Crowe et al., 2019), grandiose and vulnerable narcissism share a "core" dimension called self-centered antagonism. In addition to this core, grandiose narcissism possesses an additional "specifier" dimension called agentic extraversion, and vulnerable narcissism possesses an additional specifier dimension called narcissistic neuroticism. In short, both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are characterized by self-centeredness and interpersonal conflict. However, whereas grandiose narcissism is further characterized by an egocentric brand of extraversion, vulnerable narcissism is characterized by subjective distress stemming from perceived lack of respect. In terms of the Five Factor Model or the Big Five Model of personality (Anglim & O'Connor, 2019; Widiger, 2015), grandiose and vulnerable narcissism share low levels of agreeableness and, whereas grandiose narcissism is also associated with high levels of extraversion, vulnerable narcissism is also associated with high levels of neuroticism (Miller et al., 2011).

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Stable Trait or Dynamic State?

Although the consensus in the research literature is that narcissism comes in two principal forms, grandiose and vulnerable, which resemble the description provided by the trifurcated model (Crowe et al., 2019), there is controversy over whether grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are best conceptualized as stable and relatively separable traits or dynamic expressions of narcissism that vary across time within persons (Wright & Edershile, 2018). For example, according to the dynamic perspective, people with narcissistic personalities may oscillate between grandiose and vulnerable expressions of narcissism. Because the hypothesized oscillations happen within persons and relatively quickly, detecting them requires advanced statistics and methods including multilevel modeling (Nezlek, 2008) and ecological momentary assessment (Shiffman et al., 2008). State-level measures of narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability did not exist until recently (Crowe et al., 2016; Crowe et al., 2018; Edershile et al., 2019), suggesting that this literature may accelerate soon.

Of these few studies that have tested the oscillation hypothesis, some could be characterized as indirect tests, such as asking people who are classified as primarily grandiose or vulnerable narcissists whether they experience the complimentary variant (Gore & Widiger, 2016; Hyatt et al., 2018). Findings suggest that primarily grandiose narcissists may experience bouts of narcissistic vulnerability; however, vulnerable narcissists do not appear to experience bouts of narcissistic grandiosity as frequently. To our knowledge, there has been one published study that has tested the oscillation hypothesis directly using ecological momentary assessment (Edershile & Wright, 2021). Like the previous indirect tests, this study found evidence that participants who were primarily grandiose in terms of their narcissism experienced bouts of vulnerability, but found no evidence that participants who were primarily vulnerable experienced moments of grandiosity. Thus, although research testing the oscillation hypothesis is still emerging, some evidence suggests that grandiose narcissists experience periodic states of vulnerable narcissism.

Summary

NPD is a personality disorder characterized by extreme levels of narcissistic personality combined with impairment. The impairment can be intrapersonal or interpersonal, as is true for all personality disorders.
p. 1200 Regarding the underlying personality trait of narcissism, the consensus ↳ is that narcissism comes in grandiose and vulnerable expressions. Both share a common theme of interpersonal antagonism. Whereas grandiose narcissism is further characterized by agentic extraversion, vulnerable narcissism is characterized by narcissistic neuroticism. There is debate over whether vulnerable narcissism, in particular, is sufficiently represented in the DSM-5 description of NPD. Furthermore, there is debate over whether grandiose and vulnerable narcissism should be conceptualized as relatively stable and separable traits versus oscillating narcissistic states (Weiss & Miller, 2018).

Evolution of Narcissism

The first section of this chapter provided a general overview of narcissism, including several key concepts; this next section examines the evolutionary origins of narcissism. Specifically, we will examine whether narcissism is at least partly genetically grounded, as well as the means by which narcissism might get selected—in particular, sexual and natural selection.

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Narcissism and Genes

The evolutionary literature on narcissism focuses mostly on its grandiose form and how it has been selected (e.g., Holtzman & Strube, 2011; Holtzman, 2018; Jonason et al., 2010; Buss & Schmitt et al., 2017; Tracy et al., 2011). Therefore, when we use the term "narcissism" in this section, we will be referring to grandiose narcissism unless otherwise specified. The evolutionary literature views narcissism as an evolved personality trait. An essential element of an evolutionary theory is the genetic basis for traits, as genes are the main unit of selection (Dawkins, 1976). Behavioral genetics has established a heritability component for narcissism (Vernon et al., 2008). While this does not imply that specific genes are associated with narcissism (because heritability does not signify a genetic substrate; Jackson et al., 2011), this finding is a necessary (yet insufficient) condition for showing that narcissism has a genetic basis (Livesley et al., 1993).

Evidence in search of specific genes that reflect narcissism is lacking. There is scant research evidence on the molecular genetics of narcissism, so it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding putative gene-narcissism associations. Some research has examined polymorphisms in the *5-HTTLPR* gene, which codes for serotonin transporters. This genetic variant has been linked to a variety of psychiatric disorders and symptoms, including several personality traits associated with psychopathy and narcissism (Brammer et al., 2016; Luo & Cai, 2018; Sadeh et al., 2010). Still, this research is in its infancy, and it is not yet known what genes or combinations of genes might play a role in the development of narcissism.

Indirect evidence of a genetic basis for narcissism comes from genetic associations with antagonism and extraversion, and the corresponding biological psychology literature pertaining to these broad-band personality traits. As noted earlier, both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are antagonistic traits at their core (Crowe et al., 2019; Vize et al. 2020). Consistent with this view, grandiose narcissism (as well as vulnerable narcissism) involves disagreeableness (Miller et al., 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Vazire et al., 2008). Neighboring research has shown that narcissism—particularly the grandiose variant—is strongly positively correlated with extraversion (Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), which is indeed evident across different measures of the Big Five (r = .46 on the Big Five; r =.49 on the HEXACO; Lee & Ashton, 2005). Most research in this literature, including both self-report and behavioral measures, is consistent with Paulhus's (2002) minimalist assertion that grandiose narcissists are "disagreeable extraverts."

Because grandiose narcissism manifests as disagreeable extraversion (Paulhus, 2001), any genetic basis for
p. 1201 agreeableness and extraversion could be taken as indirect evidence of a genetic ↳ basis for narcissism. Multiple studies have provided evidence of specific genes associated with extraversion and agreeableness (Kim et al., 2015; see Sanchez-Roige et al., 2018, for review), although there is stronger such evidence for extraversion than agreeableness (Luo et al., 2017; Sanchez-Roige, 2018). These genetic factors account for approximately 1%–20% of the variance in extraversion and agreeableness in genome-wide association studies and polygenic studies (Luo et al., 2017; Sanchez-Roige et al., 2018). We will use a round number percentage (10%) as a heuristic for the genetic basis for narcissism, recognizing that the confidence interval is large. We assert that the genetic components for these two traits are approximately 10%, which—albeit lower than the common heuristic of 50% heritability for personality traits based on behavior genetic research—indirectly suggests a genetic basis for narcissism. Because narcissism appears to be partly genetically inherited, next we consider two primary pathways (perhaps somewhat positively intertwined) that may help explain the evolution of narcissism and how it was selected—sexual and natural selection.

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Narcissism and Sexual Selection

Based on pioneering work of many scholars (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Foster et al., 2006; Jonason et al., 2009; Mealey, 1995), Holtzman and Strube (2011) proposed that narcissism was selected to facilitate a short-term mating (STM) strategy, which is arguably a frequency-dependent phenomenon (Lewontin, 1958), where frequency-dependent selection is consistent with good genes sexual selection models (Martinossi-Allibert et al., 2019a; see also Gangestad et al., 2007). These models do not posit unidirectional selection for narcissism overall, but rather posit that narcissistic individuals coexist at the population level with non-narcissistic individuals (indeed, non-narcissistic qualities may coevolve); both can have evolutionary advantages according to frequency-dependence models. If this is true, then according to Holtzman and Strube (2011), there should be evidence that narcissism (a) is associated with traits (e.g., attractiveness) and proclivities (e.g., social boldness) that facilitate STM strategies; (b) is associated with coercive behavior; and (c) manifests in developmental specificity for the trait (i.e., it should peak in adolescence). All considered, nature should consolidate these positively inter-correlated features into a physically attractive and coercive constellation of traits that peaks in adolescence. The consolidated result would manifest as narcissism. Here, we review this literature and provide an update regarding these key criteria with respect to sexual selection.

If narcissism was selected to facilitate STM, then narcissism should positively correlate with qualities that are differentially adaptive for STM, such as physical attractiveness. The evidence regarding physical attractiveness is mixed (see Holtzman, 2018, for review). Early meta-analytic evidence showed a positive relationship between narcissism and physical attractiveness (Holtzman & Strube, 2010). Some evidence suggests that narcissists are more attractive as potential mates and are more successful in STM (Dufner et al., 2013), at least insofar as it concerns soliciting dates from strangers. Other research suggests that narcissistic individuals may not be especially physically attractive, however: when narcissists could not self-regulate their appearance, they were rated merely comparable in attractiveness to non-narcissists (Holtzman & Strube, 2013). Thus, narcissists do not appear to be innately (i.e., in their unadorned state) more attractive than non-narcissists, but their attractiveness may be bolstered by self-regulation, which is arguably a dynamic, complex, non-genetic, and high-level cognitive process that is presumably less susceptible to selection pressures.

Perplexingly, ongoing research in one of our labs (Burchette et al., in progress) suggests that narcissistic men are *not* significantly more likely than non-narcissistic men to actively pursue STM. This suggests that narcissism is not about internally motivated STM pursuits. ↳ However, even if it is true that narcissists are
p. 1202
not internally motivated to pursue STM, narcissists may nevertheless engage more frequently in STM because of the dynamic features of their personality. Narcissists may possess personality traits that allow them to present themselves to others as more viable candidates for STM (Dufner et al., 2013; Wurst et al., 2017). Their high confidence and self-perceived attractiveness may be appealing to potential short-term mates (Back et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2015).

Specifically, the agentic self-enhancement, dominance, and social boldness of narcissists may help to explain the increased mate appeal in narcissists (Dufner et al., 2013; Gangestad et al., 2007; Wurst et al., 2017). All these characteristics are encapsulated by narcissistic admiration, one of two positively correlated dimensions of (grandiose) narcissism according to the narcissistic admiration and rivalry concept (NARC; Back et al., 2013). The NARC model is a two-dimensional conceptualization of grandiose narcissism consisting of an admiration dimension and a rivalry dimension. The narcissistic admiration dimension is characterized by the tendency to promote one's self in social situations (using self-enhancement), while narcissistic rivalry is the tendency to defend oneself from social failure (driven by self-protection). The NARC shares much in common with the trifurcated model's conceptualization of grandiose narcissism (Crowe et al., 2019), with admiration being similar to agentic extraversion and rivalry being similar to interpersonal antagonism. Wurst et al. (2017) proposed that the increased mate appeal associated with

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narcissism in STM is mostly attributable to narcissistic admiration, which is characterized by charm, social boldness, and self-confidence. In their research, they found that people high in narcissistic admiration were rated as more attractive in video and face-to-face encounters, reported higher self-perceived attractiveness as potential mates, reported being more likely to approach the opposite sex, and had a higher preference for casual sex (Wurst et al., 2017).

By way of interim summary, narcissists do not appear to be more physically attractive, at least not in the unadorned state. However, they may do more than others to control their physical appearance, such as pay increased attention to dress and grooming. Second, recent research suggests that narcissists may not actively pursue STM, although they may possess personality traits and characteristics that make them more likely to engage in STM, such as charming personalities and dominant interpersonal styles—both of which may attract potential mates.

A more controversial and disturbing possibility is that narcissism was sexually selected, not so much because of narcissists' attractiveness and ability to attract others for STM, but rather because of narcissists' proclivity to engage in sexual coercion and rape (which is morally abhorrent, but evolutionarily possible). For example, according to the narcissistic reactance model of rape and sexual coercion, narcissism should be linked to sexual coercion because narcissists feel entitled to sex and feel it is their right to demand sex when rejected by others (Baumeister et al., 2002; Bushman et al., 2003). In general, narcissists are more likely to express anger and aggression and less likely to internalize the negative emotions associated with social rejection (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). More specifically, Bushman et al. (2003) observed that when put in a situation in which they experienced a sexual refusal by a female research confederate, male narcissists reacted more aggressively toward the female confederate.

With regard to general models of narcissistic personality, this cognition and behavior is most closely associated with the NARC model's rivalry dimension of grandiose narcissism (Back et al., 2013). Indeed, narcissistic rivalry predicts endorsement of coercive sexual behavior when individuals are reminded of social rejection (Lamarche & Seery, 2019). Additionally, narcissists self-report that they engage in more coercive sexual behavior and fantasize more about coercion and sadistic acts (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012; Williams et al., 2009). Moreover, narcissists appear to be less empathic to victims of sexual assault and tend
p. 1203 to blame the victims ↳ (Bushman et al., 2003; see also Jonason et al., 2017; Long, 2018; Willis et al., 2017). This suggests that narcissists might have emotional and motivational profiles that are reactive to rejection and potentially make them prone to engaging in acts of sexual coercion and violence.

Most of this literature on narcissism and sexual coercion focuses on male perpetrators. The most common form of sexual coercion is men pressuring women into unwanted sexual experiences (30% of men self-report having physically forced or verbally coerced women into unwanted sexual acts; Zeigler-Hill, Enjaian, et al., 2013; cf. Blinkhorn et al., 2015, 2016; Lyons et al., 2022), so this focal point makes sense. However, some research suggests that narcissistic women are also prone to sexual coercion (Blinkhorn et al., 2015). Different facets of narcissism may be correlated with sexual coercion in women compared to men. Some studies suggest that sexual coercion by women is best predicted by narcissistic traits of exploitativeness and entitlement (Blinkhorn et al., 2019; Lyons et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2008), whereas leadership/authority and grandiose exhibitionism are more strongly associated with sexual coercion by men (Blinkhorn, 2018).

The final point about sexual selection, echoing Holtzman and Strube (2011), is that it would make evolutionary sense if narcissism peaked in adolescence precisely when a STM strategy is likely to pay off; this is termed *developmental specificity* (see Andrews et al., 2002, for review). Some evidence points to this being the case (e.g., Carlson & Gjerde, 2009; Foster et al., 2003), with narcissism levels being highest in young adults and gradually declining in older age groups. Narcissism in young adulthood may enhance the enactment of the sexual strategy for which narcissists were theoretically sexually selected. However, it is

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important to acknowledge the complexity of human mating, including sex differences (e.g., women prefer older mates than men prefer; Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2018).

Narcissism and Natural Selection

Sexual selection is just one route to evolutionary success. Another possibility is that narcissism was *naturally* selected in part because it facilitates the attainment of status (Tracy et al., 2011), which confers resources that enable one to navigate the problems of life. Status attainment can be achieved through either prestige or dominance (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). The prestige path refers to status that is obtained by being recognized and respected by others for skills, success, or knowledge. The dominance path refers to status attained through the use of fear and intimidation (e.g., threatening to withhold resources). Dominance is strongly associated with narcissism (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992) and narcissistic individuals are more likely to use the dominance strategy than the prestige strategy to achieve status (Cheng et al., 2010). Narcissists' dominant behavior can make them appear more competent and allow them to gain influence over others (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Thus, it is not surprising that narcissistic individuals would have an advantage in the pursuit of status in some contexts (Carlson & DesJardins, 2015; Mahadevan et al., 2019).

The two-dimensional conceptualization of grandiose narcissism proposed by the NARC model (Back et al., 2013) can be used to explain narcissists' success in obtaining status, especially in early acquaintanceships. Narcissistic admiration accounts for the enactment of dominant behaviors, which can appear assertive and thereby increase the perception of competence (Carlson & DesJardins, 2015; Leckelt et al., 2015). However, narcissists often fail to maintain this status over the long term (Carlson & DesJardins, 2015; Paulhus, 1998). Narcissistic rivalry may account for declining popularity and status over time, which evidently results from narcissistic expressions of antagonistic and aggressive behaviors (Leckelt et al., 2015); this may lead to a revolving door of interpersonal relationships such that narcissists are perpetually in the relationship
p. 1204 "emerging zone"—a stage in which relationships are new and relatively shallow ↳ (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). An endless stream of new relationships may allow narcissists to use interpersonal charm and similar traits to their advantage in extracting resources from others (Back et al., 2010).

Although narcissists often do not maintain their popularity and status over the long term, frequently they do manage to achieve and maintain high leadership positions, such as in the workplace (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). They do this by creating self-enhancing opportunities consistent with the narcissistic admiration dimension (Back et al., 2013). Grijalva and colleagues (2015) found that while narcissism is associated with leadership emergence, people who are high in narcissism are not particularly effective leaders, and the positive association between narcissism and leadership emergence is a function of extraversion, central to the narcissistic admiration dimension. Moreover, similar to what was discussed above, although narcissists frequently achieve popularity and status in the workplace and other organizations, and they even rise to positions of leadership due to their extraverted and dominant personalities, this advantage is usually brief, as the antagonistic side emerges over time (Grijalva et al., 2015; Paulhus, 1998). Narcissistic rivalry may also be used to explain the negative emotional and motivational effects that narcissistic leaders have on followers, especially when traits associated with narcissistic rivalry (e.g., derogatory attitudes) are expressed as observable behaviors (Fehn & Schütz, 2021).

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Summary

In this section, we discussed evolutionary pathways that might have allowed narcissism and narcissistic traits to be selected and maintained in the population. Genetics research suggests that at least some small portion of narcissistic personality is regulated by genes. This is important because it is genetic code that is shaped by evolutionary forces, such as sexual and natural selection. With regard to sexual selection mechanisms, the most heavily studied hypothesis is that some of the genes that comprise narcissism confer advantages in STM. We noted that narcissists do not appear to be more physically attractive, at least when in the unadorned state. However, they may possess traits and proclivities (e.g., flashier dress, bold and extraverted interpersonal style) that make them more noticeable and appealing to others looking for STM partners. Narcissists tend to engage in sexually coercive behavior, which (although morally repugnant) could be sexually selected. Finally, we observed that narcissism appears to peak in young adults, which would be expected for a trait that confers advantages through sexual selection of STM. As for natural selection, narcissism may offer advantages for attaining status and power. We noted that traits associated with narcissistic admiration may help narcissists attain status and emerge as leaders. Consistent with the duality of narcissism, however, whereas traits associated with narcissistic admiration may help narcissists attain status, traits associated with narcissistic rivalry may undermine their ability to maintain status. Thus, narcissism would appear to be particularly useful in turbulent social situations that provide frequent opportunities for narcissists to engage in shallow interpersonal acquaintanceships rather than deeper and longer-term relationships.

Narcissism and Emotions

Now that we have discussed what narcissism is and its possible evolutionary origins, we turn to the emotions of narcissists. Depending on whether narcissism takes on a grandiose or vulnerable form (Pincus et al., 2009), it can be associated with emotional experiences of different valence, strength, dynamics, and expression. In this section, we outline plausible functional links between the two forms of narcissism and
p. 1205 describe characteristic aspects of their emotional ↳ lives. We also briefly discuss these emotional profiles in the context of evolutionary functions of emotions.

Self-regulatory models of narcissism hold that narcissists desire status and admiration from other people to "convince themselves" of their own superiority (Grapsas et al., 2020; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Some models even compare the relentless pursuit of esteem by narcissists to addiction (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001). According to these models, the motivation is so strong and toxic, and the goal of building and maintaining a grandiose self based entirely on receiving endless proofs of appreciation from others so unattainable, that narcissists' attempts to fulfill this motivation can be self-defeating. Trying to elicit continual admiration, they ruin the relationships on which they rely for the admiration they seek. Not unlike addictions, narcissism thus involves a pattern of yielding to inner urges in a way that proves costly and self-destructive. In consequence, a narcissist's life may be characterized not by a stable sense of inflated self-regard, but rather likely by periods of self-aggrandizing inflation, leading to destructive consequences that may cause the person to revert to a more "moderate" view of self or even to a sense of inferiority and a phase of depression (especially later in life; Hill & Roberts, 2011). Thus, when we describe the emotional profiles of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism below, we do so as if the two constituted semi-independent personality traits. However, as described in the first section, periods of grandiosity filled with intense positive emotions and an accompanying sense of superiority, punctuated by phases of increased vulnerability, have been observed and may even be typical in narcissists (Edershile & Wright, 2021). Thus, the emotional profiles we present for grandiose and vulnerable narcissism may manifest at different times in the same person.

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Emotional Profile of Grandiose Narcissists

Grandiose narcissists are approach-oriented and sensitive to rewards (Foster & Brennan, 2012; Pincus et al., 2009). They tend to be in an energetic, upbeat, and optimistic mood (Sedikides et al., 2004) and rarely experience sadness, loneliness, anxiety, and other negative states (e.g., Miller et al., 2011; Sedikides et al., 2004). Grandiose narcissists have therefore been described as "successful narcissists," and their high emotional well-being has been attributed to their high self-esteem (Sedikides et al., 2004). This implies, however, that any factor that lowers narcissists' self-esteem is also likely to reduce their well-being. And, indeed, the well-being of grandiose narcissists is far from stable: grandiose narcissism is characterized by strong mood variability, which is thought to be due to their contingent self-esteem and sensitivity to social comparisons (Bogart et al., 2004; Geukes et al., 2017; Krizan & Bushman, 2011; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). For instance, narcissists' state self-esteem decreases substantially on days with more negative achievement events, leading to rapidly changing emotions (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2010).

It is likely that grandiose narcissists' desire to maintain an overly positive self-image leads them to experience hubristic pride (Tracy et al., 2011; Tracy et al., 2009). In contrast to authentic pride, which is based on actual achievements and leads to the development of genuine self-esteem, hubristic pride stems not from actual accomplishments but from generalized, distorted positive self-views (Tracy & Robins, 2007b). Whereas authentic pride results from attributions to internal, unstable, but controllable causes, hubristic pride results from attributions to internal, stable, and uncontrollable causes (i.e., the self; Tracy & Robins, 2007a). Although it has been suggested that in both forms of narcissism, hubristic pride constitutes a response to chronic excessive shame (Tracy et al., 2009), recent studies indicate that grandiose narcissists are not particularly prone to shame (Di Sarno et al., 2020). Similarly, unlike vulnerable narcissists,
p. 1206 grandiose narcissists do not generally experience excessive envy (Krizan & ↳ Johar, 2012; Neufeld & Johnson, 2016). Indeed, grandiose narcissists tend not to hold negative self-opinions of any sort (Campbell et al., 2004). A grandiose form of narcissism (or possibly, this "phase" in the narcissism "cycle") is better characterized by successful self-regulatory efforts that ward off negative emotions, such as shame and envy (Campbell et al., 2004).

In a related vein, research has also established differences in the triggers and use of aggression by grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. Grandiose narcissists seem to use aggression in a cold, instrumental manner to defend and assert their position of dominance in the face of a threat. This route does not necessarily include the intermediary of shame (Campbell et al., 2004). An important factor that protects grandiose narcissists from experiencing anger and hostility is likely their low neuroticism (Czarna et al., 2019). Accordingly, grandiose narcissists do not respond aggressively to minor provocations but resort to aggression mostly when faced with strong direct threats to their agentic self or status (Bettencourt et al., 2006; Krizan & Johar, 2015; Rasmussen, 2016). Their aggressive responses might thus be calculated tactics aimed at restoring their superiority, rather than outbursts of unrestrained, uncontrollable rage fueled by shame and anger (Barry et al., 2007; Fossati et al., 2010; Krizan & Johar, 2015). This view, known as the threatened egotism model, assumes that acts of aggression by grandiose narcissists are motivated by inflated self-esteem and entitlement rather than shame (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

Still, narcissistic self-esteem contingency and sensitivity to social comparison might result in affective lability (e.g., Hart et al., 2019). Grandiose narcissists use other people to regulate their self-esteem, producing a typical dynamic of initial excitement, "seduction," and later disappointment, altogether generating interpersonal turmoil (Campbell & Campbell, 2009; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998). They also display substantial emotional volatility in response to agentic failure (e.g., Besser & Priel, 2010; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). Yet, some researchers point to few emotion-regulation difficulties among grandiose narcissists (Zhang et al., 2015). For instance, grandiose narcissists report high levels of positive emotions and resilience, even when facing failure (Wallace et al., 2009). They also flexibly regulate their emotions by promptly withdrawing from tasks when easier paths to success are provided, but persistently

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performing tasks when no other paths to self-enhancement are available. Although narcissists show high resilience to stress and an ability to maintain positive mood, there may be considerable physiological costs to narcissism in the form of heightened reactivity observed on hormonal, cardiovascular, and neurological levels (Cheng et al., 2013; Edelstein et al., 2010; Reinhard et al., 2012; Sommer et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2015).

Perhaps the most important emotional characteristic of grandiose narcissists is their reduced empathy and low susceptibility to resonate with others' emotions (Czarna et al., 2015; Giammarco & Vernon, 2014; Vonk et al., 2013). Nonetheless, evidence regarding grandiose narcissists' ability to accurately process emotion-related information has been mixed. Some studies report deficits and biases (Czarna et al., 2023; Tardif et al., 2014; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012), while others report intact or even superior abilities (Konrath et al., 2014; Ritter et al., 2011). Meta-analyses show that grandiose narcissism is negatively associated with self-reported cognitive and affective empathy. Yet, when empathy is measured behaviorally, grandiose narcissism is significantly associated only with affective empathy (negatively) but not cognitive empathy (Urbonaviciute & Hepper, 2020). This suggests that empathic limitations in narcissism may not be due to inability to empathize, but rather due to lacking motivation for understanding others' emotional states and needs (Aradhye & Vonk, 2014; Stietz et al., 2019).

Emotional Profile of Vulnerable Narcissists

In contrast to grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists have been described as "struggling" or "failed" narcissists (Campbell et al., 2004). Vulnerable narcissists are avoidance oriented and sensitive to threats (Foster & Trimm, 2008). They tend to experience anxiety, depression, hostility, and other negative states (Miller et al., 2011; Tracy et al., 2011). Vulnerable narcissism is almost entirely reducible to neuroticism (the remaining variance being antagonism and hostility; Miller, Lynam, Vize, et al., 2017), which is a strong negative predictor of subjective well-being (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Some researchers propose that vulnerable narcissism reflects general personality pathology (Wright & Edershile, 2018). Similar to grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists experience high mood variability, which is likely due to their contingent self-esteem. When confronted with shameful interpersonal experiences, such as relational rejections, vulnerable narcissists react with a sudden and substantial drop in state self-esteem and rapidly changing emotions (Besser & Priel, 2010; Sommer et al., 2009; Thomaes et al., 2008).

Vulnerable narcissists' emotional lability may manifest in a tendency to experience overwhelming shame and hubristic pride (Krizan & Johar, 2015; Tracy et al., 2011). In their case, hubristic pride often serves as a defense from chronic excessive shame. It has been suggested that this dynamic results from a structural split in the self-representational system—an unstable and conflicting situation of implicit feelings of global shame and inadequacy coexisting with explicit feelings of grandiosity (Kuchynka & Bosson, 2018). Hubristic pride has been linked to antisocial emotions and behaviors such as anger, hostility, and aggression (Cheng et al., 2010; Tracy et al., 2009): According to the "authentic versus hubristic" model of pride, externalizing blame and experiencing anger might be a viable strategy for coping with chronic shame. Aggressive responses in vulnerable narcissists are therefore a part of a "shame-rage" spiral (Scheff, 1987; Tracy et al., 2011): they serve an ego-protective function and provide relief from the pain of shame (Tangney & Dearing, 2003).

Another source of emotional misery and aggression of vulnerable narcissists is their propensity for envy. This painful emotion plays a central role in their lives: They resent higher-status peers and revel in the misfortune of others (Krizan & Johar, 2012; Nicholls & Stukas, 2011). The envious impulses are likely elicited by a deep-seated feeling of inferiority and, together with vulnerable narcissists' poor regulation abilities, may contribute to hostility (Czarna et al., 2019). Emotion-regulation difficulties are evident in vulnerable narcissists' nonacceptance of their own emotional responses, poor impulse control, limited access to

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regulation strategies, and a lack of emotional clarity (Zhang et al., 2015). They all may result in high affect volatility induced by self-esteem contingency, inclination for incessant social comparison, and a deeply rooted sense of worthlessness. Their hypersensitivity and disappointment stemming from unmet expectations lead to social withdrawal and avoidance in a futile attempt to regulate self-esteem. Indeed, interpersonal rejection remains the most painful trigger for vulnerable narcissists (Besser & Priel, 2010), generating shame, depression, anger, and hostility (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Krizan & Johar, 2015). Narcissistic vulnerability rather than grandiosity has therefore been identified as a key source of narcissistic rage, as its necessary conditions include a fragile sense of self, an explosive mixture of shame, hostility, and extreme anger (Krizan & Johar, 2015). The resultant outburst of aggression is disproportionate, dysfunctional, and often misdirected.

Although the lack of empathy is a core part of narcissism, research focusing on empathy of vulnerable narcissists has been scarce and the findings are inconsistent (Urbonaviciute & Hepper, 2020). Some studies found vulnerable narcissism to be negatively associated with cognitive empathy, but unrelated to affective
p. 1208 empathy (Aradhye & Vonk, 2014; Böckler ↳ et al., 2017). However, the distinction between self-report and behavioral measures is crucial: vulnerable narcissism is significantly negatively associated with self-reported cognitive and affective empathy, but it is not significantly associated with behaviorally measured cognitive empathy. Because a common component of both variants of narcissism is antagonism, it seems likely that empathy deficits manifest in the same way in grandiose and vulnerable narcissists (Urbonaviciute & Hepper, 2020), but evidence for this claim is limited. To date, there have been no studies employing behavioral measures of affective empathy among vulnerable narcissists.

Evolutionary Relevance of Narcissists' Emotionality

An evolutionary hypothesis for why narcissism persists suggests that narcissism serves as a frequency-dependent variant of behavioral dominance that promotes successful STM (Holtzman & Strube, 2011). We propose that the emotionality of narcissists, in particular of grandiose narcissists, facilitates their reproduction and survival, thus reflecting sexual and natural selection. In evolutionary psychology, emotions are strategies for achieving goals that increase the probability of desired outcomes (e.g., maintaining high status and self-esteem), or that reduce the probability of negative outcomes (e.g., preventing decreases in status and self-esteem; Al-Shawaf et al., 2015). For example, anger and pride (both hubristic and authentic), like inflated self-esteem, facilitate attainment of evolutionarily relevant objectives (e.g., Beall & Tracy, 2020; Cheng et al., 2010) via several routes. The emotion of pride seems to play a major role in the mechanisms that promote status-seeking efforts, allocate psychological rewards, and adjust psychological systems to maintain achieved status, as well as provide the medium that signals status achievements or self-perceived status (Cheng et al., 2010). Pride and high self-esteem reinforce self-confidence and entitlement, promote assertive behavior, "advertise" high mate value, and communicate high status to group members (the broadcasting function of self-esteem; e.g., Zeigler-Hill, Besser, et al., 2013). Empirical evidence confirms that narcissists are often perceived as having high self-esteem and thus are liked (Giacomin & Jordan, 2018). Hubristic pride may also facilitate dominance in narcissistic individuals through feelings of superiority and arrogance, which can help individuals psychologically prepare to exert the necessary force and intimidation needed to achieve a dominant reputation (Cheng et al., 2010). Anger can also contribute to increasing status as it enables narcissists to act aggressively and "recalibrate" others so that they put a high value on the narcissist's welfare (Sell et al., 2009). High status has direct evolutionary implications as it is an important factor in sexual selection and, by definition, implies preferential access to mates and resources.

Narcissists also seek access to resources and mates via less socially desirable means, and their emotional profiles facilitate these efforts. For instance, low affective empathy with intact capacity for cognitive empathy (as indicated by emotion-recognition abilities) supports effective lying, cheating, and even

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stealing without experiencing a lot of guilt in multiple social settings, including academic, occupational, and intimate relationship contexts (O'Reilly & Doerr, 2020; Schröder-Abé & Fatfouta, 2019; Shimberg et al., 2016). It also enables narcissists to enjoy cheating (Lobbestael et al., 2014), to exploit fellow humans, and to apply coercive tactics, including rape (Hart et al., 2018; Willis et al., 2017). To the extent that it is linked to low emotional attachment, low commitment, dishonesty, ease of abandoning a mate, and a "ludus" love style, it also aids in executing an STM strategy (Holtzman & Strube, 2011).

Altogether, narcissism brings benefits and costs, but from an evolutionary perspective, the costs may not outweigh the benefits. For instance, the fact that the popularity and status benefits of narcissism are short-lived (Leckelt et al., 2015) does not diminish their evolutionary relevance. Narcissists are judged attractive
p. 1209 and popular at first sight (Back et al., 2010; Dufner ↳ et al., 2013; Sedikides & Campbell, 2017) and this advantage and its associated support for mating success might be sufficient to "keep it in the population's genetic pool." Furthermore, growing evidence shows that grandiose narcissism comes with a physical and mental health cost. For example, narcissists' disproportionate physiological reactivity may be a cost of protecting their grandiosity (Cascio et al., 2015; Edelstein et al., 2010; Reinhard et al., 2012). Similarly, the episodes of vulnerability with associated suffering might be considered costs of excessive narcissistic grandiosity. In conclusion, despite the costs, traits like narcissism can confer reproductive and survival benefits for the individual (Jonason et al., 2012).

Summary

Overall, the emotional profile of grandiose narcissists partly explains why they have been referred to as "successful narcissists" (Campbell et al., 2004). Due to their high self-esteem and tendency to overestimate their own capabilities, they often experience strong positive emotions and rarely experience negative ones, including shame and envy. Their self-enhancement goes together with hubristic (rather than authentic) pride. They might use aggression to assert their dominance. However, in certain circumstances (e.g., when faced with acute threats to their ego or status), grandiose narcissists' emotional experiences might become qualitatively different. In such circumstances, grandiose narcissists may exhibit episodes of vulnerability, and this vulnerability may be present for a substantial portion of the time in their lives (Hyatt et al., 2018). In contrast to grandiose narcissists, their vulnerable counterparts are low in subjective well-being and high in negative emotionality. They too tend to experience hubristic pride and may resort to aggression, but in their case, these responses occur as a result of overwhelming shame. Their intense anger and hostility occasionally lead to outbursts of uncontrollable rage. Research suggests that both forms of narcissism are associated with reduced affective empathy. From the evolutionary point of view, the emotional profiles of narcissists may facilitate STM and may support the attainment of status-related goals.

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Chapter Summary

We have discussed narcissism/NPD in general, its possible evolutionary origins, and the emotional experiences of narcissists. In the first section, we saw that narcissism is both a personality trait and a personality disorder (i.e., NPD). One way to think about NPD is that it is present when narcissistic personality becomes a problem. Thus, people can be exceptionally high narcissists but not have NPD if they do not also experience significant intrapersonal and interpersonal impairment. As a personality trait, narcissism is probably best conceptualized as two superordinate dimensions, labeled as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Both expressions of narcissism share a common theme of interpersonal antagonism, low agreeableness, and narcissistic rivalry (the specific labels vary depending on the model). However, whereas grandiose narcissism is also characterized by agentic extraversion or narcissistic admiration, vulnerable narcissism is characterized by narcissistic neuroticism. As was discussed in the first section as well as the section on narcissism and emotions, there is some evidence that people may oscillate between grandiose and vulnerable narcissistic states. In particular, there is evidence that grandiose narcissists experience moments of vulnerable narcissism. More research is needed, however, to firmly establish how much this occurs and what prompts it.

The second section focused on the possible evolutionary origins of narcissism. Narcissistic personality is partially heritable, and our best guess is that it has a small (perhaps 10%) component that is genetic. Through sexual and natural selection, narcissism is likely to comprise a constellation of qualities that serve reproductive and survival functions. There is evidence that narcissism, in particular, grandiose narcissism,
p. 1210 may confer some reproductive advantages ↳ by facilitating STM. Although not necessarily more physically attractive than their non-narcissistic counterparts, narcissists may dress and act in ways that make them more visible and attractive to STM partners. More disturbingly, narcissists may also be more likely than others to engage in sexually coercive behavior. With regard to natural selection, narcissism—again, particularly, grandiose narcissism—is linked to short-term popularity, status, and leadership emergence. Narcissists have domineering personalities, which may give them some advantages when competing with others and allow them access to more abundant resources.

The third and final section focused on the emotional profiles of narcissists. Although it is debatable whether grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are stable and distinct versus dynamic traits, they are considerably different regarding emotions. The extent to which grandiose and vulnerable narcissists are seen as "successful" versus "failed" narcissists, respectively, may be attributable to their emotional profiles. Grandiose narcissism is linked with mostly positive emotional experiences, and grandiose narcissists appear to be relatively well-defended psychologically from threats to the self. It has been said that narcissism is like a disease where everyone around the narcissist suffers (Campbell, 2016). Although even grandiose narcissists probably have their vulnerable moments, to the extent that this description of narcissism is correct, it is clearly a more apt description of grandiose narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism, on the other hand, is linked almost exclusively to negative emotional experiences. Vulnerable narcissists are not nearly as psychologically well-defended as their grandiose counterparts. They are prone to excessive feelings of shame, doubt, and jealousy. Unlike grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists suffer greatly, and vulnerable narcissism is most likely the source of much of the intrapersonal dysfunction associated with NPD. This section concluded by discussing how these emotional profiles, in particular, that associated with grandiose narcissism, may have been shaped through sexual and natural selection. As discussed in the earlier section on evolution, status-signaling traits (e.g., pride, high self-esteem) associated with grandiose narcissism may confer mating and survival advantages.

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