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Narcissism and Motivation

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Laypersons, clinical diagnosticians, and clinical theorists all offer portraits of the narcissist, but each portrait possesses an important shortcoming. The portrait of the layperson tends to be anecdotal and imprecise, that of the clinical diagnostician (as codified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*; 4th ed. [DSM-IV]; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) is precise in description but atheoretical, and that of the clinical theorist (e.g., Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977) tends to be heavy on theory but light on empirical data. In this context, the portrait offered by Morf and Rhodewalt (this issue) is a welcome addition to the literature. The authors offer a "dynamic self-regulatory processing" model of narcissism, that is descriptively rooted in the DSM-IV, draws on theoretical work in the clinical and social-personality psychology literatures and is supported by an expanding empirical base. We believe that this model indeed holds great promise in helping to "unravel the paradoxes of narcissism."

The aspect of the model that we, as motivational researchers, find particularly appealing is its focus on the energization and direction of narcissistic behavior. Motivational considerations pervade Morf and Rhodewalt's analysis; we identify and discuss two such features of the model: the interplay between achievement and affiliation needs and the utilization of the distinction between approach and avoidance motivation.

The Need for Achievement and the Need for Affiliation

As portrayed by Morf and Rhodewalt, the narcissist appears to be an individual who is high in the need for achievement and low in the need for affiliation. As noted earlier, the authors embrace the DSM-IV definition of narcissism that describes an individual preoccupied with dreams of success and invested in demonstrating superiority relative to others. Although some have construed this striving for superiority in terms of the need for power (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), we think it also clearly reflects a particular aspect of the need for achievement. Need for achievement represents a dispositional desire to attain competence (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Murray, 1938) and is multidimensional in that it includes both a desire to master challenges and a desire to do better than others (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Narcissists are high in the competitiveness dimension of the need for achievement (Raskin & Terry, 1988), not necessarily the mastery dimension.

Although social relationships play an integral role in Morf and Rhodewalt's model, it is clear from their description of the narcissist in relational contexts that such individuals are actually low in the need for affiliation per se (Carroll, 1987; Emmons, 1989). That is, narcissists seem to desire relationships not for the intrinsic satisfaction of interacting with and connecting to others, but for extrinsic, instrumental purposes. In

essence, relational others for the narcissist primarily serve a feedback function, allowing them to clearly and emphatically demonstrate normative competence. Thus, in the world of the narcissist, social contexts are important because they are the arena in which all-important achievement processes take place and where narcissists are able to feed their strong desire for normative competence. This helps explain how narcissists can seem to care so much about social contexts but at the same time appear so callous in their actual social interactions.

Categorizing narcissists as low in the need for affiliation does not mean that they are devoid of affiliation motivation altogether. In accord with recent theorizing on needs and motives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1991) we view affiliation (as well as achievement) as an inherent, pancultural psychological need—an experience required by all humans to function optimally (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). All individuals, those low in affiliation motivation included, are presumed to require some baseline level of affiliation to thrive; socialization processes determine whether the need for affiliation remains at this baseline level, or becomes a stronger motivational impetus (see Elliot, McGregor, & Thrash, *in press*, for an analog regarding the need for achievement). Thus, despite being low in affiliation motivation, narcissists must experience some genuine affiliative connection with others to sustain their well-being. The way in which narcissists use relational others in instrumental fashion and fail to adhere to social norms of modesty and attributional generosity (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, *in press*), is likely to bode ill for the maintenance of strong affiliative bonds (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997; Paulhus, 1998). As such, narcissists undoubtedly have difficulty satisfying their basic need for affiliation, despite its relative weakness (although see Campbell, 1999).

As highlighted by Morf and Rhodewalt, the narcissist's self-regulation in social contexts appears to lack social intelligence, in that it fails to satisfy a basic need of the organism. Although the narcissist's behavior may facilitate fulfillment of the basic need for achievement, it does so by undermining satisfaction of the need for affiliation. This rigid focus on achievement to the determinant of affiliation is likely to exact a toll on psychological and even physical well-being. It may be possible in the short run to compensate for deficits in the relational domain with an abundance of competence experiences, but intrapsychic imbalance of this sort is bound to catch up with the narcissist eventually. Given that each need represents a basic requirement for health and well-being, putting all eggs in one motivational basket, or ignoring one basket for an extended length of time, clearly seems a recipe for intrapsychic disaster. These difficulties may be difficult to docu-

ment using self-report (i.e., subjective) indicators of well-being; observational or more objective measures of well-being may be required to detect the costs of the narcissist's self-regulation.

Approach and Avoidance Motivation

In several places in their analysis, Morf and Rhodewalt implicitly or explicitly make use of the distinction between approach and avoidance motivation. Earlier, we focused exclusively on approach motives—the need for achievement and the need for affiliation, but each of these dispositions has a complementary avoidance motive—fear of failure and fear of rejection, respectively. In addition, to this point we have focused exclusively on motive dispositions, but these dispositions typically evoke context-specific approach and avoidance goals that are used to proximally regulate behavior (see Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & McGregor, 1999). From our perspective, much of the paradoxical nature of narcissism is attributable to the fact that narcissists demonstrate appetitive and aversive motivation simultaneously. Specifically, we view narcissists as energized by both approach and avoidance motives at the underlying level, yet directed nearly exclusively by approach forms of regulation at the context-specific level. Thus, as alluded to by Morf and Rhodewalt, the behavior of the narcissist often represents an active avoidance of failure or rejection: performance-approach goal pursuit in the service of an underlying fear of failure and fear of rejection (in addition to an underlying need for achievement).

This hierarchical combination of approach and avoidance motivation may be what produces the sense that the narcissist's overt confidence, grandstanding, and superiority striving is a thin veneer covering a deeply engrained fragility, vulnerability, and defensiveness. Both fear of failure and fear of rejection are thought to be grounded in parental socialization practices such as global (as opposed to behavior-focused) negative feedback and love withdrawal, practices that are likely to communicate contingent acceptance and worth to the child. Thus, in essence, self-regulation undergirded by fear of failure or fear of rejection represents a symbolic (and sometimes concrete) attempt to earn or maintain the love and acceptance of important others by achieving competitive success in achievement situations (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). This type of self-regulation is extremely stressful and demanding; one's global self-evaluation rides on each achievement evaluation (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998; Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998), and no matter how many prior successes have been accrued, a single failure can spell disaster (see Dweck, 1999).

In considering the motive dispositions of the narcissist, it is important to attend to the distinction between self-attributed and implicit motives delineated by

McClelland and colleagues (Koestner, Weinberger, & McClelland, 1991; McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Self-attributed motives are posited to be conscious, cognitively elaborated values that can be assessed via self-report, whereas implicit motives are portrayed as nonconscious, affectively based dispositions that can only be assessed with projective or other non-self-report measures. With regard to approach motives, narcissists probably evidence concordance in their self-attributed and implicit dispositions (high on both self-attributed and implicit need for achievement, low on both self-attributed and implicit need for affiliation). However, given their characteristic defensiveness, it is likely that narcissists evidence discordance with regard to their avoidance motives—they would be low on self-attributed fear of failure and fear of rejection, and high on the corresponding implicit motives. A conceptual parallel is likely to exist with regard to the measurement of self-esteem. Narcissists have been shown to have high self-esteem (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), but this correlation has been obtained with the use of self-report (i.e., self-attributed) measures. Several researchers have developed implicit measures of self-esteem in the past few years (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000; Hetts, Sakuma, & Pelham, 1999; see Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000), and we suspect that narcissists may actually evidence low self-esteem on such measures. Parenthetically, when global (as opposed to domain-specific) motives are typically discussed in the self-literature, there is no attention allocated to the approach-avoidance distinction (Sedikides & Strube, 1995; see Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989 for an exception). We contend that a comprehensive understanding of self-based motives fully incorporates avoidance, in addition to approach, forms of motivation (e.g., bifurcating the self-enhancement motive into conceptually independent self-enhancement and self-protection motives; see Elliot et al., 2000).

In sum, we think portraits of narcissism (and clinical disorders in general, see Fowles, 1994) are greatly enriched by motivational analyses such as that offered by Morf and Rhodewalt. If we were to consider a criticism of their portrait, it is that the model they offer seems too general to provide a precise accounting of narcissism or to generate precise hypotheses for research. That is, at present, their model represents broad categories of variables, rather than specific constructs per se. However, the field's understanding of narcissism is at a rather rudimentary level at present and, as such, generality of this nature is understandable. In addition, this generality may actually facilitate the research process, in that it may keep researchers from becoming prematurely focused on a narrow set of ideas or hypotheses. Indeed, we find Morf and Rhodewalt's model a valuable blueprint for continued empirical efforts to comprehend the complex and intriguing world of the narcissist.

Note

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The Distributed Processing of Narcissists: Paradox Lost?

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Morf and Rhodewalt (this issue) deserve a trophy for producing an insightful and well-written article on narcissism. Narcissism is traditionally conceptualized as a personality-based clinical syndrome that has its origins in disturbances in upbringing during childhood and is manifest in distinctive defensive processes in adulthood (e.g., Paulhus & John, 1998). Morf and Rhodewalt move the ball down the field some distance by reconceptualizing narcissism as the dispositional output of a biased-information processing system. In keeping with Buss (1995), they seek to identify explicitly the psychological mechanisms that link antecedents with behavior and cognition.

Morf and Rhodewalt offer an important contribution to our understanding of the self as a system of interdependent relations. First, their article presents a rich, contextual synopsis of the literature on narcissism, including many unpublished studies. They compile the findings into a descriptive summary of the research conducted in this area. Second, the researchers reduced the complexity of findings by using key explanatory variables. The identified variables then were incorporated into an organizing model by these

researchers. Third, in presenting such a model, Morf and Rhodewalt provide not only a description but also a characterization of the state of the literature. These authors allow readers to see the holes in the research base, and they provide several valuable insights about how these holes can be eliminated.

In effect, Morf and Rhodewalt have transformed the state of the art. Before their review, it is fair to say that narcissism represented an odd curiosity of clinical psychology. Following this review, narcissism could be better conceptualized as a "boundary topic" (Masters, Yarkin-Levin, & Graziano, 1984) that does not fit neatly into one area of study. At a minimum, it also spans the developmental, social, cognitive, and personality fields within the greater, inclusive psychology umbrella. Topics that fall at these particular boundaries in psychology offer special opportunities.

Because their review is well written and virtually seamless, it is easy to overlook some potential missed connections. Of course, no single article can cover all possible connections. Nevertheless, perhaps some warning signals are in order for the rest of us. First, despite the impressive synthesis the review is not truly