Narcissism: A Social-Developmental Perspective

Sander Thomaes, Eddie Brummelman and Constantine Sedikides[1]

The Roman poet Ovid wrote in his *Metamorphoses* about a self-absorbed and vain young man named Narcissus. The youngster spurned the romantic overtures of the nymph Echo and fell in love with the reflection of himself in a pond of water. The story has no happy ending, as both Narcissus and Echo pined away due to their unrequited love. As a twist of fate, however, their characters have merged in what researchers, in modern times, have labeled 'narcissistic personality'.

Narcissism is characterized by a pervasive sense of grandiosity and disdain (much like Narcissus), and by a strong need to be validated by others (much like Echo). With this chapter we aim to provide an integrative review of current knowledge of narcissism, relying both on the social-personality and developmental literatures. By adopting an integrative social-developmental perspective, we seek to understand not only the core of narcissism, but also its diverse manifestations across individuals, contexts, cultures, and

the life course. Moreover, we seek to understand its origins: what antecedents explain why some individuals are more narcissistic than others? In doing so, we illustrate how research at the intersection of social-personality and developmental psychology helps address some of the most pressing contemporary issues about narcissism.

MANIFESTATIONS OF NARCISSISM

When we talk about 'narcissists', we refer to individuals with high levels of trait narcissism, not those with a narcissistic disorder. Although well-known for its extreme form as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), narcissism is also a subclinical or 'normal' personality trait on which people in the general population differ considerably. There is increasing evidence that narcissistic pathology is an extreme manifestation of trait narcissism.

Indeed, trait narcissism correlates strongly with interview-based assessments of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, trait narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder have similar correlates, and there is no apparent shift from normal to extreme levels in the narcissism distribution (Miller and Campbell, 2010). As such, research on trait narcissism in non-clinical samples informs understanding of narcissistic pathology.

Narcissism has become a familiar phenomenon in popular culture. When laypersons think of 'narcissists' they may think of individuals who brag, draw attention to themselves, and feel entitled to privileges. These intuitive depictions are correct, but they are also incomplete. Despite their grandiose appearance, narcissists have a vulnerable side: they are obsessed with how they are viewed by others, emotionally sensitive to relatively minor social setbacks (e.g., criticism, disrespect), and prone to shame or anger as much as to pride or hubris. If anything, narcissists are full of apparent paradoxes (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001). In this section, we review the literature on manifestations of narcissism.

Core Manifestations of Narcissism

The core manifestations of narcissism are self-enhancement, need for admiration, and adversarial interpersonal orientation.

Self-enhancement

One core manifestation of narcissism is the pervasive tendency to self-enhance (Grijalva and Zhang, 2016). Narcissists have an exaggerated sense of self-importance, view themselves as superior to others (especially in agentic domains, such as intelligence; Campbell, Rudich et al., 2002), and overestimate their abilities or achievements. For example, compared to objective standards, they overrate their intelligence and physical attractiveness (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2008; Gabriel et al., 1994), and evaluate their task

performance in overly positive terms (Farwell and Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; John and Robins, 1994).

Although some level of self-enhancement may be normative even among non-narcissists (Alicke and Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides and Gregg, 2008), narcissistic self-enhancement is more extreme and insensitive to social constraints. In situations where most others operate cautiously to make sure they are not viewed as arrogant or self-absorbed, narcissists seek opportunities for glorification. Not surprisingly, their self-enhancement can be at the cost of their social acceptance; indeed, narcissists often come across as snobs (Scopelliti et al., 2015; Sedikides et al., 2015). They also have a strong sense of entitlement. As self-perceived special and superior beings, narcissists feel owed and are convinced they deserve more than they get (Exline et al., 2004). When narcissists do not receive their entitled adulation, they respond with antagonism and hostility (Moeller et al., 2009; Reidy et al., 2008).

Need for admiration

Another core manifestation of narcissism is the craving to be noticed and admired. Narcissists place themselves at the center of attention and dominate conversation (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008; Buss and Chiodo, 1991). They impress others as charming and self-assured, and often chisel a strikingly neat or sexy appearance (Back et al., 2010; Vazire et al., 2008). They pursue leadership positions and roles or occupations that promise status (Brunell et al., 2008; Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006). In romance, they prefer high prestige (i.e., attractive, popular) partners who admire them over those who provide intimacy or nurturance (Campbell, 1999; Horton and Sedikides, 2009).

At first blush, narcissists' need for admiration might seem counterintuitive. If narcissists genuinely believe that they are important, accomplished, and superior to others, then why would they need others to

confirm all this in the first place? It is often assumed that narcissists crave such external validation because, deep down inside, they are insecure or dislike themselves. However, research has challenged this assumption (Bosson et al., 2008; Gregg and Sedikides, 2010). We have suggested, instead, that narcissists crave validation because their sense of superiority is precarious by definition (Brummelman et al., 2016). Indeed, the quest for superiority is a zero-sum game: for every winner there is a loser, and for every loser there is a winner (Back et al., 2013; Crocker and Canevello, 2008). Narcissists may need continuous validation from others to assure themselves that they are, and continue to be, on the winning side of the battlefield for superiority.

Adversarial interpersonal orientation

A third core manifestation of narcissism is a condescending and exploitative orientation toward others – an orientation that earned narcissists the label 'disagreeable extraverts' (Paulhus, 2001). They are quick to experience hostility, especially in competitive situations (Brown, 2004; Raskin et al., 1991); they are impulsive and argumentative (Holtzman et al., 2010; Vazire and Funder, 2006); and, being unempathetic (Hepper et al., 2014), they are prone to manipulate and use others, perceiving their relationships as a platform for attaining their self-goals (Nagler et al., 2014; Sedikides et al., 2002). When they are in monogamous relationships, they keep their options open for alternative partners. Not surprisingly, narcissists' romantic relationships tend to be short-lived (Campbell and Foster, 2002; Campbell, Foster et al., 2002).

Narcissists are charming, easy-going, and attractive at first sight, but their popularity crumbles with time (Paulhus, 1998). In one study, participants interacted with each other in small groups in weekly meetings over the course of three weeks (Leckelt et al., 2015). Narcissists were popular during the first

meetings; they were perceived as assertive, trustworthy, and likeable, especially due to their dominant and assertive persona. With time, however, their adversarial interpersonal orientation (e.g., arrogant, aggressive) started to surface, and their initial popularity decreased readily. Thus, what characterizes narcissists is not only their tendency to self-enhance, but also the collateral damage they are willing to inflict in the process of doing so: narcissists dismiss interpersonal closeness in favor of being admired by others – a phenomenon dubbed the 'others exist for me illusion' (Sedikides et al., 2002).

Grandiose versus Vulnerable Manifestations of Narcissism

Even if narcissism has a common core, there is evidence that it is a two-dimensional personality constellation. One landmark study (Wink, 1991) established that narcissism comprises two underlying orthogonal factors. Those factors share a core of grandiose self-belief and disregard for others, but they demonstrate distinct patterns of psychological and interpersonal correlates. One factor, grandiose narcissism, is associated with such traits as extraversion, exhibitionism, self-assurance, and aggression. The other factor, vulnerable narcissism, is associated with such traits as introversion, anxiety, and defensiveness (precisely the manifestations of narcissism that are often overlooked by laypersons). Later research also supported the two-dimensional structure of narcissism (Miller et al., 2011; Pincus and Lukowitsky, 2010).

It may be tempting, therefore, to think of narcissists as either 'grandiose' or 'vulnerable', but yet, doing so obscures that grandiose and vulnerable narcissism share core traits. There is a rather pervasive, but not always justified, tendency among experts to pursue ever-finer distinctions between subtypes of narcissists. Although the narcissistic phenotype is indeed diverse, such typologies may

exaggerate differences between narcissistic individuals, and may yield research findings that are rather idiosyncratic and dependent upon the typology that a given team of researchers happens to prefer. We advocate a more parsimonious approach that acknowledges that narcissism has a common core.

Another reason not to think of narcissistic individuals as either grandiose or vulnerable, is that grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are probably more 'state-like' than 'trait-like': narcissists can oscillate between grandiosity and vulnerability (Gore and Widiger, 2016; Pincus and Lukowitsky, 2010). Of course, some narcissists may be prone to grandiosity and others to vulnerability, but the notion of two types of narcissists may not be accurate or useful.

Manifestations of Narcissism in Youth

Early manifestations of narcissism may emerge from middle to late childhood onwards (Thomaes et al., 2013; Thomaes, Stegge et al., 2008). Like adult narcissists, narcissistic youth feel superior to others (Thomaes, Stegge, et al., 2008), are interpersonally dominant (Reijntjes et al., 2016), are invested in making favorable impressions on others (Ong et al., 2011), are prone to hostility and aggression (Barry, Grafeman et al., 2007; Thomaes, Bushman et al., 2008), and behave in non-prosocial or selfish manners (Pauletti et al., 2012).

Still, various developmental factors (e.g., cognitive and emotional maturation, changes in age-related expectations and tasks) may influence how narcissism manifests among individuals of different ages. A few narcissistic characteristics in particular appear more typical in youth than they are in adults (Thomaes and Brummelman, 2016).

First, narcissistic youth frequently engage in grandiose fantasy. According to clinicians, such fantasy is a means for narcissistic youth to create and maintain their grandiose self-views (Bardenstein, 2009; Bleiberg, 1984). Some common themes about which narcissistic youth fantasize are becoming wealthy, powerful, and physically attractive, or being capable of exceptional performances. To be sure, it is not uncommon for typically developing children to engage in some level of grandiose fantasy. What sets narcissistic grandiose fantasy apart is not only its intensity (i.e., wanting to rule the world rather than become important) but also its age-inappropriateness (e.g., fantasy about one becoming a basketball superstar is probably more appropriate for a six-year-old than a 16-year-old).

Second, narcissistic youth typically display age-inappropriate attitudes of self-sufficiency and self-reliance (Bardenstein, 2009; Bleiberg, 1984). From a young age, narcissistic children present themselves as independent and well able to take care of themselves. The common interpretation is that narcissistic children avoid the vulnerability that, in their perception, interpersonal dependency entails. Many narcissistic children lack the basic trust that others care for them (Kohut, 1971) and, in response, they take a defensive interpersonal stance that communicates self-reliance.

Third, narcissistic youth are prone to internalizing emotions. For example, experimental research found that narcissistic youth experience high levels of shame following public failure on an easy task or following blatant positive but disingenuous feedback (Malkin et al., 2011; Thomaes et al., 2011). Survey research also found that narcissistic youth can be prone to internalizing symptoms, including fear, worry, and depression (Barry and Malkin, 2010; Washburn et al., 2004). Why would narcissistic youth experience more internalizing emotions than their adult counterparts? One possibility is that adults have learned to downregulate, repress, or underreport internalizing emotions because these threaten their aspired sense of grandiosity – a possibility that needs empirical scrutiny.

THEORIES OF NARCISSISM

Narcissists exhibit paradoxical characteristics. They feel superior to others, but also crave others' attention and admiration. They appear self-confident, but are emotionally sensitive to criticism. They are charming and easy-going, but insensitive to others' needs. What underlying personality constellation explains these paradoxical characteristics? Over the years, several influential theories of narcissism have been proposed to address this question.

Psychoanalytic Models

Early theorizing about narcissism was inspired by psychoanalytic theory, in particular the object-relations and self-psychology models.

The *object-relations model* assumes that people have two fundamental drives – libido and aggression. In addition, it assumes that people hold self-representations (i.e., internal images of themselves) and object-representations (i.e., internal images of important others). These representations may be positively valenced (caused by libido) or negatively valenced (caused by aggression). Different manifestations of narcissism stem from how people integrate positive and negative self- and object-representations (Kernberg, 1975). Normal narcissism arises when self- and object-representations contain both positively valenced and negatively valenced aspects. Normal narcissism is therefore a normative phenomenon allowing people to evaluate themselves and others realistically. By contrast, pathological narcissism arises when people integrate only positive aspects into their self- and object-representations, and project negative self- and object-representations onto others. People suffering from pathological narcissism, therefore, hold unrealistically positive or grandiose views of the self and highly negative or disdainful views of others.

The *self-psychology model* (Kohut, 1971) posits that children are born in a state of self-love called primary narcissism. According to the model, young children hold highly positive views of both themselves (i.e., the grandiose self) and their parents (i.e., the idealized parent image). Later in development, the grandiose self matures and lays the foundation from which self-esteem and ambition can develop. The idealized parent image becomes internalized into a superego, that is, a set of moral standards and values that influences the ideals one comes to hold. Under certain challenging developmental conditions (e.g., when children's needs are insufficiently met by their parents), however, the grandiose self and the idealized parent image may keep their infantile form and lead to pathological narcissism. Thus, the self-psychology model conceptualizes narcissism as a form of developmental arrest. Narcissists may compensate for their unfulfilled interpersonal needs in later life. For example, they may excessively seek recognition from their friendships or romantic relationships.

Some postulates of the two psychoanalytic models have had a major influence on present-day thinking about narcissism. For example, psychoanalytic models emphasized that narcissists have distorted views of themselves and others, and were the first to illuminate the strategies that narcissists employ to maintain their positive self-views. These ideas have received empirical backing (Morf et al., 2011). Also, psychoanalytic models sought to understand narcissism from a life-course perspective, in which early disruptions in self-development might contribute to the development of narcissism – a postulate that also received empirical support (Brummelman et al., 2015b).

Dynamic Self-Regulatory Processing Model

The dynamic self-regulatory processing model of narcissism (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001)

provides a more contemporary account of narcissism, but also has a psychoanalytic origin. It is built on Freud's (1914/1957) proposition that narcissists are driven to self-regulate through the use of interpersonal tactics. The model, in particular, posits that narcissists are chronically invested in building and maintaining the grandiose self-image they desire. Narcissists want to feel superior, special, and important, and employ a variety of self-regulatory strategies to achieve this goal. However, narcissists' grandiose self-views are virtually impossible to maintain, as they will be challenged by life events (e.g., failure, rejection, disillusion). Narcissists need constant external validation, such as praise and admiration, to maintain their grandiose self. In that way, they are in a chronic state of self-under-construction.

Narcissists employ two types of moment-to-moment self-regulatory strategies. On the *interpersonal level*, narcissists shape their social interactions by soliciting others' attention and admiration. For example, they are quick to maneuver themselves to occupy the center of attention or to prove their superior skills to others. On the *intrapersonal level*, narcissists seek to affirm their grandiose self-views by taking disproportional credit for successes, dismissing negative outcomes, overestimating their competencies and accomplishments, and reconstructing their past in self-flattering ways.

Ironically, however, narcissists' grandiosity strivings may ultimately prove self-defeating. Their investment and persistence in garnering attention and admiration often repel the very people whose approval they seek. Once others notice narcissists' self-centeredness, manipulativeness, arrogance, or hot-temper, they cease to serve as the source of validation that narcissists need – a dynamic which has been considered the ultimate narcissistic paradox (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001). The dynamic self-regulatory processing model has been particularly influential, inspiring several other theoretical developments, such as the agency model (Campbell et al., 2006)

and the extended agency model (Campbell and Foster, 2007).

Addiction Model

The addiction model of narcissism (Baumeister and Vohs, 2001) draws a direct parallel between narcissists' addiction to being admired and more familiar addictions (e.g., to drugs). According to the model, narcissism represents a chronic pattern of urges and behaviors that share striking similarity to urges and behaviors that characterize addiction. In particular, narcissism may entail three hallmark features of addiction: cravings, withdrawal, and tolerance.

Cravings refer to intense longings for a desirable stimulus or outcome. Narcissists crave to be admired by others and they go to great lengths to reach this goal. *Tolerance* refers to decreasing strength of effects of the desirable stimulus, so that increased dosage is needed to yield similar effects. Indeed, narcissists often seem insatiable in their pursuit of recognition, and they typically want more admiration from more sources on more occasions. *Withdrawal* refers to the distress that ensues when exposure to a desirable stimulus or outcome (e.g., a drug) is withheld. When narcissists fail to receive the admiration they want, they tend to become angry and aggressive – not unlike other addicts who are denied their fix. Direct empirical support for the model is lacking, although preliminary results indicate that narcissists have an addiction-like attachment to social media (Andreassen et al., 2017), which provides them with opportunities for attention- and admiration-seeking.

It is possible that narcissism has similar developmental pathways and neurobiological determinants as other forms of addiction (Thomaes et al., 2013). If so, then effective treatment of narcissistic maladjustment might benefit from building upon effective treatments of more typical forms of addiction. These and other predictions may inform

prevention and intervention efforts to curtail narcissistic development. Unfortunately, however, these possibilities have received little empirical scrutiny to date. Future research will need to determine whether the parallel between narcissism and addiction is more than just a useful metaphor.

ETIOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF NARCISSISM

Relatively little is known about the etiology and development of narcissism, and yet theoretical models exist and empirical evidence is beginning to emerge.

When Does Narcissism Emerge?

Narcissism is to be seen as a derailment of normal self-development (Thomaes et al., 2009a, 2013). It follows that researchers may gain insights into the etiology of narcissism by considering normal self-development.

Cognitive maturation in middle childhood has implications for how children conceive of themselves. From middle to late childhood (i.e., from about age eight), normative developmental increases in self-reflection and abstract reasoning allow children to form global representations and evaluations of themselves as a person (e.g., 'I like myself as a person'; Harter, 2012). At this same age, children learn to evaluate themselves from the perspective of others and to incorporate social comparison into their self-evaluations (e.g., 'I am quite good at soccer: better than most of my friends, but not as good as my friend Daniel'; Harter, 2012). Accordingly, children this age have generally outgrown the unrealistically positive self-views that younger children typically hold.

If narcissism involves an excessive motivation to develop high self-esteem via approval from others, then its first manifestations are unlikely to emerge before about age eight

for two reasons. First, it is hard to see how children could be overly invested in pursuing self-esteem before they have acquired the skill to evaluate themselves globally. Second, narcissists' craving for admiration likely requires the ability to view oneself from the perspective of others.

Developmental Change in Narcissism

How does narcissism change over the course of life, both in terms of its level and intensity (i.e., mean-level stability) and individual differences (i.e., rank-order stability)? Contemporary models approach personality as a constellation of dispositions that are dynamic over time and recognize the substantial impact that environmental influences (e.g., parenting experiences, life events) have on how personality develops (Caspi and Shiner, 2006; McAdams and Olson, 2010). Unfortunately, the question of whether and how narcissism changes over time is understudied. Here, we review the scant empirical evidence on mean-level and rank-order stability of narcissism.

Mean-level stability

Adolescence is often labeled as a narcissistic phase of development. Normative adolescent increases in self-centeredness and concern over one's public image may fuel narcissism. Also, adolescents often construct 'personal fables' (Elkind, 1967). These are illusions of invulnerability (the belief that one cannot be harmed or injured), omnipotence (the belief that one has special authority or influence), or personal uniqueness (the belief that one has unique traits and cannot be understood by other people), which bear similarity to narcissistic illusions.

Cross-sectional research supports the view that mean levels of narcissism are higher in adolescence than in later developmental stages. For example, a large-scale international survey found that narcissism

is substantially higher in adolescence than in adulthood. In fact, the difference in narcissism between the youngest participants (i.e., mid-adolescents) and the oldest participants (i.e., those who were older than 50) was nearly a full standard deviation (Foster et al., 2003). One longitudinal study (Carlson and Gjerde, 2009), which focused on the developmental stages of adolescence and emerging adulthood (ages 14 to 23), found that narcissism increased from middle adolescence into late adolescence, and then decreased from late adolescence into emerging adulthood.

This putative trend for narcissism to be relatively high in adolescence and decline later can be explained in terms of the social investment model of personality trait development (Hill and Roberts, 2011). This model casts developmental changes in personality traits as normative developmental adaptations that allow individuals to fulfill age-appropriate roles. Adolescents need to develop an autonomous identity and set important personal goals with long-term relevance (e.g., deciding on a career to pursue). Taking on a rather narrow self-focus may aid in this process. From early adulthood onward, however, individuals often commit themselves to such roles as being a husband, a father, and a colleague – roles that require a more communal and less self-focused, or narcissistic, orientation.

Rank-order stability

Personality theory holds that personality structures that manifest in later life, such as narcissism, originate from temperamental traits that can be observed early in life (Caspi and Shiner, 2006; McAdams and Olson, 2010). One longitudinal study used data from the Block and Block (1980) longitudinal project and sought to predict narcissistic traits in adolescence and young adulthood from preschool temperamental traits (Carlson and Gjerde, 2009). At the preschool age, participants were described by their nursery teachers using the California

Child Q-set (CCQ; Block and Block, 1980), a technique to quantify children's cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics. Years later, when participants were 14, 18, and 23, they were described again using a Q-sort procedure, the California Adult Q-set (CAQ; Block, 1978), this time by psychology students who interviewed and observed them. Preschool temperament predicted narcissism up to 20 years later. For example, preschoolers who were interpersonally antagonistic and desired to be at the center of attention were significantly more narcissistic up to age 23. These findings suggest that the rank-order stability of some of the traits that are at the heart of narcissism is considerable, even from early childhood onward.

Etiology of Narcissism

The main theories on the etiology of narcissism posit that narcissism is rooted in dysfunctional socialization experiences during childhood. In particular, social learning theory (Millon, 1969) holds that children acquire their self-views by internalizing their parents' views and treatment of them. Parents socialize their children's narcissism by overvaluing them – treating their children as if they are more special and more entitled than other children. Psychoanalytic theory (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971) takes a different perspective. Narcissists' inflated self-views are compensations for troubled parent–child relationships, most notably lack of parental warmth (e.g., parents being cold and distant). Thus, narcissists seek the positive attention and approval they failed to receive from their parents.

Both theories have received preliminary empirical support in retrospective and cross-sectional research. Retrospective research found that adult narcissists have childhood recollections of their parents overvaluing them, that is, putting them on a pedestal, having overly positive views of them,

excessively praising them, and rarely criticizing them (Otway and Vignoles, 2006). Adult narcissists also remember their parents as permissive (Ramsey et al., 1996), overly indulgent (Capron, 2004), and rarely keeping track of their children's activities (Miller and Campbell, 2008). Cross-sectional research in youths also indicates that narcissism is associated with parental permissiveness (Barry, Grafeman et al., 2007). Similarly, retrospective research found that adult narcissists have childhood recollections of their parents being cold, harsh, or spiteful toward them (Cater et al., 2011; Otway and Vignoles, 2006). Cross-sectional research indicates that adult narcissists, especially those with vulnerable narcissistic traits, perceive their parents as psychologically controlling (e.g., prone to withdraw their affection when their children do not live up to their expectations; Horton et al., 2006; Miller and Campbell, 2008).

Cross-sectional and retrospective studies appear to suggest that multiple socialization experiences may be involved in cultivating narcissism. However, this evidence is inconclusive. First, none of these studies were longitudinal and so they were unable to disentangle temporal direction. Second, the studies typically asked participants to self-report on their current or previous socialization experiences. Driven by their pervasive self-enhancement tendencies, narcissists readily distort self-reports of their experiences. For example, it is perhaps no surprise that they report being admired by their parents; they feel admired by everyone, their parents included.

One longitudinal study addressed these limitations and followed a large community sample of 7–12-year-old children and their parents over time (Brummelman et al., 2015a). In four six-monthly waves, the researchers collected reports of child narcissism and self-esteem, and of parental overvaluation and (lack of) warmth. The findings supported the social learning theory and contradicted psychoanalytic theory: child narcissism was predicted by parental overvaluation, but not by lack of parental warmth. Importantly, parental overvaluation was not predicted by child narcissism; thus, narcissistic children did not somehow lure their parents into overvaluing them. Previous research (Brummelman et al., 2015a) has shown that overvaluing parents make their child stand out, overestimate their child's IQ, overclaim their child's knowledge, and overpraise their child's performances. When children are raised in such overvaluing ways, they may gradually internalize the view of themselves as superior and entitled individuals.

By contrast, children's self-esteem was predicted by parental warmth, but not parental overvaluation. Warm parents share joy with their child, spend time with their child, show interest in their child's activities, and cuddle with their child. Over time, these socialization practices may lead children to internalize the view of themselves as worthy individuals, the very core of self-esteem. Together, these results align with the idea that children's self-views are a function of how they are seen by significant others (Brummelman et al., 2016).

Susceptibility to Develop Narcissism

Although socialization influences are important, it would be erroneous to infer that children with overvaluing parents are predestined to become narcissistic. Constitutional factors, such as temperament, may make some children more susceptible to develop narcissistic traits than others (Elliot and Thrash, 2001). Temperament refers to early emerging individual differences in how children react to their environment and regulate these reactions. In particular, approach and avoidance temperament (Elliot and Thrash, 2002; note that different labels have been used for these motivational systems – see Rothbart et al., 2000) may be relevant to narcissism (Thomaes et al., 2009a).

Approach temperament refers to children's sensitivity (i.e., vigilance and emotional reactivity) to rewarding or desirable stimuli (Elliot and Thrash, 2002). Approach temperament can be observed from early development. In infancy it is manifested by children smiling, laughing, vocalizing, and displaying motor activity (Rothbart, 1989). Later in development it is manifested in physical activity, social ease, and preference for situations that involve intense stimuli (Rothbart et al., 2000). *Avoidance temperament* refers to sensitivity to punishing or undesirable stimuli (Elliot and Thrash, 2002). Infants high in avoidance temperament are prone to express fear and frustration, and inhibit their responses to novel and high-intensity stimuli (Rothbart, 1986, 1988). Later in development, avoidance temperament predisposes children to experience negative emotion (Rothbart et al., 2000).

Narcissists likely are high in approach temperament (Foster et al., 2009). Prospective observational research indicates that children who later become narcissistic are relatively impulsive, physically active, and attention-seeking during preschool years (Carlson and Gjerde, 2009). Also, adult narcissists are sensitive to rewarding stimuli. For example, they are at increased risk of gambling problems and substance abuse, and are prone to making risky stock market investments (Foster et al., 2011; Luhtanen and Crocker, 2005).

The link between narcissism and avoidance temperament is less straightforward. Although empirical evidence is lacking, there appears to be marked individual differences in narcissists' avoidance temperament. For example, whereas some narcissists are prone to experience relatively high levels of negative affect, others seem almost immune to experiencing negative affect. Individual differences in avoidance temperament may predispose children to exhibit more grandiose (i.e., low avoidance) versus vulnerable (high avoidance) manifestations of narcissism, a possibility that needs to be tested empirically (Foster and Trimm, 2008).

Integrative Model

We advocate a diathesis-stress model of the development of narcissism, which casts narcissism as an addiction to admiration from others. According to diathesis-stress models, some children are more strongly affected by environmental stressors than others (Monroe and Simons, 1991). Our proposed model holds that parental overvaluation is such a stressor that may activate in children a latent vulnerability to develop dependency on rewarding stimuli, including social stimuli such as praise and admiration (i.e., the diathesis; Thomaes et al., 2009a, 2013). Children high in approach temperament are sensitive to rewarding stimuli. When these children are raised in a context riddled with parental overvaluation, they may become overly dependent upon praise and admiration to be able to feel good about themselves, a dependency which is central to narcissism. Thus, narcissism may originate from the interactive workings of problematic socialization experiences and high approach temperament – a combined risk that may make children overly dependent on praise and admiration.

CONTROVERSIES

Several controversies and unanswered questions surround the study of narcissism, and we consider them next.

Narcissism and Masked Insecurity

A longstanding view has asserted that narcissists' grandiosity functions as a façade to conceal a deep-seated sense of insecurity or insufficiency. This seems a reasonable presumption: if narcissists would genuinely feel good about themselves, then why would they crave continuous validation from others?

One line of research explored the possibility that narcissists hold positive self-views on an explicit (or conscious) level, but yet

negative or less positive self-views on an implicit (or non-conscious) level. However, studies have yielded inconsistent results (reviewed by Bosson et al., 2008; see also Gregg and Sedikides, 2010). A limitation of these studies was that they examined narcissists' self-views without distinguishing between agentic and communal domains. One exception (Campbell et al., 2007) showed that narcissists hold positive explicit and implicit self-conceptions of agency (i.e., traits that reflect competence and ability), but more neutral explicit and implicit self-conceptions of communion (i.e., traits that reflect agreeableness and warmth). Thus, narcissists may not harbor insecurities (i.e., downright negative self-conceptions) of which they are unaware, but rather may hold *imbalanced* self-conceptions and evaluate themselves positively on agentic but not communal traits.

Other research explored the possibility that narcissists report more favorable self-views than they truly hold, perhaps in an attempt to convince others (or themselves) of their grandiosity (Myers and Zeigler-Hill, 2012). Participants first completed measures of narcissism and self-esteem, and then reported their self-esteem again under conditions in which they were attached to bogus lie-detecting physiological equipment, a procedure that served to encourage them to tell the truth (i.e., the bogus pipeline procedure). Participants high in narcissism – but not those low in narcissism – reported lower levels of self-esteem in the bogus pipeline condition than in the control condition. Thus, although narcissists may not harbor negative self-views of which they are unaware, they may deliberately report inflated self-views.

(Mal)adaptiveness of Narcissism

Narcissism has the connotation of being a maladaptive trait. It seems plausible, however, that individuals might also reap benefits from characteristics that are part of the narcissistic personality constellation (Sedikides et al., 2004). There are two perspectives on the potentially adaptive nature of narcissistic characteristics: the *adaptive tipping point* perspective and the *adaptive facet* perspective.

The *adaptive tipping point* perspective holds that, much like high levels of narcissism are associated with psychological maladjustment (e.g., aggression, impulsiveness, waning popularity), low levels of narcissism may be similarly problematic. Indeed, the mere fact that narcissism is associated with problematic outcomes does not necessarily mean it is best to lack narcissism entirely. There might be an adaptive tipping point along the narcissism continuum at which individuals function particularly well. If so, narcissism should have curvilinear relationships with vital psychological (e.g., mood, resilience) and behavioral (e.g., social functioning, academic and professional achievement) outcomes. Although early primary-research evidence failed to support the adaptive tipping point perspective (Barry, Thompson et al., 2007a), a recent meta-analysis (Grijalva et al., 2015) did report a curvilinear relationship between narcissism and leadership effectiveness (as assessed by subordinate-, peer-, and supervisor-reports): leaders moderate in narcissism were more effective than leaders high or low in it. Still, a more comprehensive empirical examination is warranted pertaining to a fuller spectrum of psychological and behavioral outcomes.

It is also possible that certain facets of narcissism are more adaptive than others. For example, and in line with the *adaptive facet* perspective, the predisposition to strive for authority and be competitive might yield individuals certain benefits, especially in contexts or societies that emphasize the importance of such attributes (Corry et al., 2008). Consistent with this view, research on the psychometric properties of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; and its youth version in particular; Barry and Ansel, 2011) has distinguished between two facets labeled

adaptive narcissism (i.e., comprising the traits of self-sufficiency and authority) and maladaptive narcissism (i.e., comprising the traits of exhibitionism, exploitativeness, and entitlement). In a similar vein, other research (Back et al., 2013) has also distinguished between two facets labeled admiration (i.e., assertive self-enhancement) and rivalry (i.e., antagonistic self-protection).

There are at least two problems with labeling facets of narcissism as adaptive or maladaptive. First, the fact that narcissism is a personality constellation of several characteristics, some of which are adaptive, does not imply that narcissism itself (i.e., as an overall construct) is adaptive (Brown et al., 2009). By analogy, the fact that wine is made of healthy grapes does not imply that wine itself is a healthy beverage. Second, and more fundamental, the question of whether some facets of narcissism are adaptive or maladaptive does not do justice to what is known about the functionality of personality. Probably all personality traits have some advantage in some situations (Buss, 2009; Penke et al., 2007). The desire to radiate an image of self-sufficiency, for example, may pay off in the boardroom, but not in the bedroom. Thus, it may not be accurate to state that narcissism itself is adaptive or maladaptive – what matters instead is the fit between the trait and the situation (Endler and Magnusson, 1976).

Narcissism and Generational Change

Western culture has become increasingly individualistic over the past decades. Given that individualism is an antecedent of narcissism (Cai et al., 2012), it is likely that Western culture has also become more narcissistic.

A program of research has addressed this issue through cross-temporal meta-analyses. The original work included samples of American college students who completed the NPI at some point between 1982 and 2006 (Twenge et al., 2008). There was a strong positive association between NPI scores and year of data collection: more recent generations of college students reported higher levels of narcissism. An update of the meta-analysis, which controlled for possible confounding by campus (to account for the possibility that historic differences in narcissism are not actually driven by year of data collection but by differences in campus populations studied over the years), replicated the initial findings (Twenge and Foster, 2010).

Another program of research, however, approached these findings with skepticism, raising generalizability concerns (Donnellan et al., 2009; Trzesniewski et al., 2008a, 2008b). The findings relied on college students and, as such, it may have been premature to extrapolate them to entire birth cohorts or trends in the general population. It is possible that apparent generational changes in narcissism reflect no actual societal trend, but merely a change in the kinds of individuals who attend college in different temporal periods. Another concern pertained to whether researchers should examine changes in narcissism as an overall construct (i.e., the NPI), as the other camp of researchers did, or changes in individual facets of narcissism (such as the factor-analytically derived components of the NPI).

Representative cohort studies would be needed to provide conclusive evidence, and unfortunately such studies are not available. For now, we lean in favor of considerable evidence that narcissism has increased over the past decades not only in Western culture, but also in Eastern culture as the examples of China (Cai et al., 2012) and Korea (Benavides and Park, 2014) indicate. (Note that the Eastern culture data were also collected among college students, focusing on the overall construct.) However, the magnitude and consequences of this trend for general populations of Western and Eastern youth is unknown.

Narcissism and Leadership Effectiveness

Although we mentioned the results of a meta-analysis (Grijalva et al., 2015) showing a curvilinear relationship between narcissism and leadership effectiveness, the issue is more nuanced. On the one hand, the literature indicates that narcissists – due to their approach-orientation, extraversion, charisma, dominance, and confidence – are perceived as leaders even by experienced interviewers (Judge et al., 2006), and are elected or chosen as leaders (Brunell et al., 2008; Nevicka et al., 2011). On the other hand – due to their concern with getting ahead rather than getting along, and their propensity for risk-taking (Foster et al., 2011) – narcissistic leaders suffer reputational damage (Ong et al., 2016) and blows to their effectiveness. In regards to the latter, narcissistic leaders (Chief Executive Officers) do not fare better than their non-narcissistic counterparts in increasing their company's fortunes (Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007), and they may even harm their company by undermining the relation between entrepreneurial orientation (i.e., organizational innovativeness or proactiveness) and shareholder value (Engelen et al., 2013; for a review, see Schoel et al., 2015).

It is possible, however, that narcissistic leaders are more effective in some industries than in others. For example, they may be effective in professional domains where self-absorption and extraversion are valued (e.g., academia, sales), but ineffective in professional domains where relationship building and trust are a must (e.g., community affairs, nursing; Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006). Also, narcissists may lead effectively in high-discretion or dynamic industries (e.g., media, entertainment, fashion), but lead ineffectively in low-discretion or stable industries (e.g., utilities, insurance; Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007). Moreover, narcissistic leaders may be more effective when organizations are brought to a deadlock (and need boldness and audacity for shaking up) rather than when organizations are on a stable course. Finally, narcissistic leaders may be more effective in organizations facing internal turmoil rather than in organizations facing calmness and acceptance.

FUTURE RESEARCH

We propose five broad directions for future research on narcissism.

Etiology and Development of Narcissism

One potential empirical path involves the etiology and development of narcissism. Such research would need to show how narcissism develops over the life span, and how constitutional factors (e.g., temperament, genetic influences) interact with social factors (e.g., parent and peer influences, societal influences) to shape the emergence and trajectory of narcissistic development. The diathesis-stress model we have posited describes one putative developmental pathway to narcissism. High levels of approach temperament in children may interact with dysfunctional parenting practices, in particular parental overvaluation, to jointly influence the emergence of narcissism. Other models may emphasize additional constitutional factors and social factors, such as competitive social climate, economic prosperity, or social media use (Bergman et al., 2011; Bianchi, 2014).

Model Scrutiny

Theoretical models of narcissism need deeper empirical scrutiny. Particularly promising are tests of the addiction model. Can narcissism be understood as an addiction to others' esteem for oneself (e.g., positive attention, praise, and admiration)? Does narcissism share the hallmark features of addiction – cravings,

tolerance, and withdrawal? Research that addresses these questions will not only yield fundamental insight into the nature of narcissism, but will also raise intriguing developmental and clinical questions. From a developmental perspective, does narcissism share genetic characteristics, developmental trajectories, and developmental outcomes with familiar forms of addiction? From a clinical perspective, may intervention approaches to narcissism benefit from incorporating strategies that have been proven effective in the treatment of other addictions?

Interdisciplinarity

An interdisciplinary approach may help clarify how trait narcissism and narcissistic pathology differ. Should researchers think of the difference between trait narcissism and narcissistic pathology as dimensional, reflecting individual differences in intensity and pervasiveness of symptoms? Research concerning trait narcissism and narcissistic pathology has remained largely separate so far. Current conceptualizations of normal and pathological narcissism are diffuse and provide little insight into how they are different. Accurate conceptualization is essential not only to improve understanding of the narcissistic personality constellation, but also to develop and select suited interventions, and to inform debate on dimensional versus categorical approaches to diagnosing narcissistic pathology (Miller and Campbell, 2008).

Functionality

What are the potential benefits of narcissism? Answering this question requires examination of situational-specificity. For example, narcissism may help individuals thrive in settings where resources are scarce, but not in settings where communal characteristics are required for harmonious group functioning (see also our discussion on leadership effectiveness.)

As another example, narcissism may help individuals disengage self-protectively from threats to their self-image, but may also harm them because it can prevent them from taking advantage of opportunities for improvement (Thomaes and Sedikides, 2016). A key challenge for future research is to uncover not so much whether, but rather *when* and *why* narcissism is a blessing or a curse.

Intervention

Basic research approaches that explore techniques to counter narcissism or its consequences are beginning to emerge. For example, in our own research we have sought to temporarily reduce narcissistic aggression by making youth less vulnerable to ego threatening experiences in school (Thomaes et al., 2009b). Other research has sought to make narcissists more committed to their relationships by temporarily activating a sense of communion (Finkel et al., 2009).

Future efforts to curb narcissistic maladjustment face two challenges. One challenge is identifying the processes that may carry intervention effects forward in time. For example, is it possible to develop interventions that set in motion a recursive process that sustains itself over time? Another challenge is identifying the boundary conditions under which interventions exert their effects. Interventions can only be effective if the processes they target are relevant in the setting at hand (Walton, 2014). For example, interventions that buttress self-esteem can be effective to reduce narcissistic aggression in settings where people are frequently criticized or rejected, but not in less threatening settings.

CODA

We have aimed to illustrate a social-developmental approach to the study of

narcissism – an approach that is mindful of the origins and dynamic nature of narcissism, but also emphasizes how narcissism is an inherently social construct, and how context is key to its diverse manifestations. This perspective not only addresses key contemporary questions surrounding narcissism, it also highlights controversies and opens up a host of avenues for future work. Indeed, narcissism is an 'old' psychological trait, but the study of its origins, dynamic nature, and social grounding is still young. We hope that our chapter will contribute to a joint, interdisciplinary understanding of narcissism – an understanding that helps explain how, ultimately, Narcissus and Echo can be one.

Note

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