“It's All About Me!”

How Narcissistic College Students Think About Career

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Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (AD 8)
- Relationship with parent
- Social popularity
- Hunting metaphor
- Rejects echo’s words for reflection of self (feedback threatens ego)

- *It seems to me, then that our myth deals with human drive for self-knowledge and self-realization, with the admonition “Become who you are!” (Jacobs, 1990, p. 29)*

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*Echo and Narcissus*  
John William Waterhouse (1903)
Popular Literature & Narcissism

- The Culture of Narcissism (Lasch, 1979)
  - A psycho-socio-political analysis of the “Me Decade” of 70s culture
  - Conservative political take

- Generation Me (Twenge, 2006)
  - Harder social science approach
  - Millennials (born > 1982) are most narcissistic generation in history
  - More mental health issues (e.g., anxiety & depression) (Benton, et al., 2003)

- Many news and magazine articles
Freud (1914) contrasted healthy & pathological narcissism
Personality Disorder appeared in DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) & was revised in DSM-IV (1994)
Today, considered “normally distributed”? (Mullins & Kopelman, 1988; Burstein & Bertenthal, 1986)
self-report measures line up along a continuum: healthy self-esteem to personality disordered (Watson, et al., 1992)
Hickman (1996) noted that:
- dimensions of narcissism (e.g., leadership, superiority, and self-admiration) correlate directly w/ optimism & inversely w/ pessimism
- more pathological measures of narcissism (e.g., exploitation/entitlement) tended to display opposite relationships
Narcissism Theory: Analytic

- Ellis (1928) narcissism is an individual’s actual sexual attraction to himself.
- Freud (1914) Libido invested in ego, not external objects (e.g., people)
- Kernberg (1996) preoedipal fixation based in both environmental & constitutional factors
- Kohut (1975) “developmental arrest later in childhood
  – idealization & acceptance of powerful others
  – Emphasis on “Self”
- Millon’s (2001) “personology” biopsychosocial evolutionary theory historically based in analytic theory (that which is adaptive is reinforced & survives)
Narcissism Theory: Cognitive-Behavioral

Beck (1990) conceptualized the narcissistic personality style in terms of beliefs, affects, & interpersonal strategies (i.e., behaviors) adopted.

Core Beliefs
- Since I’m special, I deserve special privileges
- I’m superior to others & they should acknowledge this
- I am above the rules

Conditional Beliefs
- If others don’t recognize my special status, they should be punished
- If I am to maintain my superior status, I should expect others’ subservience

Instrumental Beliefs
- I must at all times insist upon or demonstrate superiority

Strategy
- Any behavior that reinforces my superiority is okay, regardless of societal rules (from which I’m exempt)

Affect
- I get angry when others do not accord me the admiration that I am entitled
Overt Narcissism

a.k.a. grandiose or oblivious

Behavioral signs
• express grandiose fantasies
• make demands on others out of sense of entitlement
• devalue others who threaten self-esteem
• anger if their expectations are not met

Psychological Core
• lack of insight into the incongruence between expectations & reality and the impact of expectations on others
• Regulate self-esteem through overt self-enhancement and denials of weakness
• associated with greater levels of exhibitionism, aggression, sociability, dominance, and self-acceptance
• Significantly higher grandiosity than covert groups (Hibbard, S. & Bunce, S. C. 1995)
Covert Narcissism
a.k.a. narcissentivity, closet, hypervigilant, hypersensitive & vulnerable

Behaviors
- shyness, constrained affect, feigned empathy
- use of external sources to regulate self-esteem
- pattern of interpersonal conflict leading to anger/hostility & then shame/depression giving impression of labile mood
- interpersonal anxiety (especially in developing relationships), social withdrawal & avoidance

Psychological core
- grandiose expectations
- sense of entitlement, which is disavowed
Covert Narcissism

a.k.a. closet, hypervigilant, hypersensitive & vulnerable

Described by Wink (1991)

• associated with greater psychological distress, lowered sociability, and lower degrees of self-acceptance
• higher levels of vulnerability, dependent masochism, shame, and emotional lability
Overt & Covert Similarities

Wink (1991) noted overt & covert narcissists are likely to:

• Have less self-control, suggesting a tendency toward self-indulgent, risk-taking, and impulsive behavior
• Score lower on responsibility, socialization, & good impression scales indicating a need for self-expression even at the expense of others
• Be rated by partners as bossy, demanding, intolerant, argumentative, conceited, arrogant, and cruel
• Experience boredom (Wink & Donahue, 1997)
Diversity & Narcissism

Foster, Campbell, & Twenge (2003)

**Age:** Youth greater narcissism ($r = -0.22$ w/ income & gender controlled)

**Income:** Higher income ($r = 0.08, p < .001$)

**Gender:** Males > Females w/ age & income controlled

**Ethnicity:** White & Asian < Blacks & Hispanics  
   w/ age & income controlled, no interactions with gender

**Geography:** U.S.* > Europe > Canada > Asia* > Middle East*
Narcissism & Career

Benson (1980)

• *narcissistic guardians*: idealized vocational fantasies that protect the self at a time of vulnerability due to developmental conflicts
• defend against threats to self-esteem
• illusory “lubricant” maintains a cohesive & satisfying self
• prevents more regressed & disruptive solutions to stressors

Robbins (1983) *Self-Expression Inventory*

• created a measure of narcissism related to career development
• initial items were created based on Kohut’s concepts of “consolidation of ambitions” & “consolidation of goals”
• items reduced via factor analysis to “grandiosity” & “goal instability”
Mako, T. J. (1991)

- individuals endorsing greater amounts of narcissism on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory valued & engaged in more self-focused career exploration while avoiding activities requiring environmental exploration
- higher levels of career indecision associated with
  - lower levels of authority and self-sufficiency
  - higher levels of exhibitionism
- “Thus for individuals with narcissistic tendencies, a higher level of career decidedness may be based primarily upon participating in and valuing of self-exploration activities” (p. 127)
Research Question & Hypotheses

Trial Study for Dissertation

What are the relationships among overt & covert narcissism, neuroticism, & dysfunctional career thoughts?

- Neuroticism (anxious/hesitating scale) will be inversely related to narcissism (confident asserting scale) as in past findings (Millon, 2004)
- Neuroticism will be positively related with the total and scale scores on CTI score (Sampson, et al, 1996)
- There will be no relationship between overt and covert narcissism and dysfunctional career thoughts scores on the CTI
- There will be no difference in group means for overt/covert narcissism & neuroticism for high & low dysfunctional career thoughts groups
Sample

- Students enrolled in two sections of a career development class in Summer 2006 (n=37)
- Typical student was male, Caucasian, junior, 21 years of age, carrying 14 credit hours who was able to name occupational alternatives, and a first choice, but who were unsure about their choice
Instruments: Career Thoughts Inventory
Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders (1996)

- 48 item measure of dysfunctional career thoughts
  - “My interests are always changing.”
  - “I’ll never find a field of study or occupation I really like.”
- Total Score
- Decision Making Confusion, Commitment Anxiety, & External Conflict Scales
Instruments: Millon Index of Personality Styles (MIPS-R)

Millon (1988)

- 180 item true-false measure of normal personality traits
- Assesses motivational, thinking, & behaving styles
- Behaving styles inspected
  - Anxious/hesitating scale (neuroticism)
  - Confident/asserting scale (overt narcissism)
Instruments: Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS)

Hendin & Cheek (1997)

- 10 item, Likert measure of covert narcissism
- Reduced from Murray’s (1938) longer “narcism” scale
- Uncorrelated with measures of overt narcissism
- Related to neuroticism ($r = .51$, $p > .05$) & inversely to extraversion ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$)
Results

• Anxious/hesitating & confident/asserting scales of MIPS-R inversely related ($r = -0.458$, $p < 0.05$)

• One significant correlation between the anxious/hesitating scale (Neuroticism) & External Conflict subscale on CTI ($r=0.40$, $p < 0.05$)

• No significant relationships between overt narcissism as measured by MIPS-R confident/asserting scale & dysfunctional career thoughts

• No significant relationships between covert narcissism as measured by the HSNS & dysfunctional career thoughts
Results

• No signification relationship between covert narcissism (HSNS) and neuroticism (anxious/hesitating scale of MIPS-R)

• No significant differences in means of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, or neuroticism for high & low dysfunctional career thoughts groups

• At times, saw a pattern of expected relationships
  – lower dysfunctional career thoughts in high overt narcissists
## Results

### Means, Standard Deviations, & Effect Sizes for Low & High Confident/ Asserting Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CTI Item</th>
<th>Confident/Asserting</th>
<th>Cohen’s D</th>
<th>CIP Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None &amp; Low  (n = 12)</td>
<td>Medium &amp; High (n = 25)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>I’m afraid if I try out my chosen occupation, I won’t be successful.</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Choosing an occupation is so complicated, I can’t get started.</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>.663</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The views of important people in my life interfere with choosing a field of study or occupation.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.640</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I know what job I want, but someone’s always putting obstacles in my way.</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I get so depressed about choosing a field of study or occupation that I can’t get started.</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>I don’t know how to find information about jobs in my field.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.603</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>I can narrow down my occupational choices to a few, but I don’t seem to be able to pick just one.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Results

**Means, Standard Deviations, & Effect Sizes for Low & High Hypersensitive Narcissism Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CTI Item</th>
<th>Confident/Asserting Low (n = 17)</th>
<th>Confident/Asserting High (n = 25)</th>
<th>Cohen’s D</th>
<th>CIP Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 I’m always getting mixed messages about my career choice from important people.</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-.57</td>
<td>Valuing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Jobs change so fast it makes little sense to learn much about them.</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>-.57</td>
<td>Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 I need to choose a field of study or occupation that will please the important people in my life.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>Valuing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 I’ll never find a field of study or occupation I really like.</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>Synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 I’ve tried to find a good occupation many times before, but I can’t ever arrive at good decisions.</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>Metacognitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 My age limits my occupational choice.</td>
<td>1.1 / .56</td>
<td>.6 / .68</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>Synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 I worry a great deal about choosing the right field of study or occupation.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Deciding on an occupation is hard, but taking action after making a choice will be harder.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>Execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 I’m so confused, I’ll never be able to choose a field of study or occupation.</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 My interests are always changing.</td>
<td>1.71 / .47</td>
<td>1.45 / .76</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>Self Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

• Lack of power due to small n
• Sample too homogenous (low CTI scores & somewhat decided)
• MIPS-R may not measure desired constructs
• Previously documented relationship between covert narcissism and neuroticism would predict a relationship with the CTI, but this was missing
Future Research

• MIPS-R will be replaced, but HSNS, & CTI retained
• Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988) is a better option for Covert Narcissism
• Inclusion of Vocational Interests as measured by the Self Directed Search (Holland, 1997)
  – Aspirations
  – Summary Scores
  – Congruence
  – Self Estimates of Abilities
  – Differentiation
  – Profile Elevation
Instruments: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

Raskin & Terry (1988)
- 40 forced choice items
- Overt narcissism
- Most popular instrument in normal populations (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004)
- Overall good psychometrics
- but seven subscales have poor internal consistency

Below are several pairs of attributes (i.e., descriptions of you). Choose the one that you MOST AGREE with.

1. a) I have a natural talent for influencing people.  
   b) I am not good at influencing people.
2. a) Modesty doesn’t become me.  
   b) I am essentially a modest person
3. a) I would do almost anything on a dare.  
   b) I tend to be a fairly cautious person.
4. a) When people compliment me I get embarrassed.  
   b) I know that I am a good person because everybody keeps telling me so.
5. a) The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.  
   b) If I ruled the world it would be a better place.
6. a) I can usually talk my way out of anything.  
   b) I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.
7. a) I prefer to blend in with the crowd.  
   b) I like to be the center of attention.
8. a) I will be a success.  
   b) I am not to be concerned.
9. a) I am not to be messed with.  
   b) I am not to be dominated.
Implications for Practice

• Do current screening methods assume that clients are capable of “seeing” their problems?
• Does our focus on screening for negative distortions, miss the presence of positive distortions?
• Do narcissists even present for career services? If so, when & why?
• Can clients be “too positive”?
• Should we be careful about encouraging clients to be “realistic”? 

The “Pyramid” & Narcissism

May react with anger at actual or perceived slights (e.g., kicked out of major)

Gravitates toward self-exploration

People vs. Things: Overt vs. Covert

Thinking About My Decision Making

May be “too positive” (i.e., grandiose) in self-talk

May ignore others’ feedback

May be impulsive & take risks

May “know it all” & resist “learning” about options

Too many options?

The Pyramid of Information Processing (client version pictured) is a component of the Cognitive Information Processing Approach to Career Decision Making (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, & Reardon, 1992)
Thank you!

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