

Material Meaning: Narcissists Gain Existential Benefits From Extrinsic Goals

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Abstract

The present research examined how narcissism is related to perceptions of meaning derived from distinct types of life goals, namely, extrinsic and intrinsic. Although in most cases extrinsic goals are inversely associated with well-being, we propose that narcissists' pursuit of extrinsic goals (e.g., wealth, fame) is positively linked to meaning in life. In Study 1, higher levels of narcissism corresponded with viewing extrinsic goals as more meaningful. In Study 2, focusing participants on the extrinsic, relative to intrinsic, value of their goal pursuit increased meaning among narcissists. Taken together, narcissists derive meaning from extrinsic goals.

Keywords

meaning in life, narcissism, goals, extrinsic goals, intrinsic goals

In his classic lecture *existentialism is a humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre argued that the pursuit of meaning in life (MIL) is central to the human condition. According to Sartre, unlike objects that are created with a meaning, the person “materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself” (Sartre, 2007, p. 23). Thus, unlike objects, people must find a sense of purpose or meaning. MIL is a key component of healthy psychological functioning (Frankl, 1959; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009; Yalom, 1980), and therefore it is important to uncover factors that promote it. For example, interpersonal relationships (Lambert et al., 2010; Stillman et al., 2009), personal growth (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 2000; Prager, 1996), and investment in cultural belief systems that imbue the world with order and predictability (Arndt & Vess, 2008; Routledge et al., 2010) all promote MIL. This literature suggests that there are many paths to a meaningful life (Arndt, Landau, Vail, & Vess, 2013).

We endeavored to investigate how the trait of narcissism is implicated in the meaning that individuals derive from distinct types of life goals, namely, extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic goals refer to attaining rewards or positive evaluations from others (e.g., money, fame), whereas intrinsic goals are internally motivated pursuits that satisfy psychological needs such as belongingness (e.g., giving back to one's community, maintaining social bonds). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), intrinsic goals will be associated with positive psychological functioning and promote psychological growth, because the pursuit and attainment of these goals satiate the fundamental needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Extrinsic goals, on the other hand, will distract from the pursuit of intrinsic ones and therefore interfere with one's

ability to meet these fundamental needs. Thus, investment in extrinsic goal will be associated with negative psychological outcomes (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007).

Researchers (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996) have explored relations between intrinsic/extrinsic goals and well-being outcomes by developing and validating the Aspirations Index, which assesses the extent to which people are invested in goals that are more strongly intrinsic (e.g., having fulfilling interpersonal relationships) or more strongly extrinsic (e.g., being wealthy). Investment in intrinsic goals is associated with psychological well-being (e.g., self-actualization, subjective vitality, high self-esteem, low depressive symptoms), whereas investment in extrinsic goals is associated with discomforting psychological states (e.g., anxiety, depression, low self-esteem; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Also, attaining intrinsic goals is associated with increased well-being, whereas attaining extrinsic goals is not (Niemic, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2010). The negative relation between extrinsic goals and well-being is robust even in populations that place a premium on extrinsic pursuits (i.e., business school students; Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Simons, & Soenens, 2006). Most relevant to the current research, intrinsic pursuits such as authentic self-expression (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009) or social

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relationships (Lambert et al., 2013) promote MIL, whereas the extrinsic pursuit of materialism is inversely associated with MIL (Kashdan & Breen, 2007).

There is apparent consensus, then, that intrinsic pursuits foster meaning, whereas extrinsic pursuits do not do so and may even undercut it. However, we propose that individuals high in trait narcissism might prioritize extrinsic pursuits, because they derive MIL from them. Narcissism is characterized by a self-centered, self-aggrandizing, dominant, and manipulative interpersonal orientation (Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, 2011; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002; Wallace, 2011). Narcissists are low on empathy and pursue activities that enhance their status and affirm their sense of self-superiority (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004). For example, individuals high in trait narcissism are more likely to persist in activities framed as having implications for self-superiority than in activities framed as having implications for self-mastery (Morf, Weir, & Davidov, 2000). Further, narcissists pursue material wealth, a social indicator of their high status (Sedikides, Cisek, & Hart, 2012; Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007). For example, narcissism is positively associated with desire for material possessions (Cohen & Cohen, 1996) and aspirations for economic success (Roberts & Robins, 2000). Narcissists are prone to conspicuous consumption as a means to elevate their status (Cisek et al., 2014; Richins, 1994). Further, narcissists prioritize extrinsic pursuits, such as wealth (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). When narcissists do pursue social relationships, they do so to enhance their social status and affirm their positive self-views and not necessarily for the intrinsic benefits of relational bonds (Campbell, 1999; Horton & Sedikides, 2009).

Ultimately, narcissists should derive MIL from pursuits that involve external rewards, such as material wealth and fame, because attaining these goals would enhance their social status and affirm their specialness and exceptionalism (Sedikides, Hart, Cisek, & Routledge, 2013). As we mentioned above, narcissists are self-oriented, have an exaggerated sense of self-importance, and possess a chronic desire to establish their superiority over others (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Morf et al., 2011). Therefore, pursuing extrinsic goals (e.g., wealth, fame) that are congruent with their desire for superiority would provide narcissists with a sense of meaning and purpose. Indeed, goals contribute to MIL when they are consistent with one's personal values and ambitions (McGregor & Little, 1998).

In contrast, narcissists would derive less meaning from pursuing intrinsic goals, such as fostering interpersonal bonds or helping others, than from pursuing extrinsic goals. External validation is necessary to maintain the narcissistic air of superiority (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Sedikides & Gregg, 2001), and narcissists are strongly inclined to engage in evaluative activities from which they derive more pleasure than from activities involving personal mastery or lack an evaluative component (Baumeister & Wallace, 2012; Morf et al., 2000). Further, the pursuit of extrinsic ambitions often comes

at the expense of intrinsic goals, such as interpersonal harmony or sense of community (Sedikides et al., 2013). For example, thoughts of money can engender self-sufficiency and reduce prosocial behaviors (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006). In addition, materialistic pursuits are associated with poor relationship quality (Kasser, 2002) and predict disharmony in the workplace (Deckop, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2015).

In the current research, we tested the proposition that narcissists derive MIL from extrinsic pursuits. In Study 1, we examined the relation between trait narcissism and the meaningfulness of extrinsic versus intrinsic goals. We hypothesized that narcissism would be positively associated with the meaning ascribed to the pursuit of extrinsic, but not intrinsic, goals. In Study 2, we examined whether the pursuit of an extrinsic (vs. intrinsic) goal would bolster MIL for narcissists. We measured narcissism, presented participants (undergraduate students) with information highlighting either the financial (extrinsic) or personal fulfillment (intrinsic) benefits associated with receiving a college education, and then assessed MIL. We hypothesized a positive association between narcissism and meaning when the extrinsic, but not intrinsic, value of a college degree was made salient. Further, we hypothesized that rendering salient the extrinsic (vs. intrinsic) value of a college degree would elevate meaning among participants high, but not low, in narcissism.

Study 1

In Study 1, we asked whether those high in narcissism view extrinsic goals as personally meaningful pursuits. In particular, we measured narcissism and assessed how meaningful participants find the pursuit of two types of extrinsic goals: wealth and fame. We also assessed how meaningful participants find the pursuit of two types of intrinsic goals: relationship and community. We hypothesized that higher levels of narcissism would correspond with viewing goals of attaining wealth and being famous as more meaningful. We adopted an exploratory approach regarding the nature of the association between narcissism and meaning ascribed to the pursuit of relationship or community goals. On the one hand, narcissists (vs. nonnarcissists) may view intrinsic goals as less meaningful in accordance with research indicating that narcissists favor extrinsic over intrinsic rewards (Morf et al., 2000) and that the pursuit of extrinsic goals (e.g., material wealth) undermines the pursuit of intrinsic goals (e.g., interpersonal harmony; Deckop et al., 2015; Kasser, 2002). On the other hand, narcissists are adept at presenting themselves in a socially desirable manner (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010), and community and relationship goals are generally valued by society; indeed narcissists (compared to nonnarcissists) report being more nostalgic about personally experienced agentic events or themes, but they do not report being less nostalgic about personally experienced communal events or themes (Hart et al., 2011). Narcissists, then, may report that intrinsic goals are meaningful to a similar extent as nonnarcissists.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We recruited Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) workers to complete an online survey. AMT is a valid and reliable source for psychological research. In particular, AMT samples are comparable to traditional (e.g., college, community, clinical) samples on demographic measures (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010), personality characteristics (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), cognitive biases (Paolacci et al., 2010), and mental health indicators (Shapiro, Chandler, & Mueller, 2013). Past research has evinced a moderate correlation between narcissism and the importance of extrinsic goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), and we therefore anticipated a medium effect size ($r = .30$). Based on a medium effect size, power of .80, and $p = .05$, a power analysis indicated a desired sample size of at least 84. However, because we collected these data as part of a larger exploratory investigation (involving religiosity, loneliness, and belief in supernatural phenomena), we tested a larger sample of 166 adults residing in the United States (100 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.21$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.61$).

Materials

Narcissism. Participants completed the 16-item, forced-choice Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). For each of the 16 items, they were presented with two statements and were instructed to choose which statement described them better. One of the statements was consistent with definitions of narcissism, the other was not. Following established practice (Ames et al., 2006), we assigned narcissistic responses a value of 1 and nonnarcissistic responses a value of 0. We computed a total narcissism score by summing responses to the items. Scores ranged from 0 to 14 ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 3.47$; $\alpha = .81$).

Extrinsic and intrinsic goals. Participants responded to a measure of extrinsic and intrinsic goals. This scale consisted of an adapted version of the Aspirations Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), which assesses the strength of three types of extrinsic aspirations (i.e., wealth, fame, and image) and four types of intrinsic aspirations (i.e., health, relationships, personal growth, and community). Each aspiration type contains five goals. We presented participants with two goals pertaining to wealth (“To be financially successful” and “To have many expensive possessions”), two goals pertaining to fame (“To have my name appear in the media” and “To be famous”), two goals pertaining to relationships (“To have good friends I can count on” and “To share my life with someone I love”), and two goals pertaining to community (“To work for the betterment of society” and “To help people in need”). Participants indicated how meaningful they found each goal (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). We computed goal composites by averaging the meaningfulness scores of the two wealth goals ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.87$), the two fame goals ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.76$), the two relationship goals ($M = 4.26$,

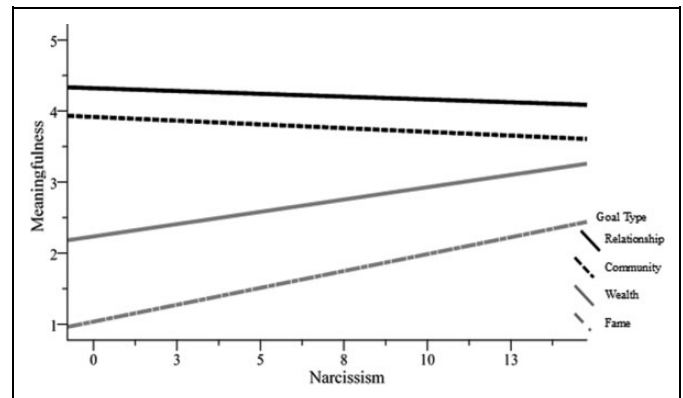


Figure 1. The association between narcissism and the meaningfulness of extrinsic and intrinsic goals in Study 1.

$SD = 0.76$), and the two community goals ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.94$), respectively.

Results and Discussion

We tested a mixed model using the general linear model function in IBM SPSS (Windows version 22.0; IBM Corp., 2013). Specifically, we entered goal type (i.e., wealth, fame, relationships, and community) as a within-subjects factor, narcissism as a between-subjects factor, and meaningfulness as the outcome. We obtained a significant main effect of goal type such that participants rated relationship and community goals as more meaningful than wealth and fame goals, $F(3, 492) = 281.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .62$. We also obtained a significant main effect of narcissism such that higher levels of narcissism corresponded with viewing goals as more meaningful, $F(1, 164) = 9.35$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .05$.

These main effects, however, were qualified by the Narcissism \times Goal Type interaction, $F(1, 492) = 11.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$ (Figure 1). We broke down the interaction by first examining the relation between narcissism and the meaningfulness of wealth, fame, relationship, and community goals. Narcissism was positively and significantly associated with the meaningfulness of wealth goals, $r(164) = .28$, $p < .001$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [0.13, 0.43], and fame goals, $r(164) = .44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.30, 0.57], but was not significantly associated with the meaningfulness of relationship goals, $r(164) = -.07$, $p = .36$, 95% CI [-0.23, 0.08], and community goals, $r(164) = -.08$, $p = .32$, 95% CI [-0.23, 0.08]. Put another way, narcissism was associated with the meaningfulness of extrinsic, but not intrinsic, goals. We also examined whether the difference between the meaningfulness of intrinsic and extrinsic goals varied as a function of narcissism. In particular, we averaged meaningfulness scores for wealth and fame, and for relationship and community, to create extrinsic and intrinsic composites, respectively. Next, we subtracted scores on the extrinsic composite from scores on the intrinsic composite. Greater trait narcissism was associated with smaller differences in the meaningfulness of intrinsic and extrinsic goals, $r(164) = -.36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.50, -0.22]. Gender neither reduced the significance of nor

Table 1. Summary of Exploratory Regression Analyses on the Interaction Between the NPI-40 Component Scores and the Experimental Condition on Presence of Meaning in Study 2.

Model	Effect	B	SE	Sig. (p)	sr ²	95% CI	M	SD	α
1	NPI-40: authority	.12	.05	.02	.04	[0.02, 0.23]	4.57	2.07	.69
	Condition	.04	.22	.85	.0003	[-0.39, 0.47]			
	Authority × Condition	.23	.10	.03	.03	[0.03, 0.44]			
2	NPI-40: exhibitionism	.09	.08	.30	.008	[-0.08, 0.25]	1.30	1.37	.52
	Condition	.02	.22	.92	.00008	[-0.42, 0.46]			
	Exhibitionism × Condition	.16	.16	.34	.007	[-0.17, 0.48]			
3	NPI-40: superiority	.12	.09	.19	.01	[-0.06, 0.29]	1.64	1.25	.47
	Condition	.03	.22	.90	.0001	[-0.41, 0.47]			
	Superiority × Condition	.27	.18	.14	.02	[-0.09, 0.62]			
4	NPI-40: entitlement	-.09	.08	.29	.008	[-0.25, 0.08]	1.76	1.36	.47
	Condition	.02	.22	.93	.00006	[-0.42, 0.46]			
	Entitlement × Condition	.07	.17	.69	.01	[-0.26, 0.40]			
5	NPI-40: exploitativeness	-.06	.08	.49	.003	[-0.26, 0.40]	1.81	1.33	.48
	Condition	.04	.22	.86	.0002	[-0.40, 0.48]			
	Exploitativeness × Condition	.44	.16	.009	.05	[0.11, 0.76]			
6	NPI-40: self-sufficiency	.17	.08	.03	.04	[0.02, 0.32]	2.85	1.45	.43
	Condition	.06	.22	.79	.0005	[-0.37, 0.49]			
	Self-sufficiency × Condition	.06	.15	.72	.001	[-0.25, 0.36]			
7	NPI-40: vanity	.16	.10	.11	.02	[-0.04, 0.35]	0.94	1.12	.76
	Condition	.04	.22	.87	.0002	[-0.40, 0.47]			
	Vanity × Condition	.36	.20	.07	.02	[-0.03, 0.74]			

Note. NPI-40 = 40-item, forced-choice Narcissistic Personality Inventory.

moderated the relation between narcissism and meaningfulness of extrinsic goals ($ps > .76$).

Taken together, the results of Study 1 indicate that narcissists, relative to their less narcissistic counterparts, are more inclined to view the pursuit of extrinsic goals as meaningful. Although there was no relation between narcissism and the meaningfulness on either of the intrinsic goals, and although both narcissists and nonnarcissists rated the intrinsic goals as more meaningful than the extrinsic ones, narcissists rated extrinsic goals as more meaningful than nonnarcissists. Moreover, the gap between the meaning ascribed to intrinsic goals relative to extrinsic goals decreased at higher levels of narcissism.

Study 2

In Study 1, participants higher (than lower) in trait narcissism identified the extrinsic goals of wealth and fame as more meaningful. However, these results cannot speak to whether narcissists actually derive meaning from extrinsic pursuits. In addition, although the Study 1 results indicated that individuals, regardless of their level of narcissism, report intrinsic goals as more meaningful, we propose that narcissists do not derive as much meaning from intrinsic goals as they do from extrinsic goals. That is, narcissists might claim to view intrinsic goals as meaningful, but, based on literature regarding the pursuits or ambitions narcissists prioritize, we propose that they gain the most meaning from extrinsic goals. We designed Study 2 to experimentally test this proposal. We measured narcissism and made salient the intrinsic or extrinsic benefits of a goal toward which participants were progressing. Specifically, we capitalized

on a goal that all undergraduate students pursue, getting a college degree. Finally, we assessed MIL. We hypothesized that making salient the extrinsic (relative to the intrinsic) value of a college degree would boost meaning for narcissists.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We recruited undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university to participate in an online survey. A power analysis indicated a desired sample size of 115, anticipating a medium effect size ($R^2 = .09$), power of .80, and $p = .05$. Additionally, we established a stopping rule to end data collection after 2 weeks, unless the desired sample size had not been achieved. After 2 weeks, 138 undergraduate students (86 females) took part in the study for course credit ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.43$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.26$). They were informed that the study concerned attitudes toward college.

Materials

Narcissism. After responding to a few filler personality measures to reduce suspicion about the study, participants completed the 40-item, forced-choice Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-40; Raskin & Terry, 1988). We computed a total narcissism score by summing responses to the items. Scores ranged from 1 to 29 ($M = 15.20$, $SD = 6.11$; $\alpha = .79$). For exploratory purposes, we also scored the NPI-40s seven component scales: authority, exhibitionism, superiority, entitlement, exploitativeness, self-sufficiency, and vanity. We provide descriptive statistics in Table 1.

Extrinsic versus intrinsic goal manipulation. We then randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions. In both conditions, participants were instructed to bring to mind the progress they had made toward earning their college degree. In the extrinsic goal condition, participants read an essay making the argument that receiving a college degree is important, because it leads to greater financial success. Thus, the goal of earning a college degree was framed in terms of the external rewards associated with it. The essay read as follows:

Statistics indicate that having a college degree is financially beneficial. According to a recent study, people with a bachelor's degree make three times as much money over a lifetime as high school graduates. Similar studies suggest that college grads have higher starting salaries than high school grads and receive larger and more frequent raises over their careers. In all, research on education and money indicates that getting a college degree equals making more money.

In the intrinsic goal condition, participants read an essay about the benefits of receiving a college degree, but this essay focused on personal fulfillment instead of material gain. According to self-determination theory, intrinsically motivated goals/behaviors are those that are self-determined and pursued when people are free to follow their most inner interests or desires, without feeling bound by external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivations breed internal benefits, such as happiness and life satisfaction (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), and therefore we framed the value of earning a college degree in terms of its ability to improve a person's chances of attaining a personally satisfying job that leads to happiness. The essay read as follows.

Statistics indicate that having a college degree is emotionally beneficial. According to a recent study, people with a bachelor's degree are 3 times happier with their jobs than high school graduates. Similar studies suggest that college grads are more satisfied with their career choice than high school grads and remain more satisfied over their careers. In all, research on education and happiness indicates that getting a college degree equals more happiness.

The essays were matched on length, general sentence structure, and utilization of an empirically driven argument. Also, both essays argued that a college degree is beneficial.

Meaning. Finally, participants completed a state version of the 5-item Presence of MIL subscale from the MIL Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; sample item: "Right now... I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful"). This measure formed a reliable index ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.29$; $\alpha = .91$).

Results and Discussion

We conducted a regression analysis in which we entered total narcissism scores (centered) and goal condition (dummy coded) in Step 1, and the interaction term in Step 2. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .07$,

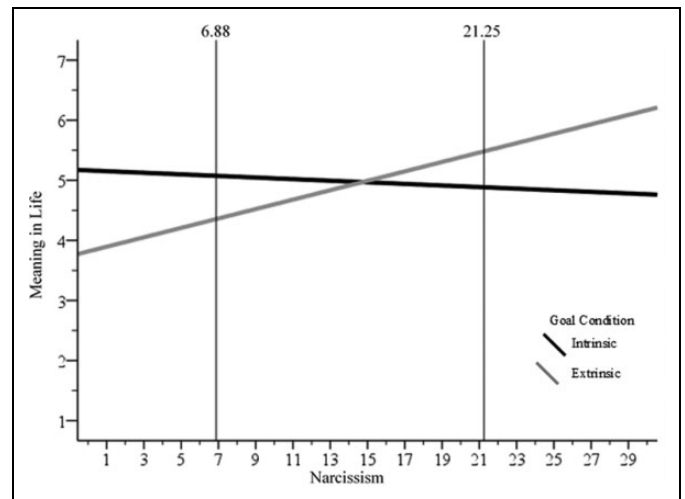


Figure 2. The impact of extrinsic/intrinsic goal condition and narcissism on meaning in life in Study 2.

$F(3, 133) = 3.54$, $p = .02$. In Step 1, we only obtained a marginal main effect for narcissism, such that higher narcissism tended to be associated with higher MIL, $b = .03$, $SE = .02$, $t = 1.92$, $p = .06$, $sr^2 = .03$, 95% CI $[-0.001, 0.07]$. However, the Narcissism \times Goal Condition interaction was significant in the second step, $b = .09$, $SE = .04$, $t = 2.61$, $p = .01$, $sr^2 = .05$, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.16]$ (Figure 2). We also conducted exploratory analyses testing the interactions between each NPI-40 component scale and the experimental manipulation (Table 1).

To probe the Narcissism \times Goal Condition interaction, we first examined the relation between narcissism and MIL in the extrinsic and intrinsic goal conditions. As hypothesized, within the extrinsic goal condition, there was a significant positive relation between narcissism and MIL, $b = .07$, $SE = .02$, $t = 3.22$, $p = .002$, $sr^2 = .07$, 95% CI $[0.03, 0.13]$. There was no significant relation between narcissism and MIL within the intrinsic goal condition, $b = -.01$, $SE = .03$, $t = -.52$, $p = .61$, $sr^2 = .002$, 95% CI $[-0.06, 0.04]$. Second, we probed the interaction using the Johnson and Neyman (1936) technique. This technique allowed us to identify regions in the range of narcissism scores where the effect of the goal manipulation on MIL is statistically significant (Hayes & Matthes, 2009). The extrinsic goal condition, relative to the intrinsic goal condition, led to decreased MIL for narcissism scores lower than 6.88, $b = -.72$, $SE = .36$, $t = -1.98$, $p = .05$. At higher levels of narcissism, the effect was reversed: The extrinsic goal condition, relative to the intrinsic goal condition, led to increased MIL for narcissism scores higher than 21.25, $b = .60$, $SE = .30$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .05$. Figure 2 shows the regions of narcissism where the effect of the goal manipulation was statistically significant. Gender neither reduced the significance of nor moderated the Narcissism \times Goal Condition interaction ($p = .10$).

These results converge in showing that narcissists derive meaning from extrinsic goals. When students reflected on the extrinsic benefits of a college degree, higher levels of

narcissism were associated with a greater MIL. In contrast, narcissism was unrelated to meaning among students who reflected on the intrinsic value of a college degree. Further, making salient the extrinsic (relative to the intrinsic) value of a college degree increased MIL at higher levels of narcissism. In contrast, making salient the extrinsic (relative to the intrinsic) value of a college degree decreased MIL at lower levels of narcissism. Thus, people high in narcissism gain more meaning from thinking about the progress they have made toward a goal that has extrinsic rewards rather than intrinsic benefits, whereas people low in narcissism lose meaning from thinking about the extrinsic rather than intrinsic value of a goal.

General Discussion

We asked what makes life meaningful for narcissists. Although past research has demonstrated that narcissists are attracted to extrinsic pursuits, particularly those that contribute to fortune, fame, or status (Cisek et al., 2014; Sedikides et al., 2013), no research has explored the possibility that these pursuits confer existential benefits. We obtained evidence that extrinsic goals do contribute to MIL among narcissists. In Study 1, narcissism was positively and significantly associated with the meaning ascribed to the extrinsic goals of wealth and fame, but not the intrinsic goals of relationships and community. In Study 2, narcissism was significantly and positively associated with meaning when the extrinsic value of a college degree (i.e., financial success) was made salient, but not when the intrinsic value of a college degree (i.e., personal fulfillment) was made salient. Stated differently, when narcissists considered the financial (vs. personal or emotional) rewards associated with progress toward earning a college degree, they reported greater MIL.

Our research contributes to the literature on the personality trait of narcissism. Scholars have long argued for the importance of perceiving one's life as meaningful (Hicks & Routledge, 2013; Markman, Proulx, & Lindberg, 2013). Whereas the literature has established the types of goals that narcissists are most motivated to pursue, it has not identified why these goals are so appealing to them. Our findings offer one reason why narcissists are motivated by extrinsic goals: These goals help them attain MIL. Future empirical efforts ought to evaluate more thoroughly this possibility. For example, following existential threat (e.g., reminders of mortality), people heighten their investment in structures (e.g., religion, relationships) that provide MIL (Arndt & Vess, 2008; Sullivan, Kosloff, & Greenberg, 2013). Do narcissists turn to structures built around extrinsic motivation (e.g., money, high-status consumer products) to cope with existential fears?

We were concerned with two types of extrinsic goals, wealth and fame. There are compelling reasons to suspect, however, that narcissists would also derive meaning from other extrinsically motivated pursuits, such as maintaining an attractive appearance (Holtzman & Strube, 2010; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Follow-up investigations should consider the potential of other extrinsic goals to confer existential benefits to narcissists. Similarly, future work would do well to take into account

the potential of extrinsic goal failure to undermine MIL among narcissists. Might narcissists be vulnerable to meaning deficits and the psychological problems associated with them (e.g., lower well-being), when they fail in their extrinsically motivated ambitions?

There are a few unresolved issues with respect to the current findings. First, we cannot be certain that the findings reflect a unique effect on meaning as opposed to a more general tendency for extrinsic pursuits to increase positive affect for narcissists. The extant literature concerning the association between extrinsic pursuits and deficits in well-being (Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014), even among those who highly value extrinsic goals (e.g., business students; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006), cast doubt on this interpretation. MIL is related to, but is relatively independent from, well-being (Shmotkin & Shrira, 2013), and individuals may derive MIL from negative experiences such as stress (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013; Juhl, Routledge, Hicks, & Sedikides, In Press; Routledge, Abeyta, & Roylance, 2016). Thus, it possible that narcissists are motivated to pursue extrinsic goals because they view them as meaningful, but these pursuits might ultimately lead them to feel unhappy, be less satisfied with their lives, and place them at risk for psychopathology.

Another unresolved issue is whether achieving extrinsic goals actually increases MIL. The current research focused primarily on possessing or making progress toward an extrinsic goal (i.e., earning a degree that ensures financial success). It is possible that possessing or pursuing an extrinsic goal generates meaning for individuals high in narcissism but achieving these goals does not. Such a finding would be consistent with recent research indicating that feeling further from attaining a goal preserves meaning following an existential threat, whereas feeling closer to attaining a goal does not (Vess, Rogers, Routledge, & Hicks, 2016).

A third unresolved issue concerns the process through which extrinsic goals contribute to meaning. There are at least three candidate processes. First, narcissists may be internally motivated for pursuing goals such as wealth and fame: They may gain a sense of pleasure out of activities that validate their superiority over others (Morf et al., 2000). This sense of enjoyment may be one way through which the pursuit of external rewards generates meaning in narcissists; indeed, positive affect (a marker of enjoyment) contributes to MIL (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006). Second, extrinsic goals may foster self-esteem, and self-esteem is positively associated with MIL (Steger et al., 2006). Thus, narcissists may rely on extrinsic goals to maintain or elevate their self-esteem. Finally, self-affirmation sustains MIL (Nelson, Fuller, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Narcissists have a grandiose self-view that requires relentless validation, possibly because of its fragility (Gregg & Sedikides, 2010; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Thus, extrinsic pursuits might affirm the grandiose self and in turn promote MIL.

Although the current research demonstrates that extrinsic goals contribute to MIL among narcissists, the Study 2 findings also show that these extrinsic (relative to intrinsic) pursuits

undermine MIL among nonnarcissists. Specifically, at lower levels of narcissism, participants in the extrinsic condition reported lower meaning than those in the intrinsic condition. The finding that an extrinsic goal value undermines meaning among nonnarcissists aligns with evidence that the prioritization of extrinsic goals is associated with negative psychological outcomes (Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Future investigations could seek to test the replicability of our finding and address its motivational implications. Relative to those high in narcissism, participants low in it are less motivated to pursue extrinsic rewards, such as material wealth (Cisek et al., 2014; Sedikides et al., 2007, 2012). Might nonnarcissists be less motivated to pursue extrinsic goals, because such strivings undermine MIL? Further, might emphasizing the external rewards associated with a goal undermine the meaning that nonnarcissists derive from that goal and in turn reduce their motivation to pursue it?

Even though narcissists and nonnarcissists differ in how relevant extrinsic goals are to MIL, our research provided evidence that narcissists view intrinsic goals as meaningful as nonnarcissists do. Given that narcissists are manipulative (Morf et al., 2011; Sedikides et al., 2002) and concerned about presenting themselves in a socially desirable manner (Back et al., 2010), they may be reluctant to indicate that highly valued goals, such as interpersonal relationships or community involvement, lack meaning. Alternatively, narcissists and nonnarcissists may find intrinsic goals as equally meaningful, because they define them idiosyncratically. For example, narcissists pursue romantic relationships as a means to enhance their social status and affirm their positive self-views (Campbell, 1999; Horton & Sedikides, 2009). Similarly, narcissists may regard giving back to the community a way to bolster their social status (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012).

One of the plights of humanity is to construct a meaningful existence, but, ultimately, there are many paths to it. The current research suggests that the path one takes to find meaning is profoundly shaped by personality. The pursuit of extrinsic goals is often considered to have negative consequences for positive psychological function (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1996, 1993). However, in the case of the trait of narcissism, the pursuit of extrinsic goals is one path that can generate meaning.

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