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Editors

Handbook of Trait Narcissism

Key Advances, Research Methods, and Controversies

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Preface

We are very pleased to present *The Handbook of Trait Narcissism: Key Advances, Research Methods, and Controversies*. This handbook is the first of its kind, an edited volume devoted to the latest theoretical and empirical developments on individual differences in narcissism in personality and social psychology. Ours, however, is not the first "handbook" dedicated to narcissism; Campbell and Miller (2011) paved the way with one which sought to bridge the clinical and personality-social "divide" providing a much-needed summary of recent work from both academic spheres. Our effort here is somewhat less ambitious but comes at a time in which narcissism research is exploding and theoretical development is happening at a rapid pace. According to PsychINFO, there have been over 1600 peer-reviewed journal articles published on the subject of narcissism since January of 2011, a more than 50% increase from all those published since the Narcissistic Personality Inventory was published in 1979! In order to accommodate as many topics as possible, we have adopted a "brief chapter" approach in which we have asked authors to summarize cutting-edge research and suggest future research directions in less than 3500 words. We believe this also serves the reader as well, as it makes it quicker and easier than ever before to keep abreast of the latest developments. We hope this handbook will serve the seasoned narcissism researcher trying to keep up with this rapidly advancing and fluid field, the novice researcher or student trying to gain a theoretical foothold, as well as the journalist or member of the public who desires an accurate yet accessible depiction of the science of narcissism.

Our editorial duties for this volume have given us a "bird's eye" view of our field and we have several observations to offer our readers. First, narcissism research has spread to a dramatically wider variety of domains since Campbell and Miller's (2011) volume. For example, our handbook includes chapters on topics like followership, memory, friendship, envy, religiosity, and bullying–topics that did not appear in the Campbell and Miller's (2011) handbook. Moreover, new and fascinating empirical perspectives on the development of narcissism have appeared in the intervening years, which include advances in our understanding of the impact of parenting, economic conditions, behavioral genetics, and other factors, all of which can be found in the current volume.

Our initial intention was to develop a book that focused exclusively on grandiose narcissism research. However, we quickly realized that the literature on vulnerable narcissism had exploded recently as well and was often so

intimately linked to research on grandiose narcissism that it was impractical, and even misleading, to avoid the topic altogether. As a result, a substantial portion of the handbook addresses developments in the literatures on both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. For example, we have four chapters entirely devoted to making key empirical and theoretical distinctions between the two constructs, and a great many chapters address vulnerable narcissism as a substantial subtopic. Questions remain, however, regarding which core traits vulnerable and grandiose narcissism share and how to best conceptualize these distinct (i.e., weakly correlated) personality traits. Moreover, the conceptual and empirical relation between grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, and the more clinically oriented constructs of pathological narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder remain underdeveloped. Nevertheless, we think readers of this volume will come away with a more nuanced understanding of narcissism and its many varieties.

A good deal of recent research has also made it very clear that individual differences in grandiosity and self-inflation can take many forms. For example, recent work on communal and collective narcissism has made a compelling case that trait self-aggrandizement can be based on prosocial traits ("I am the most charitable person!") and also be held on behalf of one's social group ("We are the best country on Earth!"). These developments have clearly arisen, at least in part, because there is still ample room in the field for psychometric and theoretical innovation. On the other hand, we still lack consensus on how to best measure many of our core constructs and those that are relevant, albeit distinct, from narcissism. The good news is that new and theoretically driven measures are emerging, which serve as useful tools as we seek to advance our knowledge in a more concerted and cumulative fashion.

As we present this work to you, we are filled with gratitude for the excellent contributions of all our authors and to be a part of an intellectually exciting field that is more relevant than ever. The three of us approached this daunting project with a combined sense of excitement and more than a little anxiety. Our anxieties were quickly replaced with feelings of appreciation and indebtedness, however, when we began to receive drafts of the individual chapters. They were overwhelmingly punctual and well-written and required modest levels of editing on our parts. We are so thankful to the contributors, who so clearly put significant effort into their chapters, and did so almost entirely as an act of collegiality. Who knew that narcissism researchers could be so selfless? More specifically, we are thankful for collegial support and advice from W. Keith Campbell and the encouragement and assistance of Morgan Ryan at Springer, without which this book would have never made it off the ground.

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Abstract

In this chapter we examine the argument and evidence that a lack of empathy may lie at the core of narcissists' chronic interpersonal inadequacies. Empathy is a key ingredient in facilitating smooth social interactions and maintaining interpersonal harmony. Empathy is linked with the promotion of prosocial and mitigation of antisocial behavior. We review the research showing that narcissism is inversely related to a whole host of empathy measures. This relationship pertains to both cognitive (e.g., understanding and considering another person's viewpoint) and affective (e.g., vicariously experiencing another's emotional state) forms of empathy. We argue that without taking another's perspective and feeling their emotions, narcissists have no reason to curb their antisocial behavior or participate in prosocial acts. We delineate the negative consequences of narcissists' low empathy for those around them and society at large. Such empirical evidence has determined low empathy to be a mechanism underlying narcissists' displays of aggression, bullying, and criminality, as well as an increased propensity to engage in poor parenting practices and inability to maintain long-term relationships. On a positive note, we review the literature which suggests that narcissists are capable of being empathic. Thus change is possible. With this in mind, we discuss the ways in which narcissists' low empathy may be mitigated.

Keywords

Grandiose narcissism · Empathy · Interpersonal · Antisocial behavior · Prosocial behavior · Motivation · Perspective-taking · Intervention

Individuals high in grandiose narcissism prioritize agency (reflecting dominance and superiority) over communion (reflecting lack of caring or concern for others; Campbell & Foster, 2007). For these individuals (hereafter referred to as "narcissists"), getting ahead is more important than getting along (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992). Consequently, narcissism is linked with high intrapersonal functioning (e.g., high self-esteem; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004; for a distinction between narcissism and self-esteem, see Brummelman, Gürel,

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Thomaes, & Sedikides, this volume) and poor interpersonal functioning. As an example of the latter, despite making positive first impressions, narcissists are disliked over time (Paulhus, 1998). Likewise, they are successful at pursuing short-term, but not long-term, romantic relationships (Wurst et al., 2016). More generally, they engage in antisocial behaviors, as demonstrated by their proclivity to commit aggressive acts (Barry, Kauten, & Lui, 2014) and increased likelihood of committing white-collar crimes (Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006).

Lack of empathy may lie at the core of narcissists' chronic interpersonal inadequacies (Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014; Watson & Morris, 1991). Empathy—vicariously experiencing another's perspective or emotions—is a key ingredient in relationship formation, in fostering smooth social interactions, and in promoting prosocial behavior and mitigating antisocial behavior (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). Without taking another's perspective and feeling their emotions, narcissists may have little compelling reason to engage in prosocial deeds or curtail their antisociality. Below we consider the link between narcissism and empathy, the consequences of narcissists' low empathy for those around them and society at large, and ways in which their low empathy may be mitigated. Research on narcissism and empathy is timely given that narcissism levels are rising (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), whereas empathy levels are declining (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011).

Narcissism and Empathy

Narcissism is inversely related to a host of empathy measures (Ehrenberg, Hunter, & Elterman, 1996; Ghorbani, Watson, Hamzavy, & Weathington, 2010; Gurtman, 1992; Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014; Hepper, Hart, Meek, Cisek, & Sedikides, 2014; Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013; Vonk, Zeigler-Hill, Mayhew, & Mercer, 2013; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984; Watson & Morris, 1991). Although defini-

tions of empathy vary, consensus points to empathy being multidimensional and having both cognitive and affective components (Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). Cognitive empathy entails understanding and considering another person's viewpoint (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Davis, 1983). Despite recent evidence suggesting that narcissists perform well on some theory of mind tests (Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012), they typically report low cognitive empathy (Ehrenberg et al., 1996; Gurtman, 1992; Hepper, Hart, Meek, et al., 2014; Vonk et al., 2013; Watson & Morris, 1991). The socially maladaptive components of narcissism also predict poor identification of others' emotions in images and short video clips, partly due to alexithymia (i.e., intrapersonal difficulties with emotional understanding; Hepper & Hart, 2017). Affective empathy entails vicariously experiencing and feeling moved by another's emotions or distress (Davis, 1983; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). Narcissists report low affective empathy (Ehrenberg et al., 1996; Gurtman, 1992; Hepper, Hart, Meek, et al., 2014; Vonk et al., 2013; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012; Watson et al., 1984; Watson & Morris, 1991). A recent meta-analysis (Urbonaviciute, Hepper, & Cropley, 2017) supports overall negative associations between subclinical grandiose narcissism and both cognitive ($r = -0.078$, $p < 0.001$) and affective ($r = -0.118$, $p < 0.001$) empathy. These effect sizes indicate a deficit, but not the absence of empathy, in narcissists. Low empathy may not be insurmountable, as we will discuss later.

Consequences of Narcissists' Low Empathy

Because empathy plays a critical role in facilitating social functioning and maintaining interpersonal harmony, narcissists' relative lack of empathy is likely to have consequences. Evidence reveals favorable outcomes associated with higher cognitive and/or affective empathy and unfavorable outcomes associated with lower empathy. These benefits pertain to social behavior at individual, dyadic, group, and societal levels. First, empathy elicits altruism and helping

(Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). People higher in affective empathy report more volunteering behaviors per month, as well as more instances of giving money to a homeless person and donating to charity in the last year (Unger & Thumuluri, 1997; Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010). Second, empathy forestalls aggression, bullying, delinquency, and antisocial behavior (Ireland, 1999; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). High empathy inhibits harmful behaviors, because imagining the harm that one might cause deters antisociality (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Criminal offenders, for example, score lower on empathy than non-offenders (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). Third, empathy fosters interpersonal engagement, smooth social interactions, and social bonding (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Davis, 1983; Davis & Oathout, 1987). Perspective-taking ability, in particular, facilitates social coordination by allowing one to anticipate the behavior and reactions of others. Moreover, empathy helps to maintain interpersonal relationships when they are under threat (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Finally, empathy can improve intergroup attitudes and relations (Batson & Ahmad, 2009). For example, perspective-taking decreases stereotyping, prejudice, and social aggression (Galinsky & Ku, 2004) while increasing interest in intergroup contact (Crisp & Turner, 2012). In all, empathy is crucial for prosocial behavior, fostering and maintaining social bonds, as well as lessening difficulties associated with group living.

The literature supports our proposition that narcissists' low empathy underlies (at least in part) their interpersonal deficits, thus accounting for their propensity to engage in antisocial behavior (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005) and their failure to be enduringly likable (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Paulhus, 1998). In the realm of antisocial behavior, low cognitive empathy and ensuing low affective empathy mediated the link between young men's narcissism and likelihood of imprisonment (Hepper, Hart, Meek, et al., 2014). Also, low empathy mediated narcissistic aggression among youth who had dropped out of

school (Barry et al., 2014). In school settings (Hart, Hepper, & Sargeant, 2014) and workplace (Hart & Hepper, 2017) settings, narcissism positively predicted indirect and direct forms of bullying via low empathy and a high need for power. Moreover, narcissists' lack of interpersonal forgiveness following a transgression was mediated partly by low empathy (Fatfouta, Gerlach, Schröder-Abé, & Merkl, 2015; see also Leunissen, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2017). In research on narcissists' athletic coaching style, narcissism positively predicted controlling coaching behaviors and negatively predicted autonomy-supported coaching behaviors, also via low empathy (Matosic et al., 2017). Even in a family context, low empathy and subsequently low responsive caregiving mediated the link between narcissistic parents and their (a) decreased propensity to engage in optimal forms of parenting (authoritative) as well as (b) increased propensity to engage in non-optimal parenting behaviors (authoritarian and permissive; Hart, Bush-Evans, Hepper, & Hickman, 2017).

Finally, in a direct test of whether low empathy underscores a narcissist's inability to be enduringly likeable, Hart, Hepper, Cheung, and Sedikides (2017) illustrated that narcissists' low empathy is visible to interaction partners (strangers) leading to lower liking. In this study, participants ($N = 84$ students) came to the laboratory in pairs of strangers. After a brief getting-acquainted conversation, each participant in turn disclosed a personal negative experience to the other. Each participant rated their empathy for the other person and perceptions of the other's empathy for them. Participants high in the narcissistic attributes of entitlement and exploitativeness reported lower empathy for their partner ($\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.03$), and—crucially—their partners perceived lower affective empathy emanating from them ($\beta = -0.35$, $p = 0.04$). Despite relying on an initial interaction (when narcissists are typically still liked; Paulhus, 1998), this study used a scenario in which empathy would be the normative response. These preliminary results are consistent with the idea that narcissists' low empathy impacts their social interactions and relationships.

We are in the process of testing whether low empathy also underlies the dissatisfaction experienced by narcissists' long-term romantic partners and narcissists' propensity to game-play with and cheat on romantic partners (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002).

Taken together, narcissists' low empathy has been demonstrated across a wide range of social contexts, and its consequences may undermine their social behavior and relationships. Nevertheless, the extant research has been primarily concerned with correlational studies involving dispositional empathy measures.

Narcissists Can Be Empathic

Hepper, Hart, and Sedikides (2014) conducted the first experimental investigations on grandiose narcissism and empathy. Narcissists displayed low self-reported empathy for a specific target in an empathy-evoking situation. Also, when narcissists encountered another's suffering, they did not manifest increased heart rate (a physiological indicator of empathy; Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous & Warden, 2007). Hence, narcissists may not automatically process others' experiences via the neural-cognitive networks involved in processing self-related information (Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011). Given that narcissists are not physiologically "moved" by another's suffering and do not automatically experience empathy, they may not be motivated to communicate sympathetically, offer help, or inhibit antisocial behavior (Hein, Lamm, Brodbeck, & Singer, 2011; Zahn-Waxler, Cole, Welsh, & Fox, 1995). Crucially, although narcissists displayed low empathy across a range of scenarios, they were capable of showing self-reported and physiological signs of empathy when explicitly instructed to perspective-take (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996). For example, narcissists who were instructed to take the perspective of an empathic target (a video of a woman talking about her experiences of domestic abuse or an audio recording of a university student describing her relationship breakup) by imagining how the target was feeling reported greater empathy and manifested more physiological signs of empathy compared to a control group who received no instructions. The reason for narcissists' low empathy is not inability; hence, their default behavior can be altered.

If narcissists are capable of empathy, why do they not display it? The answer can inform interventions. Narcissists may be relatively less skilled or resourced and therefore need to exert more effort in order to empathize. This warrants empirical testing. At the same time, contemporary theoretical models emphasize the role of motivation in underpinning narcissists' behavior (Morf, Hovath, & Torchetti, 2011; Sedikides & Campbell, 2017). Motivation might explain narcissists' low empathy. First, their low communal orientation may imply that they lack motivation to consider others' views and feelings. However, the narcissism-empathy association holds above and beyond low agreeableness (Hart, Bush-Evans, et al., 2017), and so this cannot be the whole story. Second, narcissists may be motivated to avoid empathizing, because this allows them to fulfill their key goal of self-enhancement (Hepper, Gramzow, & Sedikides, 2010). Low empathy may feed into narcissists' self-enhancement needs via three pathways: by making them feel distinctive (as it annuls the cognitive self-other merging characteristic of empathy; Myers & Hodges, 2012), by protecting the self from threat (as it offsets imagining oneself in the same situation and vicariously experiencing the other's pain; Decety & Lamm, 2011), and by exploiting others (as it reduces awareness of the social consequences of one's actions). We are currently testing these possibilities. Crucially, if narcissists' low empathy reflects motivation, we ought to be able to render empathy more appealing to them and motivate them to show it.

Potential for Intervention

Given the integral role of empathy in promoting prosocial behavior and inhibiting antisocial behavior, nurturing it is often a focus of interventions (Davis & Begovic, 2014) that aim to reduce bullying (Whitney, Rivers, Smith, & Sharp, 1994) or prevent criminal re-offending (Day, Casey, & Gerace, 2010). Interventions could help counteract narcissists' antisocial proclivities and interpersonal difficulties. However, existing interventions are typically generic (rather than targeted at individuals with certain characteristics) and rely on teaching empathy techniques (which assumes lack of skill rather than motivation). To maximize success, an intervention should address an individual's idiosyncratic deficit(s). Because narcissists can be empathic, a researcher should tailor intervention content to address narcissists' motivations in order to make empathy appealing to them in the long term.

Techniques designed to improve empathy skills may not be particularly successful among narcissists. They have the skills; they just do not use them. For example, mindfulness techniques—believed to cultivate empathy—actually reduce mind-reading ability among narcissists (Ridderinkhof, de Bruin, Brummelman, & Bögels, 2017). Also, if narcissists' low empathy is driven by motivation, simple perspective-taking instructions (as per Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014), although successful in the short term, may not result in prolonged change. Without the motivation to be empathic, narcissists will be resistant to behavioral change.

Accordingly, understanding the motivations that drive a narcissist can help inform ways to make empathy enduringly appealing. Can narcissists be motivated intrinsically to take another's perspective—and thereby show empathy? One promising direction focuses on improving narcissists' low communion. For example, priming communal concepts or having a partner who fosters communal attributes can increase narcissists' commitment to relationships (Finkel, Campbell, Buffardi, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2009), and priming interdependent self-construals can reduce narcissistic tendencies (Giacomin & Jordan, 2014). If narcissists' low communality is a reason for their low empathy motivation, such techniques might raise empathy. However, this approach relies on altering narcissists' fundamental personality structure, which may be challenging.

An alternative direction capitalizes on narcissists' high agency. We are currently testing whether it is possible to increase narcissists' empathy by presenting it as appealing to their agentic motivational needs. That is, framing perspective-taking as a desirable (agency-relevant) skill may make it rewarding to narcissists, thus serving self-enhancement instead of impeding it. This should then activate the underlying neural processes (Lamm et al., 2011) and trigger affective empathy (Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). Relevant research has indicated that agentic motivation can alter narcissists' prosocial behavior: Narcissists exhibit behavioral mimicry, if an interaction partner is presented as high (but not low) status (Ashton-James & Levordashka, 2013). Further, narcissists report engaging in prosocial behavior (e.g., helping, volunteering) when it fulfills self-serving functions such as furthering their career (Brunell, Tumblin, & Buelow, 2014) or is publicly visible (attracting admiration) but not anonymous (Konrath, Ho, & Zarins, 2016). Thus, narcissists may modify their emotional responses to others when motivation calls for it: If empathizing with another person becomes beneficial to narcissists' goals, they may show empathy.

We are currently testing this proposition. That is, we are reframing empathy to feed into, instead of undermine, their narcissistic ego and in doing so making empathy desirable. To illustrate, we present the benefits of engaging in perspective-taking in an agentic context (perspective-taking is linked to business success), a communal context (perspective-taking is linked to relational success), or neither (perspective-taking is linked with better spatial awareness skills). Then, we measure changes in narcissists' self-reported and automatic (physiological) empathic reactions toward an empathic target both in-the-moment and over time. Although such an intervention would not make narcissists empathic for altruistic reasons, motivating narcissists to respond empathically could decrease the antisocial behaviors they enact and interpersonal difficulties they experience. Over time, such practice may become habitual. Knowledge of how to motivate narcissists to empathize could be used in tailored

interventions in educational (e.g., anti-bullying), organizational (e.g., promoting citizenship behaviors), forensic (e.g., preventing recidivism), relationship (e.g., couples therapy), or parenting (e.g., antenatal education) settings.

What's Next?

Several issues remain unresolved. To begin, when narcissists perspective-take, do they interpret the target's thoughts and feelings accurately? Some level of empathic accuracy is required to respond appropriately to the other's needs. The jury is out on whether narcissists' theory of mind is impaired (Vonk et al., 2013) or not (Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012). Relatedly, although much of the empathy literature has been concerned with global narcissism, some studies find that low empathy is more closely predicted by maladaptive (e.g., entitlement, exploitativeness) than benign (e.g., superiority, authority) aspects of narcissism (Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014; Hepper, Hart, Meek, et al., 2014; Watson & Morris, 1991; Wurst et al., 2016). Similarly, maladaptive (but not benign) narcissistic aspects may impair accuracy of mind reading, as suggested by recent emotion identification results (Hepper & Hart, 2017). The distinction between components of narcissism is a promising line of inquiry.

Also, when narcissists are motivated or induced to experience empathy, what "flavor" of empathy do they feel? Affective responses to others' pain may focus on compassion for the other (i.e., empathic concern) or anxiety about one's own threatened pain including ability to handle the situation at hand (i.e., personal distress; Davis, 1983). Empathic concern is more likely to prompt prosocial behavior, whereas personal distress may prioritize self-soothing or withdrawal (Decety & Lamm, 2011). The self-focus inherent in narcissism and their increased autonomic arousal observed during perspective-taking (Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014) hint that narcissists may be at risk of a personal distress response. It will be vital to tease empathic con-

cern and personal distress apart and consider how to turn narcissistic focus on the other's needs rather than their own. A more detailed assessment of the behavioral consequences of narcissists' low empathy (and of any intervention) would also be crucial.

Furthermore, the literature on narcissism and empathy has been overly concerned with grandiose narcissism. Research on vulnerable narcissism and empathy is sparse. A recent meta-analysis (Urbonaviciute et al., 2017) identified only seven studies assessing vulnerable narcissism's association with affective empathy and only five with cognitive empathy. This limited evidence yielded a significantly negative meta-analytic association for cognitive empathy ($r = -0.167$, $p < 0.001$), and not for affective empathy ($r = -0.05$, $p = 0.125$), but more research is needed. Finally, it will be informative to distinguish effects of narcissism from conceptually related individual differences such as psychopathy, Machiavellianism (as part of the Dark Triad; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and borderline personality disorder (Miller et al., 2010).

Coda

Rising levels of narcissism, in addition to declining levels of empathy, should be cause for concern. Research has started to delineate the negative consequences of narcissists' low empathy, including an increased propensity to engage in poor parenting practices, aggression, bullying, and criminality. Narcissists' low empathy also befalls their inability to maintain long-term relationships. Is it possible to curtail these adverse behaviors and improve their relational prospects? We argue that reframing empathy as an agentic rather than a communal characteristic will likely increase empathy's appeal to narcissists and promote its use. Understanding what makes a narcissist tick and how to trigger a more empathic response from them may improve the quality of life for narcissists and those around them, promoting a culture of harmony in an increasingly narcissistic world.

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