

On the Self-regulatory Dynamics Created by the Peculiar Benefits and Costs of Narcissism: A Contextual Reinforcement Model and Examination of Leadership

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A new model of narcissism is presented, the contextual reinforcement model. This model describes an area where narcissism will be largely beneficial to the self and, to a lesser extent, to others. This “emerging zone” includes situations involving unacquainted individuals, early-stage relationships, and short-term contexts. The costs of narcissism are seen primarily in the “enduring zone.” These are situations involving acquainted individuals, continuing relationships, and long-term consequences. A dynamic in which narcissists cyclically return to the emerging zone is described. Research on the functioning of narcissism in leadership settings is presented as a case study of the contextual reinforcement model. Implications for understanding self-enhancement more broadly are discussed.

Keywords: Leadership; Narcissism; Self-enhancement.

Individuals act for a reason. When these actions emanate from the self, broadly speaking, psychologists think about them as self-regulation. Typically, actions are chosen by the individual because there is a benefit from performing them, and not chosen because there is a cost. Unfortunately, while this simple strategy can be effective for a simple organism in a simple system—think of the paramecium alternately approaching good things and avoiding bad things—this strategy has its problems in a complex human organizational or societal system. Humans are faced with many behavioral options that lead to positive consequences immediately, but negative consequences in the longer term. Smoking is a good example of this. To many, it feels good to smoke a cigarette, but smoking leads to poor aerobic performance in the short term and cancer and other illness in the long term. Sometimes the nature of the positive outcomes themselves even changes with

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repetition and turn into bad outcomes. For example, the rush of cocaine is a great mood elevator for the first use, but over time the cocaine simply lifts the individual from a state of depression to one of fleeting normality. To make things more complex, some behaviors are positive in some contexts but negative in others. Dancing with the proverbial lampshade on one's head is a good thing on New Year's Eve, but not so good at work the next week. In a final complexity, humans are also faced with a host of behaviors that are positive for the individual doing them, but negative for others in the organization or society. Second-hand smoke—which provides none of the positive outcomes of smoking but many of the negative outcomes—is an example of this. Often, behaviors that harm others also result in negative outcomes in the longer term for the individual doing the behavior, as either the social system breaks down or the selfish actor is punished by the group. Theft is beneficial to the thief, but costly for others; thus thieves will, when possible, be punished (see Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Platt, 1973; Rachlin, 2004, for reviews on these issues).

These same complexities of self-regulation are evident in self-enhancement processes. The directive: "Do things that enhance the self" would only be effective in a very simple system. In the world of complex human social systems, self-enhancement can lead to positive outcomes. If I think I am great, I will feel good. But these positive outcomes can have long-term costs. If I think I am great, I might fail to practice or repeat performance and this failure will hurt my performance. Or the goodness can fade with repetition. I always felt pride driving my Chrysler, but now I need a Porsche to get that same good feeling. Similarly, self-enhancement can be positive in some contexts, but not in others. Boasting about myself helps when I am meeting strangers, but it hurts when I am with my close friends and family. Finally, much self-enhancement is positive for the self, but perhaps not so positive for others. When I take the credit for the team's victory, the teammates don't look as good, so self-enhancement is often suppressed in public settings. Taken together, this complex structure of pay-offs for self-enhancement leads to certain self-regulatory dynamics. That is, the pay-offs for self-enhancement will lead to certain choices of behaviors over time. Self-enhancement will be ideal for feeling good, performing on certain immediate tasks; but self-enhancement has more complex outcomes for close relationships or enduring performance (e.g., McNulty, O'Mara, & Karney, 2008; Neff & Karney, 2005; Robins & Beer, 2001). In other words, self-enhancement, like other self-regulation processes, involves trade-offs (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

In the present work, our efforts to understand the trade-offs in self-enhancement are focused on the behaviors made, and outcomes obtained, by individuals high in trait narcissism (and those with whom they interact). The individual difference variable of narcissism is closely linked to a broad strategy of self-enhancement (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006a; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), and thus trait narcissism is useful for understanding self-enhancement more generally. Still, we want to be clear that our discussion is limited to narcissistic self-enhancement—we are not saying that narcissism represents all self-enhancement—rather, we think that high trait narcissism offers one useful window for studying self-enhancement, but there is much of the self-enhancement landscape that cannot be seen. Our analysis takes the following form. First, we define the construct of narcissism and the current thinking on narcissistic self-regulation. Second, we propose a contextual reinforcement model of narcissistic self-enhancement, including the trade-offs inherent in narcissistic self-enhancement, both for the narcissist and the other. Third, we discuss the overall dynamic created for narcissists (and others) by the structure of these

benefits and costs. Finally, we turn to an analysis of narcissism in the context of leadership. Leadership presents a highly important social context in which the benefits as well as costs of narcissistic self-regulation are evident.

Narcissism and Self-enhancement

The construct of narcissism has always been linked with issues of self-enhancement (e.g., self-love, self-esteem, self-regard). Freud linked narcissism with self-regard and self-love, and argued that high levels of self-regard would be balanced by low levels of regard for others (Freud, 1914/1957). Several models of narcissism have focused on the regulation of self-esteem (e.g., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), esteem and status (Campbell, 1999), or narcissistic esteem (Campbell et al., 2006a). Morf and Rhodewalt's (2001) dynamic self-regulatory processing model describes what is essentially a self-sustaining system that includes self-knowledge, intrapersonal self-regulatory processes, interpersonal strategies, and social relationships. These components feedback on each other so that the narcissists' self-concept is continually enhanced and defended. For example, the narcissist will seek out a social relationship that involves the narcissist being admired, when that admiration is obtained in the relationship, the narcissist's self-concept will be enhanced. The narcissist can later fantasize about this admiration and receive further enhancement intrapsychically. We should also add to this list of models Baumeister and Vohs's (2001) addiction model of narcissism. This model proposes that, in part, narcissists' desire for self-esteem and enhancement can take on the qualities of an addiction, such as a rush associated with experiencing enhancement and is subject to rules of habituation.

Another set of models has focused on the structure of narcissists' psyche. The general idea behind these models is that narcissistic self-enhancement is more evident in domains involving agency or agentic concerns rather than communal concerns. Agentic concerns include power, status, physical appearance, extraversion, intelligence and creativity; communal concerns include caring, emotional warmth, and closeness to others. Although these models tend to be structural (e.g., Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002b; Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007), they also suggest a dynamic. The focus on agency and relative lack of focus on communion suggests that self-enhancement will be: (a) focused on establishing dominance and superiority, and (b) close emotional relationships with others will not be seen as a stumbling block to achieving the latter. The dynamic implications of this agency/communion distinction can be seen in Paulhus's (2001) minimalist model and Campbell et al.'s (2006a) agency model.

Finally, there have been a (very) few models of narcissistic self-regulations that have focused on the experience of the other. By other, we mean the person interacting with or influenced by the narcissist. These models have included the other insofar as the other provides fodder for the narcissists' efforts to shoot for self-enhancement—narcissists need others as sycophants, admirers, arm candy, supporters, minions, etc., for the narcissistic self-enhancement system to work. What happens to the others, however, is less specified. Campbell's "chocolate cake model" of the experience of those romantically dating narcissists has focused on some of the benefits of dating narcissists (Campbell, 2005), and Campbell and Green's (2007) extended agency model incorporates some strategies through which narcissists can draw others into the narcissistic system.

Putting these models together leaves us with the following picture of narcissistic self-enhancement: First, narcissism involves a dynamic self-regulatory system central

to which is gaining and maintaining favorable self-views/self-esteem. Second, other individuals or groups are used in this system to provide enhancement for the narcissist. Third, narcissists' use of others is influenced by narcissists' relative lack of interest in forming and maintaining close, caring relationships. Importantly, there is no proposed limit to narcissists' self-enhancement strivings. The overall dynamic is for the narcissist to run the system until he or she hits a wall where self-enhancement is not possible (for example, when self-deception fails, or others will no longer provide admiration). Campbell and Green (2007) use the metaphor of another system, a hurricane, to describe this process. Hurricanes feed off warm ocean waters. They will grow and grow until there is no more warm water or they run into land. At this point, the hurricane falls apart.

Some recent psychiatric data looking at narcissistic symptoms shows this pattern (Miller, Campbell, & Pilkonis, 2007). Over time, narcissism predicts disruption in both work setting and close relationships. And, to the extent these troubles in love and work are present, narcissism is linked to suffering in the form of depression and anxiety. At least in this population, narcissism has ultimately poor consequences for the narcissistic individual.

This “enhance until things go poorly” model, however, is potentially an overly simple description of the dynamics of narcissistic self-enhancement. In the present paper, we propose that another important dynamic can be used to model narcissists' behavior. A secondary dynamic of narcissistic self-regulation is the outcome of the peculiar structure of benefits and costs associated with narcissism. We refer to this model as the *contextual reinforcement model*.

Before describing this model in detail, however, we want to clarify a few important theoretical points. First, the contextual reinforcement model is not meant to replace existing dynamic feedback models of narcissism. Instead the contextual reinforcement model should be seen as a complement to those models. The feedback models are excellent for understanding intrapsychic dynamics; whereas the contextual reinforcement model is suited for understanding narcissism across behavioral contexts. Second, we acknowledge that narcissism is continuous—there is no narcissism taxon (Foster & Campbell, 2007). However, for ease of exposition, we use the term “narcissists” throughout to refer to those with relatively high scores on self-reported narcissism. Third, there are many factors that influence social behavior. We are focused on trait narcissism, but, overall, narcissism accounts for only a moderate amount of variance in the outcomes described throughout the paper.

Contextual Reinforcement Model

The Emerging and Enduring Zones

If the benefits of self-enhancement are judged simply from looking at the outcomes of narcissism, the conclusion would be that self-enhancement is not really beneficial. There is evidence for a link between narcissism and positive well-being (e.g., Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro & Rusbult, 2004), but also between more extreme narcissism and depression (e.g., Miller et al., 2007). There is evidence for narcissism being linked with successful task performance (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), but also poor task performance (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). There is evidence that narcissism is linked to relationship success (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004), but also failure (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

The mean level of the outcomes of narcissistic self-enhancement, however, does not tell the full story. Within the mean are both significant benefits and significant costs of narcissism—in other words, trade-offs. Key to the contextual reinforcement model is the location of these benefits and costs. The benefits of narcissism are seen primarily in *emerging* settings. These are situations involving unacquainted individuals, early-stage relationships, and short-term contexts. The costs of narcissism are seen primarily in *enduring* settings. These are situations involving acquainted individuals, continuing relationships, and long-term consequences. The contextual reinforcement model refers to these two contexts as the *emerging zone* and the *enduring zone*.

As we noted, central to several models of narcissistic self-regulation is that narcissistic self-enhancement is primarily possible through the aid of others. This suggests that others are at times getting something positive from their interactions with the narcissist. What is interesting is that these same patterns of outcomes in the emerging and enduring zones, although skewed in the direction of overall greater negativity, are mirrored in the experiences of those interacting with the narcissist. That is, for those interacting with narcissists, the greatest benefits will be seen in the emerging zone, and the costs will be in the enduring zone.

Two brief examples: A seminal study looking at emergence versus endurance is Paulhus's (1998) longitudinal study of narcissists' social relationships. Paulhus found that in groups of strangers, narcissists were seen as highly likable individuals (emerging zone). As these groups continued meeting and became more acquainted, however, the correlations flipped direction and narcissism was associated with less likeability (enduring zone). Paulhus used the appropriate expression "mixed blessing" to describe the trade-off inherent in narcissism.

For the perspective of the "other," a similar pattern can be seen in reports of those who dated narcissists. At the beginning of the relationships (emerging zone) the relationships were highly satisfying and exciting. As the relationships continued (enduring zone), however, the relationships with narcissists were seen as less satisfying and the excitement wore off. This pattern underlies the chocolate cake model of relationships with narcissists, where the initial phases lead to a rush of excitement and satisfaction, and the later phases lead to low emotional intimacy, relational problems and plummeting satisfaction (Campbell, 2005).

The Peculiar Pattern of Benefits and Costs

The easiest way to see the benefits and costs of narcissism is to simply tabulate them and then characterize them as existing in either the emerging zone or the enduring zone (see Table 1). These outcomes are based on existing empirical data (detailed below). Together, these represent the overall structure of benefits and costs of narcissist, both for self and other.

Narcissism has benefits for the self that are more evident in the emerging zone. There are the following benefits for the narcissist: positive self-views (e.g., Campbell et al., 2002b); positive affect (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2004); an emotional rush when self-enhancement occurs (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001); success in dating during initial stages (e.g., Rhodewalt & Eddings, 2002); likeability in initial meetings (Oltmanns et al., 2004; Paulhus, 1998); emergent leadership (Brunell et al., in press); success at initial resource extraction from environment (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2006b); resilience in the face of negative feedback (e.g., Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000); and success in public performance (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002).

TABLE 1 The Consequences of Narcissism for the Self and Others

	Emerging zone	Enduring zone
<i>For self</i>		
Benefits	Positive self-views Positive affect Emotional rush Dating success Likeability Emergent leadership Resource extraction from environment Resilience to negative feedback Success in public	Positive self-views Celebrity status Unrestricted sociosexuality
Costs	Overconfident decision making Poor private performance	Depression Addiction to rush Compulsive spending Pathological gambling Overconfident decision making Prison Difficulty learning from feedback Volatile leadership performance Poor management rankings Romantic relationship trouble Reduced likeability
<i>For others</i>		
Benefits	Excitement Relationship satisfaction Emergent leadership	
Costs	Aggression after threat Overconfident decision making	Low levels of emotional closeness Infidelity Overconfident decision making Compulsive spending Pathological gambling Suffering Confusion Aggression Sexual assault Volatile leadership performance Poor management Destruction of commons

There are also the following costs to the self: overconfidence and thus poor decision making (Campbell et al., 2004) and poor performance in private (i.e., non-public) tasks (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002).

In contrast, narcissism has both benefits and costs for the self that are more evident in the enduring zone. There are the following benefits for the narcissist:

positive self-views (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2004); a higher probability of achieving celebrity status (Young & Pinsky, 2006); and higher levels of unrestricted sociosexuality (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006). But, there are also the following costs: depression (Miller et al., 2007); addiction to the rush associated with self-enhancement (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001); compulsive spending (Rose, 2007); pathological gambling (Lakey, Rose, Campbell, & Goodie, 2008); overconfident decision making (Campbell et al., 2004); serving time in prison (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002); difficulty learning from feedback (Campbell et al., 2004, Study 3); volatile leadership performance (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007); poor management rankings (Blair, Hoffman, & Helland, 2008); romantic relationship troubles (see Campbell, 2005, for a review); and reduced likeability (Paulhus, 1998).

We now turn to those interacting with the narcissist (i.e., others). In the emerging zone, there are the following benefits for others: excitement and satisfaction in early relationship stages (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2003), and having leadership in leaderless groups (we consider this a benefit because leadership emergence is, overall, a positive in leaderless groups; Brunell et al., in press). There are also the following costs: aggression after threat (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 2002) and being involved with someone who displays overconfident decision making (Campbell et al., 2004).

In contrast, there are no identified benefits for the other interacting with the narcissist in the enduring zone. There are, however, even more evident costs, such as: low levels of emotional closeness (Foster et al., 2006); infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997); overconfident decision making (Campbell et al., 2004); compulsive spending (Rose, 2007); pathological gambling (Lakey et al., 2008); suffering (Miller et al., 2007); confusion (Campbell, 2005); aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002); sexual assault (Bushman, Bonacci, Van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003); volatile leadership performance (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007); poor interpersonal management (Blair et al., 2008); and destruction of commons (Campbell, 2005).

This overall pattern of rewards and costs is represented in Figure 1. In this figure, we simply summed the number of benefits and costs in each condition to create an overall value for the benefits and costs. This approach, we acknowledge, is only a rough approximation, certainly biased by what people choose to study and which topics yield publishable outcomes. Likewise, there is the issue of frequency that is not captured. For example, the narcissist could increase benefits by having multiple simultaneous short-term relationships. But even though the numbers are sure to be inexact, the structure should be generally accurate. The figure is in standard matrix form, with the consequence of narcissism for the self represented *above* the diagonal in each cell, and the consequence of narcissism for the other represented *below* the diagonal in each cell.

By summing the four cells for the self and for the other, we can see the overall consequence of narcissism. For the self, narcissism has only a very slight negative consequence (i.e., -1). In contrast, for the other, narcissism has an overall very negative consequence (i.e., -12). This pattern maps on well to recent research in using diagnostic criteria, which found that the primary consequence of narcissism was suffering experienced by close others (Miller et al., 2007).

More importantly, this graphic representation makes clear the pattern of benefits and costs of narcissism for the self and the other. For the self, narcissism clearly has benefits in the emerging zone, and these benefits of narcissism in the emerging zone actually outweigh the costs in the emerging zone. For others, narcissism also has benefits in the emerging zone, although these benefits are matched by the potential costs.



FIGURE 1 The overall pattern of benefits and costs of narcissism. The figure is in standard matrix form, with the consequence of narcissism for the *self* represented above the diagonal in each cell and the consequence of narcissism for the *other* represented below the diagonal in each cell.

The Emergent Dynamics from Narcissism's Benefit and Cost Structure

The pattern of benefits and costs of narcissism, in the simplest sense, represents a set of contexts (emerging versus enduring) in which narcissism will be differentially reinforced. For example, the narcissist given the choice of going to the cocktail party with strangers versus old acquaintances will do better to choose the former. This state of affairs will also be better for the others involved. Those who have not met the narcissist might find him charming and impressive; those who know him well might find him boorish and self-absorbed.

This simple choice model, however, is not destined for stability. It is disrupted by a *natural drift* in contexts and situations. Emerging situations naturally drift into enduring situations. In other words, a person who enters the emerging zone is likely to find him- or herself in the enduring zone, in the same way that someone surfing in a crosscurrent will naturally find him- or herself at the other end of the beach. There is no such thing as a three-year first date, or a non-stop honeymoon for a leader. This natural drift means that narcissists cannot select a zone and simply stay there—they have to constantly leave the situation when it transforms from emerging to enduring. To continue the surfing metaphor, there is always the step needed to get out of the water and hike back up the beach. The same goes for those involved with narcissists: when the enduring zone is entered, the best solutions are to leave or get back to the emerging zone.

This dynamic is represented in Figure 2. The arrow on top represents the natural transition from the emerging zone to the enduring zone. The large solid arrow represents the dynamic for narcissists regulating their own behavior. The natural drift to the enduring zone will be met by an effort to return to the emerging zone.

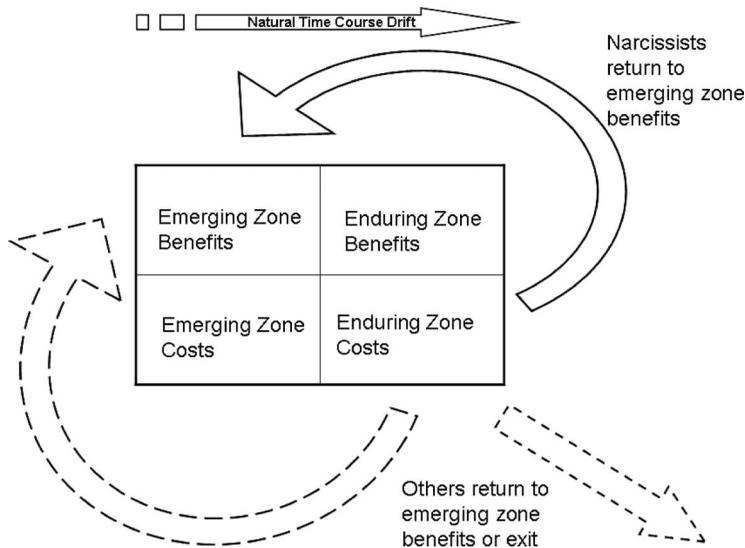


FIGURE 2 The arrow on top represents the natural transition from the emerging zone to the enduring zone. The large solid arrow represents the dynamic for narcissists regulating their own behavior back to the emergent zone. The broken arrow represents the dynamic for other either returning to the emergent zone or exiting the interaction.

There is little reason for narcissists to leave the matrix (i.e., change), because the benefits they accrue will be high as long as they can stay in the emerging zone. The dashed arrows represent the dynamic for the other interacting with the narcissist. There will be some effort to return to the emerging zone because there is some level of benefit there. On the other hand, the overall consequence of narcissism for the other is strongly negative, so there will be a strong pull to leave the matrix.

This dynamic can be seen clearly in the pattern of romantic relationships with narcissists. Narcissists thrive in the emerging zone. They are game-playing (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002a), have high attention to alternatives (Campbell & Foster, 2002), and are successful at engaging in short-term sexual relationships (Foster et al., 2006). At the same time, narcissists are not as functional in the enduring zone. They have low levels of commitment and accommodation (Campbell & Foster, 2002) and they have a proclivity for infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). The suffering experienced by the narcissists (as opposed to their partners) in enduring relationships, however, is typically not that bad; thus, the narcissists are able to gain maximal benefits by returning the emerging zone and starting new relationships.

The story is a little different for those who become romantically involved with narcissists. They do experience benefits in the emerging zone, including excitement and high relationship satisfaction (Foster et al., 2003). The enduring zone, however, is far more negative, with very low levels of satisfaction accompanied by a range of negative experiences including psychological control, lack of emotional connection, and even aggression (Brunell, Campbell, Smith, & Krusemark, 2004; Campbell, 2005). Thus, there is a strong pull to exit the matrix of the relationship. There have been no studies of how often individuals who become involved with narcissists repeat

the mistake, but the anecdotal evidence suggests that there is both a percentage who keep repeating the mistake with different narcissistic partners, and a seemingly larger percentage who learn to avoid these relationships in the future (Campbell, 2005).

Contemplating these dynamics over time, narcissists should show something of a cycle. The narcissist enters an emerging context and thrives. This, however, transforms into an enduring zone and there are increased costs. Finally, there is an effort to return to the emerging zone. With apologies to David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984), A B E, *Always Be Emerging*, would be a successful guiding principle for narcissists. (Interestingly, in this vein, one mythical description of narcissism is the eternal boy, which the Jungians referred to as the archetype of the Puer Aeternus. Peter Pan, the perpetual boy, is a manifestation of this archetype.) In contrast, for others interacting with the narcissist, there will be fewer cycles. This is because the other is more likely to exit the relationship after becoming aware of the costs in the enduring zone. The cycles will also be deeper, with the negative consequences of being in the enduring zone with narcissists being highly negative. For a visual description of this cycle, see Figure 3. The solid line representing the self shows the longer term dynamic generated by the benefits and costs of narcissism for the self; the broken line represents the dynamic generated by the benefits and costs for the other interacting with the narcissist. The broken line stops before the end of the graph, which is meant to represent exiting the situation. An example of this would be individuals who repeatedly get involved with narcissistic dating partners (either the same partner again and again, or a series of different partners). As noted, anecdotally, many people with this pattern will eventually stop as the costs of dating narcissists outweigh short-term benefits (Campbell, 2005).

A Tale of Two Dynamics

The contextual reinforcement model is intended to complement past self-enhancement models by: (a) identifying those zones where narcissism will be effective—and ineffective; (b) doing the same for the other interacting with the narcissist; and

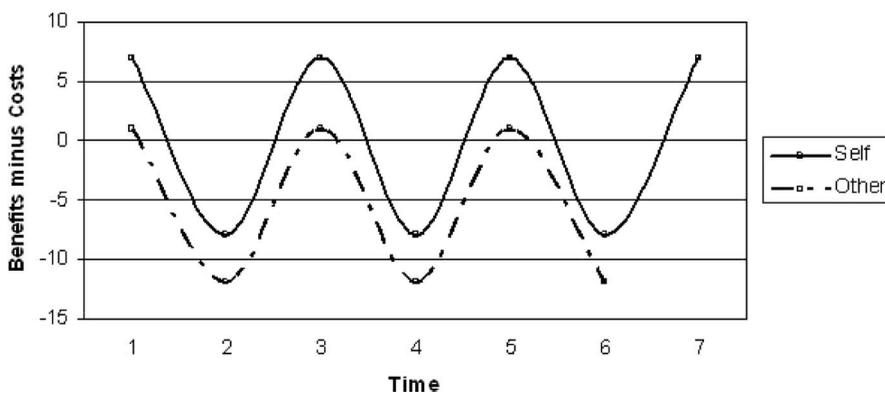


FIGURE 3 The overall benefits minus costs of narcissism are on the vertical axis; time is on the horizontal axis. The solid line represents the longer term dynamic generated by the benefits and costs of narcissism for the self; the broken line represents the dynamic for the other interacting with the narcissist. The broken line stops before the end of the graph to represent exiting the situation.

(c) showing how a dynamic of behavior can emerge from the particular pattern of benefits and costs in each zone. If the tenets of the contextual reinforcement model are correct there is a secondary dynamic to narcissism—the pressure to stay in the emerging zone versus the natural drift into the enduring zone. Narcissists need to defend threats to self from outside (and jump on outside possibilities for enhancement), as well as fight the natural drift to maturation found in the enduring zone.

The contextual reinforcement model helps shed light on one of the central questions for understanding narcissism: Why does narcissism persist if it is bad for the self and for others? The standard answer is that narcissism persists because there is the ability to alter reality by defensive processing of negative feedback and the augmentation of positive feedback, and by manipulation of others. The contextual reinforcement model suggests a more complex answer to this question. The benefits of narcissism, both for the narcissist and those he or she are involved with, can be seen more clearly when the context of the interaction or behavior is specified. There is a context, the emerging zone, where narcissism can generate a high ratio of benefits versus costs. As long as the emerging context is maintained, narcissists will thrive. The same even holds true for the other. Narcissism provides sufficient positive rewards to others in the emerging zone so that others will begin and temporarily maintain relationships with narcissists.

These dynamics suggest that the narcissists who are depressed or unhappy, sometimes referred to as “failed narcissists” (e.g., Campbell, 2001), could be cured of their unhappiness by moving back into the emerging zone. For example, they could start a new relationship, a new job, or go to a place to meet new people. Of course, these efforts are going to be most available to narcissists who are young, attractive and talented. When the possibilities to move into the emerging zone are gone, so are the benefits to narcissism. This might explain why some of the psychodynamic models of narcissism, especially the work of Kernberg (1975), argued that narcissists often have a particular talent or skill (e.g., being a talented artist or speaker) that allows them to keep the narcissism going. We explore an area of social relationships where narcissism has traditionally been thought to play an important role: leadership.

The Dynamic in Action: Narcissism and Leadership

Leadership has been a significant topic in the discussion of narcissism in part because it is easy to identify narcissism at the top of organizations and in part because narcissism seems well-suited for leadership. Leadership positions are a useful social platform for obtaining the narcissistic goals of self-enhancement, via, for example, social status, material goods, admiration, social power, and access to attractive mates. Leadership positions, at least from some perspectives, are more about having power over others (agentic concerns) than about forming close, warm relationships with others (communal concerns). This combination matches narcissists’ preferences. As Wilhelm Reich (1949) noted in his writings on the link between the phallic-narcissistic character and leadership:

The outspoken types tend to achieve leading positions in life and resent subordination unless they can—as in the army or other hierarchic organizations—compensate for the necessity of subordination by exerting domination over others who find themselves on lower rungs of the ladder. (Reich, 1949, p. 201)

There is also the sense that others (i.e., potential followers) are likely to see narcissistic personalities (e.g., outgoing and self-confident individuals) as leaders.

This was expressed by Freud in his classic essay on libidinal types, where he first described narcissistic personality (Freud, 1931, p. 218): “People of this type impress others as being ‘personalities’; it is on them that their fellow-men are especially likely to lean; they readily assume the role of leader . . . ”. This is also seen in an interesting historical study of narcissism (Deluga, 1997). Presidential narcissism scores were estimated by asking raters to fill out the NPI for each US president based on biographical information. The results showed that presidential NPI scores were very high—roughly one half a standard deviation higher than those found in the typical undergraduate self-report sample today. These NPI ratings also correlated positively with ratings of charisma and “consensus of greatness.” In other words, the presidents rated as narcissistic were also seen as charismatic and successful. These data certainly have shortcomings—they are other-reports based on limited data—but they do suggest that people see narcissism as linked to successful leadership—at least among political leaders.

Together, these early writings on narcissism and leadership appear to make a case for the benefits of narcissism for leadership. Others, however, have argued for a more complex view of narcissistic leadership that focuses on benefits and for costs (e.g., Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Maccoby, 2003; see Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, for a recent review). One approach to understanding the benefits and costs of narcissistic leadership has been to divide narcissism itself into two “sides,” a “bright side” and a “dark side”:

The bright side concerns the person you meet in an interview; the dark side concerns the person who actually comes to work. Dark side tendencies typically coexist with well developed social skills which mask or compensate for them in the short run. Over time, however, dark side tendencies erode trust and undermine relationships. (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005, p. 171)

For example, Hogan and Hogan (2001) have mixed accounts of what they term “bold” or arrogant leadership. From observer reports of leaders, they find high levels of self-promotion and limit testing and low self-restraint, but also a lesser likelihood to be a follower and higher sociability. In coach reports, they find that these leaders are seen to take “advantage of others,” have “strong opinions,” expect “special consideration” and be “direct and assertive.” In other words, narcissism, at least as measured by these researchers, appears to be a mixed bag.

There are at least two ways to make sense of the “two sides” of narcissistic leadership. One possibility, which harkens back to the clinical accounts from the middle of the last century, is to split the construct of narcissism itself into two types, such as healthy or unhealthy narcissism or “bright side” and “dark side” narcissism. This approach has been used in the study of emergent leadership (Paunonen, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, Leikas, & Nissinen, 2006) and is discussed by Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006). While not unreasonable, we do not fully support this approach to narcissism because often in issues of leadership the exact same behavior can be “bright” or “dark” depending on the perspective it is judged from or the time frame. For example, in work on narcissism in commons dilemmas, students were asked to take the role of CEO of a forestry company and harvest forests in competition with three other “companies” (these were simply three other undergraduate students in separate rooms). The narcissistic student-CEOs were in some respects very successful—they harvested more timber at Time 1 and, compared to the other student-CEOs they were competing against, they harvested more timber. At the same time, at a higher level of analysis, the more narcissistic groups of four student-CEOs actually harvested less timber than the less narcissistic groups. Furthermore, the

more narcissistic groups destroyed the forests more rapidly. So, from a perspective limited to a short time, or only the perspective of the competing groups, narcissism has a benefit for leadership. From the perspective of a longer time, the perspective across groups, and the perspective of the broader society, narcissism has a cost for leadership (Campbell et al., 2006b).

A second way to make sense of the success of narcissistic leadership is to focus on context. Narcissism should be beneficial in some contexts, and detrimental in others. This approach was also examined by Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006), who wrote:

We might expect narcissists to succeed in positions where charisma and extraversion are important (e.g., sales), or where self-absorption and grandiosity are important (e.g., science), rather than in positions that require building sustained relationships and trust (Robins & Paulhus, 2001). Narcissists are also likely to do better in situations in which their personal goals converge with those of their followers and institutions rather than situations in which their success is likely to come at the expense of those around them. Narcissists are apt to emerge, and often flourish, in times that call for a new order to be established, but they are unable to maintain the necessary stability once that new order has come to the fore. (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, p. 625)

This context-based approach is also consistent with Hogan's original bright side/dark side model. We believe that the contextual reinforcement model can help in categorizing some of these contexts. The model proposes that many of the benefits of narcissism for leadership are largely going to reside in the emerging zone. Many of the costs of narcissism, in contrast, are largely going to reside in the enduring zone. We are not claiming this distinction is absolute and incontrovertible—we have all seen how, for example, narcissistic self-enhancement that is not buffered by charm and social skills can sink a job candidate in an initial interview. Instead, we claim that this distinction is largely correct, and that it has implications for the careers of narcissistic leaders. We begin by describing the benefits of narcissism for leadership.

Benefits of the Narcissistic Leader—The Emerging Zone

In the study of leadership, the distinction can be made between leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Werner, 2002). Leadership emergence is the process by which a person becomes a leader in a new group. Leadership emergence is the quintessential emerging zone outcome, and, as such, we should expect that narcissism will predict leadership emergence. This is indeed what happens. In new research we found that narcissism predicted leadership emergence from all three perspectives. In a lab setting where individuals engaged in a group tasks (e.g., "Narg Island"), narcissists rated themselves as leaders and, importantly, narcissists were also rated by other participants as leaders. In a study of business executives, trained observers rated leadership emergence and again found that narcissism predicted leadership emergence (Brunell et al., in press).

A similar study was conducted by Pittinsky and Rosenthal (2008). These researchers added the important element of time to the assessment, bringing small groups back into the lab for several assessments. Thus, they were essentially tracking the link between narcissism and leadership from the emerging zone to the enduring zone. What they found conformed to the contextual reinforcement model—narcissism predicted leadership in the initial interactions, but not in the later interactions.

Another aspect of leadership associated with narcissism is charisma or charismatic leadership (this notion goes back to at least Freud's social psychological writings where he specified a similar mechanism for both romantic love and

leadership that involved projection of the ego-ideal and narcissism; Freud, 1959). Charisma, is a term used to describe leaders whose personal appeal and charm allows them to motivate and even manipulate followers (e.g., Conger, 1989).

There are data showing a link between narcissism and charismatic leadership. In the Deluga (1997) study on presidents noted above, raters observed narcissism scores for presidents correlated with their ratings of presidents' charisma. There are also recent unpublished self-report data showing a positive association between self-reported narcissism and charisma (Campbell, Miller, Lakey, & Goodie, 2008a). If these initial findings are accurate, this narcissism–charisma link would certainly be beneficial in the emerging zone for rising to leadership positions. On the surface, it should also be useful for performance in the enduring zone; however, there is also a “dark side” to charisma that often emerges later in the tenure of a leader, especially when narcissism and charisma are combined (Conger, 1989; House & Howell, 1992). A final area where narcissistic leadership has been theorized to be a benefit is the area of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a broader construct than charisma that, in addition to individual components like charisma, includes several aspects of the leader/follower relationship (e.g., sharing a vision, facilitating intellectual engagement; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Michael Maccoby, argued that many of the best transformational leaders were what he called “productive narcissists.” These leaders have a vision for the future of the organization (i.e., they are “visionary”) as well as an leadership style ideal for causing major changes, even disruptions, to the organization (Maccoby, 2000, 2003). This description of narcissistic leaders as successful in managing unstable, transforming environments—and even in intentionally creating those instabilities in an organization—does map onto the idea of narcissists' successful performance in the emerging zone (we see unstable or constantly evolving contexts as emerging rather than enduring zones because they present new contexts on a rapid basis.) To date, however, there has been little direct empirical testing of this hypothesis.

Costs of the Narcissistic Leader—The Enduring Zone

Unfortunately, narcissism has costs for the narcissistic leader, the other, and the organization after the narcissist has been in power for a time. That is, in the enduring zone. As we noted above, the benefit of narcissism for emergent leadership dissipates over time (Pittinsky & Rosenthal, 2008). In fact, in a large study of ratings of active leaders, Judge and colleagues found that narcissism positively predicted self-reported leadership abilities—but negatively predicted leadership ratings made by others (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006).

Even the charisma and transformational abilities of narcissism fade in time. The current approach to understanding leadership involves understanding the relationship between leaders and their followers (e.g., Klein and House, 1995). This approach holds true even for the study of charisma (e.g., Campbell, Ward, Sonnenfeld, & Agle, 2008b). Like other relational types, leader–follower relationships are at risk for selfish, narcissistic behaviors. This is a particular risk for charismatic leaders who are able to use their personal charisma to form relationships with others, but ultimately exploit the others in the relationship (e.g., the followers). Classic examples include leaders like Hitler and Stalin, or cult leaders like Charles Manson. This “dark side” of charisma (Conger, 1989) is often associated with narcissism. As House and Howell (1992) note, “personalized” charismatic leaders

(as opposed to socialized charismatic leaders) have traits like social dominance, self-interest, and self-promotion that are linked with narcissism:

... following McClelland (1975), we define personalized charismatic leadership as leadership which (a) is based on personal dominance and authoritarian behavior (b) serves the self-interest of the leader and is self-aggrandizing and (c) is exploitive of others (McClelland, 1975) They show disregard for the rights and feelings of others and they tend to be narcissistic, impetuous, and impulsively aggressive. (p. 84)

House and Howell conclude that personalized charismatic leadership is going to have significant negative consequences for the individual, but primarily for others in the organization: "While narcissists very likely cause serious pain and disturbance in others, they are best characterized as carriers of psychological problems rather than individuals who experience such problems" (p. 98). Direct empirical data from the leadership field, however, is still needed.

What about the benefits of narcissism for transformational leadership? Over time, narcissists' transformational style also has significant costs. First off, "visionary leadership" often results in taking big, public risks. In other words, it is not so much about having a keen insight into the future, but about looking like one does. This can be accomplished by making large, highly public changes to a company such as acquisitions or shifts in corporate strategy. A fascinating study by Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007) assessed leaders' narcissism from a range of indicators (e.g., size of CEO picture in the corporate report, use of "I", "Me", "My" in interviews) and then looked at performance. CEO narcissism had no relationship with overall level corporate performance, but there was a positive association between narcissism and volatility of performance. The narcissistic leaders were taking big, dramatic, public risks. When those risks paid off, the companies did very well; when they did not the companies underperformed. Because, in economic terms, variance of performance is considered "risk" and decreases corporate value (i.e., consistent, stable performance is more valuable than fluctuating performance of the same magnitude) it can be argued that the overall effect was that narcissism was a net negative.

Second, these transformational narcissistic leaders often short-circuit their initial successes by destroying their relationships with those around them (e.g., Maccoby, 2003). Blair et al. (2008) found that, in superiors' reports of manager performance, narcissistic managers were judged to be poor at the interpersonal aspects of management and lacking in integrity (but no worse in task competence).

One particularly pernicious aspect of narcissists' interpersonal style is the willingness to engage in deviant or destructive workplace behaviors. Judge and colleagues (2006) found that narcissism predicted relatively positive ratings of workplace deviance. Likewise, Penney and Spector (2002) linked narcissism to self-reported counterproductive behaviors at work as well as higher levels of anger. Similarly, narcissists in sales contexts show some willingness to endorse less ethical practices (Soyer, Rovenpor, & Kopelman, 1999). Finally, narcissism has been linked to white-collar crime (Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006).

Conclusion

The available information on narcissistic leadership maps relatively well onto the contextual reinforcement model. Narcissism has benefits in the emerging zone, but has significant costs in the enduring zone. Furthermore, narcissistic leadership likely hurts the followers more than the leaders. This is also consistent with the contextual

reinforcement model. Finally, there is the issue of cycles. If narcissism predicts successful leadership in the emerging zone (new jobs, unstable corporation, etc.) we would expect that the narcissistic leaders would cycle through positions at a relatively rapid pace. There is some suggestion this is the case, both in the work of Maccoby and the research of Chatterjee and Hambrick, but it remains to be directly targeted by researchers.

Beyond the realm of leadership, the contextual reinforcement model is a useful model for understanding the contexts in which narcissism will thrive and the contexts where it will wither. Furthermore, the model describes how narcissism can thrive—in love and in work—while still having negative consequences for the self and, especially, for others. Finally, it describes the behavioral dynamic that emerges from these benefits and costs. Narcissism will be linked to a cycle that constantly leads the narcissist back to the emerging zone.

Finally, by focusing on trait-level narcissism, we have taken one, but only one, of the several approaches to understanding self-enhancement processes. What we have seen is that the benefits of self-enhancement are highly complex, differing across situations, across time, across individuals (self vs. other), and across levels of analysis. Hopefully, the research on narcissism can serve as a piece for completing the larger puzzle of self-enhancement.

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