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- AQ1** Carlson and her colleagues (2011). There are two Carlson 2011 papers; which is this? Carlson, Naumann et al., [already cited] or Carlson, Vazire, & Oltmanns [not apparently cited anywhere in the paper, cf. AQ4] Following APA Manual (6th ed.), to prevent confusion, after the first full author citation of each 2011 paper they should be cited in the text as: Carlson, Naumann et al. (2011) or Carlson, Vazire et al. (2011) as appropriate (all et al. citations have been flagged AQ1)
- AQ2** American Psychiatric Association, 1994. DSM-IV 1994, as in text, or DSM-IV-TR 2000, as in endlist? 
- AQ3** Anderson & Kilduff, 2009. 2009  in text, or 2002, as in endlist?
- AQ4** Carlson, E. N., Vazire, S., & Oltmanns, T. F. (2011). Not cited in the text [cf. AQ1] 
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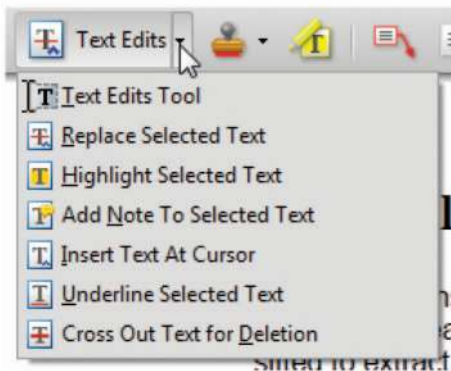
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Honestly Arrogant or Simply Misunderstood? Narcissists' Awareness of their Narcissism

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Narcissists describe themselves as narcissistic (e.g., arrogant). Do they have self-insight, or do they simply misunderstand the behavioral manifestations or consequences of narcissism? With two samples (undergraduates $N = 86$, 65% female, $M_{age} = 20$; MTurk $N = 234$, 62% female, $M_{age} = 35$), the current paper investigates whether narcissism is associated with genuine self-insight. Findings suggest that individuals higher in narcissism: (a) agree with close others ($N = 217$) that they behave in explicitly narcissistic ways (e.g., brag); (b) view narcissism as an individually desirable trait but not necessarily as a socially desirable trait; and (c) strive to be more narcissistic. Thus, it appears that narcissists truly grasp the behavioral and social significance of their narcissism.

Keywords: Interpersonal perception; Narcissism; Personality; Self-knowledge.

To confess a fault freely is the next thing to being innocent of it.

Publilius Syrus

Lack of self-insight is a hallmark of personality pathology, yet recent work suggests that narcissists may have self-knowledge of their narcissism and of their narcissistic reputation (Carlson, Vazire, & Oltmanns, 2011). Narcissists are individuals who tend to be manipulative, selfish, entitled, vain, arrogant, hostile, overly dominant, and more concerned with getting ahead than with being liked by others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, 1998; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists also tend to see themselves in overly positive ways, especially when describing themselves on desirable traits (e.g., intelligence, attractiveness; Bleske-Rechek, Remiker, & Baker, 2008; Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994; Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; John & Robins, 1994). Until recently, a key assumption was that narcissists lack insight into their narcissism. That is, narcissists would not describe themselves as arrogant (e.g., Emmons, 1984) or recognize that others do not share their positive self-views (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Yet, Carlson and her colleagues (2011) found that narcissists described themselves and their reputation among acquaintances, coworkers, friends, and family members as narcissistic

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(e.g., arrogant). Furthermore, narcissists realized that others did not view them as positively as they viewed themselves on desirable traits. Given that narcissists confessed to having a narcissistic personality and reputation, Carlson and her colleagues suggested that narcissists have insight into their narcissism.

As the opening quote suggests, perhaps narcissists should be credited for freely confessing to their “faults,” or to fairly negative, narcissistic characteristics. Then again, perhaps narcissists describe themselves as narcissistic because they misunderstand the behavioral manifestations or consequences associated with narcissism. For example, when presented with a narcissistic characteristic such as “arrogant,” most people probably think of a person who brags or who is condescending towards others. In contrast, a narcissist might believe that “arrogant” refers to a person who is superior to others or who is punished for being rightfully confident. Following this logic, it is possible that Carlson and her colleagues (2011) found that narcissists describe their reputation on desirable traits as being less positive than their self-perceptions because they believe that others are too dim or too jealous to recognize their brilliance. In other words, narcissists may not be freely confessing to their faults when they describe themselves as narcissistic because they do not understand the meaning of narcissism.

The goal of the current paper was to determine whether narcissists have genuine insight into their narcissism when they describe themselves as narcissistic or whether they simply misunderstand the meaning of narcissism. Similar to past work (e.g., Carlson et al., 2011), the current research adopted the social-personality, or subclinical conceptualization of narcissism, which defines narcissism as a dimensional trait (i.e., a trait that all individuals have to some degree; Miller & Campbell, 2008, 2010). This conceptualization differs from the clinical definition of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., *DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), which defines narcissism as a categorical disorder (i.e., only individuals who meet diagnostic criteria are diagnosed with NPD).¹ Thus, the term “narcissists” in the current paper refers to individuals who scored higher on a subclinical measure of narcissism (i.e., the NPI) instead of individuals diagnosed with NPD.

To determine whether narcissists have true insight into their narcissism, the current research examined: (a) narcissists’ perceptions of their narcissistic personality traits (e.g., arrogant), their beliefs about how others perceived them on narcissistic personality traits and close others’ actual perceptions of their narcissistic traits; (b) narcissists’ and close others’ perceptions of their everyday behavior; (c) narcissists’ beliefs about the interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences of narcissism; and (d) the extent to which narcissists believe that narcissistic traits reflect their ideal selves. Evidence that narcissists are described by others and describe themselves and their reputation as narcissistic (e.g., arrogant) will replicate the key finding that narcissists seem to have insight into their narcissism (Carlson et al., 2011). Going one step further, evidence that narcissists are also aware of their narcissistic behavior and of the consequences associated with narcissism will demonstrate that narcissists have genuine insight into their narcissism when they describe themselves as narcissistic. The following sections describe how narcissists typically behave as well as the interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences that are associated with narcissism.

Behavior Associated with Narcissism

Demonstrating that narcissists describe their behavior in explicitly narcissistic ways (e.g., they admit to bragging) will provide some evidence that narcissists understand

the implications of describing themselves as narcissistic. How do narcissists typically behave? Many lines of research suggest that narcissists tend to brag, talk about themselves, as well as criticize and derogate others (Fast & Funder, 2010; Paulhus, 1998; Robins & Beer, 2001; Robins & John, 1997). A recent study measured narcissists' behavior in their everyday lives using the Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR; Mehl, Pennebaker, Crow, Dabbs, & Price, 2001), which is a small, pocket-sized digital audio recorder that randomly records snippets of ambient sounds. In this study, NPI scores were positively associated with extraverted (i.e., talking, socializing) and disagreeable (i.e., arguing, swearing, using anger words) behavior (Holtzman, Vazire, & Mehl, 2010). Studies that assess narcissists' behavior in laboratory settings have found that narcissists also tend to aggress towards others, sometimes for no clear reason (Reidy, Foster, & Zeichner, 2010). After a transgression or insult, individuals higher in narcissism are especially likely to behave in aggressive ways and are also less likely to forgive than individuals lower in narcissism (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). In sum, narcissists tend to be extraverted, disagreeable, and aggressive, and they tend to engage in behaviors designed to garner admiration (e.g., bragging) while denigrating others (e.g., criticizing others).

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Consequences Associated with Narcissism

Demonstrating that narcissists understand the interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences associated with narcissism while also confessing that they possess narcissistic qualities will provide more evidence that narcissists truly understand the implications of describing themselves as narcissistic. What are the consequences of narcissism? In general, narcissism is associated with fairly negative consequences for others (i.e., interpersonal costs). Given that narcissists are more concerned with getting ahead than with being liked by others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin et al., 1991), it is not surprising that narcissists generally engage in behaviors designed to get them ahead at the expense of others (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005; Campbell & Campbell, 2009). For example, in commons dilemmas, narcissists' competitive and exploitative tendencies often result in outcomes that are more positive for them but that tend to destroy the commons (Campbell et al., 2005). Furthermore, as mentioned above, narcissists tend to be aggressive, especially when rejected (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Exline et al., 2004; Reidy et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2003), and their aggressive behavior can have dangerous consequences for others (e.g., sexual coercion; Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003).

Arguably, any positive outcomes associated with narcissism are likely restricted to intrapersonal consequences. In fact, some evidence suggests that narcissists experience positive outcomes such as high self-esteem (e.g., Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004) and high status (e.g., narcissists tend to emerge as leaders; Brunell et al., 2008). However, these positive consequences are often inconsistent or short-lived. For example, narcissists' self-esteem tends to be unstable (Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998), and narcissism is associated with poor management rankings (Blair, Hoffman, & Helland, 2008) suggesting that narcissists' initial rise to status might fade. Furthermore, narcissists can be charming and make positive first impressions, but these positive impressions deteriorate over time (Back, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2010; Carlson et al., 2011; Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004; Paulhus, 1998). Thus, eventually, narcissists tend to be disliked by

others and often have conflict in their relationships (Brunell & Campbell, 2011; Campbell & Foster, 2002). In sum, most of the positive intrapersonal gains associated with narcissism tend to be short-lived.

Narcissists' impulsivity and risk-taking behavior also results in fairly negative intrapersonal consequences (Foster, Shenese, & Goff, 2009; Vazire & Funder, 2006). For example, narcissists are much more likely to engage in compulsive spending (Rose, 2007), pathological gambling (Lakey, Rose, Campbell, & Goodie, 2008), and dishonest behavior such as cheating (Miller, Campbell et al., 2009). Narcissists also tend to make risky monetary investments (e.g., risky stock portfolios) and consequently, tend to lose more money than non-narcissists (Foster, Reidy, Misra, & Goff, 2011). Interestingly, recent work suggests that narcissists do not engage in risky behaviors because they fail to appreciate the potentially negative consequences; instead, their eagerness to attain highly desirable outcomes seems to drive them to behave in fairly risky ways (Foster et al., 2009). Thus, narcissists might value their narcissistic behaviors despite the potentially negative consequences of these behaviors.

While narcissism is associated with fairly negative interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences, a recent model of narcissism, called the contextual reinforcement model (Campbell & Campbell, 2009), argues that narcissists tend to place themselves into situations where their narcissism has positive consequences for the self relative to others. These situations include interactions with new acquaintances or other short-term interactions where narcissists tend to make positive impressions and are able to obtain the status they crave. Therefore, although narcissism is objectively associated with fairly negative interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences, narcissists may in fact experience more intrapersonal benefits by placing themselves in the situations that bring them the status and admiration they crave.

Research Overview

To summarize, past work suggests that narcissists have insight into their narcissism because they describe themselves and their reputation as narcissistic (Carlson et al., 2011). However, narcissists may describe themselves as narcissistic because they do not understand the behavioral manifestations or consequences associated with narcissism. In two samples, the current research explored whether narcissists truly confess to their narcissism when they describe themselves and their reputation as narcissistic. Specifically, each participant described his or her personality and reputation on narcissistic traits (e.g., arrogant) as well as his or her everyday behavior (e.g., talk, brag, gossip) and then nominated several close others who also described his or her personality and behavior. Participants also provided their perceptions of the social and individual desirability of narcissistic traits and described the extent to which these traits described their ideal selves.

If narcissists have true insight into their narcissism when they describe themselves and their reputation as narcissistic, they should also: (a) admit that they behave in explicitly narcissistic ways (e.g., acknowledge that they brag); (b) admit that narcissism does not have positive consequences for others (i.e., they should not perceive narcissism as socially desirable) but admit that they believe narcissism has positive consequences for the self (i.e., they should perceive narcissism as individually desirable); and (c) admit that, although their narcissism only benefits them, they desire to be more narcissistic (i.e., they should describe narcissism as representing their ideal self). In contrast, if narcissists lack true insight into their

narcissism, they will fail to realize that they tend to behave in narcissistic ways, and they will not understand the social costs associated with narcissism (e.g., they will believe that narcissism is socially desirable). ~~That is,~~ narcissists might report that they believe narcissistic traits are ideal traits that benefit them, but they will not realize how their narcissism is manifested in their behavior (e.g., they will not acknowledge that they brag) or realize that there are social costs to their narcissism (e.g., they will report that narcissism is socially desirable). Learning whether narcissists have genuine insight into the behavioral manifestations and consequences of their narcissism is an important step in understanding the underlying mechanisms driving and maintaining narcissism (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

Method

Participants

Sample 1 participants ($N = 86$; 65% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.97$) were undergraduates from a private Midwestern university enrolled in a personality course and were not compensated for their participation. Ethnicities were as follows: 57.1% Caucasian, 25.9% Asian, 5.4% Black, and 11.6% who indicated “other” or did not report on their ethnicity. Each participant nominated a parent, hometown friend, college friend, roommate, and romantic partner to describe his or her personality and behavior. Informants received an e-mail invitation to complete an online survey about the target’s personality, but they were not compensated for their participation (Vazire, 2006). On average, targets knew responding informants ($N = 217$) for approximately 8.45 ($SD = 2.21$) years.

Sample 2 participants ($N = 234$; 62% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.60$) were Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers from the United States. MTurk is an online network hosted by Amazon.com that allows individuals to post various tasks for MTurk “workers” to complete for small monetary payment (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants in the current study were paid \$0.50 for their participation. However, eighteen participants were dropped from analyses due to their failure to correctly answer four questions designed to assess whether they were reading the questions (e.g., the excluded participants responded “yes” to the question: “*I am not reading the questions*”). Ethnicities were as follows: 77% Caucasian, 9% Asian American, 7% African American, 5% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 1% who described their ethnicity as “other.” Approximately 23% of participants described themselves as students. At the time of the study, 12% had completed high school, 5% had completed a technical or vocational program, 40% had completed some college, 30% had completed a four year program, 11% had completed a master’s degree, and 2% had completed a PhD or professional (MD) degree.²

Procedures

Sample 1 participants took part in a larger, longitudinal study that was conducted over the course of a semester. On different days of class, participants completed a narcissism measure, they described themselves and their beliefs about how close others perceived them (i.e., meta-perceptions) on a variety of personality traits, they described their everyday behavior, and they described the desirability of the

personality traits they used to describe themselves and their reputation. Participants' close others (i.e., five informants) were contacted via e-mail and asked to describe the target participant's personality and everyday behavior using an online version of the measures ~~target~~ that participants used to describe themselves.

Sample 2 participants completed all measures online. Participants completed a narcissism measure, described themselves and their reputation on a variety of traits, and then rated the desirability of the same personality items they used to describe themselves.³

Measures

Narcissism. Both samples completed the 40-item version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). The mean scores for both samples (sample 1: $M = 13.89$; sample 2: $M = 13.21$) were slightly lower than the national average ($M = 15.3$, $SD = 6.8$; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003); however, the internal consistency reliabilities were acceptable and similar to past studies (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics; Corry, Merritt, Mrug, & Pamp, 2008). Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the four facets of the NPI identified by Emmons (1984, 1987): Leadership/Authority (L/A; enjoyment of leadership and authority roles), Self-absorption/Self-admiration (S/S; self-admiration of personality and physical appearance), Superiority/Arrogance (S/A; self-enhancement, grandiosity), and Exploitativeness/Entitlement (E/E; manipulative and exploitative of others).

Self-perceptions, meta-perceptions, and informant perceptions of personality. Using the 17-item personality measure described below, Sample 1 participants provided self-perceptions (i.e., "I see myself as someone who ...") as well as meta-perceptions (i.e., "I believe Person X sees me as someone who ...") for each informant (i.e., parent, hometown friend, college friend, roommate, and romantic partner). Informants also described participants' personality (i.e., "Person X is someone who ...") with the same 17-item personality measure. Meta-perceptions and informants' actual impressions were averaged to index participants' perceptions of their reputations and their actual reputations respectively. The personality measure included the Big Five (Ten-Item Personality Inventory, TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003), five positive traits (e.g., funny) and two narcissistic traits (i.e., arrogant and exaggerates abilities). All items were rated on a 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 15 (*agree strongly*) scale. Reported results were limited to the two narcissistic traits listed in Table 2.

Sample 2 participants provided self-perceptions ~~and~~ as well as meta-perceptions for how their friends generally view them (i.e., instead of how specific friends viewed them) with the same 33-item personality measure. This measure included the TIPI, several positive traits (e.g., likeable), and six narcissistic traits (i.e., arrogant, exaggerates abilities, brags). All items were rated on a 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 15 (*agree strongly*) scale. Reported results were limited to the six narcissistic characteristics listed in Table 2.

Self-perceptions and informant perceptions of behavior. Sample 1 participants completed a revised version of the ACT (Vazire & Mehl, 2008) in which they described how often they engaged in 42 behaviors (e.g., laugh, watch TV, gossip, criticize others) relative to the average person on a 1 (*much less than the average person*) to 7 (*much more than the average person*) scale. Informants completed the

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

	NPI		L/A		S/S		S/A		E/E	
	Mean (SD)	α	Mean (SD)	α	Mean (SD)	α	Mean (SD)	α	Mean (SD)	α
Sample 1 (undergraduates)	13.89 (6.83)	.84	3.16 (2.08)	.72	3.38 (1.97)	.66	2.05 (1.74)	.65	1.39 (1.27)	.49
Sample 2 (Mechanical Turk)	13.21 (7.23)	.86	3.18 (2.33)	.79	2.63 (2.09)	.72	2.49 (1.85)	.63	1.53 (1.63)	.66

Note: Sample 1: $N = 86$; Sample 2: $N = 226$. L/A = Leadership/Authority; S/S = Self-absorption/Self-admiration; S/A = Superiority/Arrogance; E/E = Exploitativeness/Entitlement.

300
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345

TABLE 2 Descriptive Statistics for Self-, Meta-, and Informant-Perceptions of Narcissistic Traits

	Self-perceptions		Meta-perceptions		Informant-perceptions	
	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 1	Sample 2
Arrogant	5.32 (3.52)	4.60 (3.87)	5.51 (3.03)	4.15 (3.90)	3.44 (2.45)	—
Exaggerates abilities	6.08 (3.34)	5.58 (3.84)	5.88 (2.82)	4.90 (4.01)	3.69 (2.50)	—
Condescending	—	5.13 (3.78)	—	4.48 (3.82)	—	—
Argues/fights	—	4.80 (3.91)	—	4.44 (4.01)	—	—
Criticizes people	—	6.39 (3.99)	—	5.92 (4.38)	—	—
Braggs	—	5.31 (3.77)	—	4.75 (3.98)	—	—

Notes: Sample 1 (undergraduates): self- and meta-perceptions $N=79$; informant-perceptions $N=71$. Sample 2 (Mechanical Turk): self- and meta-perceptions $N=208$. Items were rated on a 1 to 15 scale.

same measure, describing their perceptions of the participant’s behavior, and their responses were averaged (see Table 3).

Perceptions of the desirability of traits. Participants from both samples rated the social and individual desirability of the personality traits they used to describe themselves. A socially desirable trait was defined as having positive interpersonal consequences, whereas an individually desirable trait was defined as having positive consequences for the self. Desirability was rated on a 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 15 (*agree strongly*) scale, such that a 1 indicated very undesirable traits and a 15 indicated very desirable traits (see Table 4). Sample 2 participants also described their ideal selves on these traits (i.e., who the participant wanted to be). Ideal self

TABLE 3 Sample 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Ten Informant-perceptions of Behaviors Most Strongly Associated with Narcissism

Behaviors	Informant-perceptions	Self-perceptions
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Criticize people	3.16 (1.44)	4.17 (1.37)
Spend time by himself/herself	4.24 (1.09)	4.45 (1.32)
Express opinion/preference	4.99 (0.97)	4.58 (1.23)
Argue or fight	2.86 (1.19)	2.78 (1.45)
Act condescending to others	2.16 (1.00)	2.75 (1.20)
Talk about himself/herself	3.55 (1.21)	4.08 (1.31)
Agree with others	4.25 (0.86)	4.75 (1.00)
Apologize	4.21 (0.93)	4.68 (1.24)
Brag	2.36 (1.08)	3.22 (1.45)
Talk	4.57 (0.96)	4.28 (1.30)

Note: N = 60. Items were rated on a 1 to 7 scale.

TABLE 4 Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of the Desirability of Narcissistic Traits

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Ideal self
	Social desirability	Individual desirability	Social desirability	Individual desirability	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Arrogant	2.72 (2.13)	3.48 (2.70)	3.42 (3.36)	3.48 (3.35)	2.72 (3.05)
Exaggerates abilities	4.30 (3.03)	5.22 (3.38)	4.05 (3.62)	3.90 (3.43)	3.09 (3.38)
Condescending	–	–	3.25 (3.23)	3.24 (3.24)	2.88 (3.31)
Argues/fights	–	–	2.93 (2.88)	2.86 (2.94)	2.86 (3.43)
Criticizes people	–	–	4.06 (3.42)	3.77 (3.34)	3.35 (3.50)
Brags	–	–	3.76 (3.39)	3.47 (3.30)	2.80 (3.17)

Note: Sample 1 (undergraduates): N = 54; Sample 2 (Mechanical Turk): N = 206. Items were rated on a 1 to 15 scale.

ratings were completed on a 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 15 (*agree strongly*) scale, such that a 1 indicated traits that were not reflective of a participant's ideal self and a 15 indicated traits that were reflective of a participant's ideal self (see Table 4). Reported results were limited to the narcissistic characteristics listed in Table 2.

Results

Do Narcissists Confess to their Narcissistic Traits and Reputation?

Table 5 shows the associations between narcissism and self-perceptions, meta-perceptions, and informant perceptions of narcissistic traits. Replicating past work, Table 5 shows a positive association between NPI scores and close others' perceptions of narcissism. Specifically, close others perceived individuals who scored higher on the NPI as more arrogant and as people who exaggerate their abilities more than those who scored lower on the NPI.

Did narcissists describe themselves or their reputation as narcissistic? Table 5 shows a positive association between NPI scores and self- and meta-perceptions of narcissistic traits. Thus, results replicated the key findings observed by Carlson et al. (2011). Notably, some traits in Table 5 were not examined by Carlson et al.; however, the pattern of results replicated their findings. Specifically, individuals who scored higher on the NPI described themselves as more condescending and as people who argue, fight, criticize others, and brag more than those who scored lower on the NPI. They also believed that close others perceived them as more condescending and as individuals who argue, fight, and brag more than those who scored lower on the NPI. In sum, narcissists confessed to possessing narcissistic traits and to having a narcissistic reputation, which replicates the key finding that narcissists may have insight into their narcissism.⁴

Do Narcissists Confess to their Narcissistic Behavior?

Due to space constraints, Table 6 shows the ten strongest correlations of the 42 correlations between narcissism and informants' perceptions of behaviors on the ACT. Table 6 also shows the corresponding correlations between narcissism and self-perceptions of the same ten behaviors. As shown, there was a positive association between participants' NPI scores and informants' perceptions of their narcissistic (i.e., acting condescending towards others; talking about himself/herself; bragging), extraverted (i.e., spending less time alone; talking), and disagreeable (i.e., criticizing people, arguing/fighting, agreeing with others less, apologizing less) behavior. These findings mirror past research that suggests narcissists behave in narcissistic, extraverted, and disagreeable ways in their everyday lives (e.g., Holtzman et al., 2010).

More importantly, participants' NPI scores were significantly associated with self-perceptions of each of these behaviors as well. That is, individuals who scored higher on the NPI also described themselves as behaving in more narcissistic (e.g., bragging: $r = .31$, $p < .05$), extraverted (e.g., talking: $r = .35$, $p < .01$), and disagreeable (e.g., arguing/fighting: $r = .34$, $p < .01$) ways than individuals who scored lower on the NPI. In sum, narcissists confessed to behaving in explicitly narcissistic ways, suggesting that they understood the behavioral manifestations of their personality.

TABLE 5 Correlations between Self-, Meta-, and Informant-perceptions of Narcissistic Traits and Narcissism

	Self-perceptions of narcissistic traits <i>r</i> with the NPI				Meta-perceptions of narcissistic traits <i>r</i> with the NPI				Informant-perceptions of narcissistic traits <i>r</i> with the NPI						
	NPI	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E	NPI	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E	NPI	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E
<i>Sample 1</i>															
Arrogant	.24*	.16	.09	.23*	.24*	.24*	.26*	-.02	.25*	.22*	.47***	.30**	.41***	.36***	.34**
Exaggerates abilities	.25*	.13	.06	.19	.27*	.23*	.15	.00	.22†	.35**	.31*	.14	.30**	.21†	.26*
<i>Mean</i>	.25	.15	.08	.21	.26	.24	.21	-.01	.24	.29	.39	.22	.36	.28	.30
<i>Sample 2</i>															
Arrogant	.27***	.22**	.12†	.20**	.36***	.22**	.16*	.06	.13†	.37***	-	-	-	-	-
Exaggerates abilities	.15*	.10	.08	.06	.24***	.16*	.07	.08	.09	.27***	-	-	-	-	-
Condescending	.17*	.12†	.06	.12†	.39***	.28***	.16*	.20**	.16*	.36***	-	-	-	-	-
Argues/fights	.25***	.17*	.11	.19**	.38***	.23**	.15*	.13†	.16*	.33***	-	-	-	-	-
Criticizes people	.24***	.13†	.16*	.17*	.38***	.11	.08	.05	.09	.21**	-	-	-	-	-
Brags	.21**	.23**	.10	.15*	.21**	.17*	.12†	.12†	.08	.23**	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Mean</i>	.22	.16	.11	.15	.33	.20	.12	.11	.12	.30	-	-	-	-	-

Notes: † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, two-tailed. Sample 1 (undergraduates): informant-perception $N = 73$; self- and meta-perception $N = 77$. Sample 2 (Mechanical Turk): self- and meta-perception $N = 208$. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory; facets: L/A = Leadership/Authority; S/S = Self-absorption/Self-admiration; S/A = Superiority/Arrogance; E/E = Exploiteness/Entitlement.

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TABLE 6 Sample 1. Correlations between Narcissism and the Ten Informant-perceptions of Behavior Most Strongly Associated with Narcissism and Corresponding Self-perceptions of Behavior

Behaviors	Informant-perceptions of behavior <i>r</i> with the NPI					Self-perceptions of behavior <i>r</i> with the NPI				
	NPI	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E	NPI	L/A	S/S	S/A	E/E
Criticize people	.48***	.28*	.25 [†]	.31*	.54***	.42**	.30*	.33**	.30*	.46***
Spend time by him/herself	-.45***	-.44***	-.30*	-.31*	-.26***	-.40**	-.47***	-.11	-.35**	-.15
Express opinion/preference	.44***	.35**	.28*	.40**	.27*	.43**	.52***	.21	.24 [†]	.36**
Argue or fight	.41**	.28*	.24 [†]	.20	.45***	.34**	.28*	.15	.17	.46***
Act condescending to others	.41**	.24 [†]	.25 [†]	.25 [†]	.36**	.38**	.24 [†]	.27*	.29*	.52***
Talk about him/herself	.40**	.31*	.25 [†]	.28*	.31*	.39**	.37**	.36**	.20	.31*
Agree with others	-.37***	-.23 [†]	-.06	-.34**	-.51***	-.44***	-.39**	-.30*	-.29*	-.42**
Apologize	-.34**	-.19	-.25 [†]	-.25 [†]	-.28*	-.31*	-.14	-.36**	-.21	-.26*
Brag	.34**	.21 [†]	.34**	.14	.26*	.31*	.21	.24 [†]	.17	.35**
Talk	.30*	.32*	.28*	.10	.18	.35**	.44***	.19	.19	.08

Notes: [†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, two-tailed. $N = 60$. Correlations are ordered from the strongest to weakest association between informants-perceptions of behavior and the NPI. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory; facets: L/A = Leadership/Authority; S/S = Self-absorption/Self-admiration; S/A = Superiority/Arrogance; E/E = Exploiteness/Entitlement.

Do Narcissists Confess that they Believe Narcissism Brings Personal Gain?

Table 7 shows the correlations between narcissism and perceptions of social and individual desirability of narcissistic traits, and Figure 1 summarizes these correlations across both samples. As shown, NPI scores were weakly associated with perceptions of social desirability of narcissistic traits (mean $r = .11$; see Figure 1). In contrast, NPI scores were positively associated with perceptions of individual desirability of narcissistic traits (mean $r = .24$; see Figure 1) as well as ideal self ratings (mean $r = .27$). In other words, individuals who scored higher on the NPI perceived narcissistic traits such as “arrogant” as having more positive consequences for the self and as more ideal than individuals who scored lower on the NPI; however, these individuals did not believe that narcissistic traits had positive consequences for others. Taken together, this pattern of correlations suggests that narcissists were not deluded about the social costs of narcissism, but instead, seemed to believe that narcissism is a relatively ideal trait that brings them personal gain.

Discussion

Are narcissists honestly arrogant when they describe themselves as narcissistic, or do they simply misunderstand the meaning or consequences of narcissism? Results from the current study suggest that narcissists do have genuine insight into their narcissism. First, results replicated Carlson and colleagues’ (2011) finding that narcissists describe themselves and their reputation as narcissistic. Second, narcissists described themselves as behaving in explicitly narcissistic ways in their everyday lives (e.g., bragging, acting condescending). Thus, narcissists seem to have insight into the behavioral manifestations of their narcissism. Third, narcissists seemed to have no illusions about the social costs of narcissism; yet, they reported that narcissism brings them personal gain and that they would ideally like to be more narcissistic. In sum, results from the current research suggest that narcissists are truly confessing to their narcissism when they describe themselves as narcissistic.

One question raised by Carlson et al.’s (2011) findings is how narcissists are able to maintain their overly-positive self-perceptions on desirable traits while also perceiving themselves and their reputation as narcissistic. Many agree that narcissists maintain their positive self-views by interpreting feedback in positive ways or by derogating others who provide negative feedback (Horton & Sedikides, 2009; Kernis & Sun, 1994; Robins & John, 1997). The current results suggest yet another mechanism. Specifically, narcissists seem to perceive narcissism as a “get ahead” trait that brings them personal gain. Thus, narcissists likely view their narcissism as a personal strength and justify their narcissism in terms of the benefits it has for them. Put another way, narcissists are able to see themselves in overly positive ways on desirable traits while also seeing themselves as narcissistic because they consider narcissism to be a relatively desirable trait.

These findings also shed some light on the mechanisms underlying and maintaining narcissists’ maladaptive interpersonal style. Recall that narcissists are more concerned with getting ahead than they are with being liked (Raskin et al., 1991). Figure 1 suggests that narcissists believe that their narcissism brings them positive rewards and that they strive to become more narcissistic. In other words, narcissists are likely aware that their behavior does not benefit others, but they continue to behave in socially undesirable ways because of the positive rewards they believe their behavior brings to them. Perhaps future research will investigate whether narcissists can learn to recognize the ways in which their narcissistic

TABLE 7 Correlations between Perceptions of the Desirability of Narcissistic Traits and Narcissism

	Perceptions of social desirability r with NPI				Perceptions of individual desirability r with NPI				Perceptions of ideal self r with NPI			
	NPI	L/A	S/S	E/E	NPI	L/A	S/S	E/E	NPI	L/A	S/S	E/E
<i>Sample 1</i>												
Arrogant	.17	-.03	.11	.18	.05	.25 [†]	.01	.30*	.34**	—	—	—
Exaggerates abilities	.12	-.05	-.12	.15	.31*	.30*	.12	.30*	.25 [†]	—	—	—
<i>Mean</i>	.15	-.04	-.01	.17	.18	.28	.10	.30	.30	—	—	—
<i>Sample 2</i>												
Arrogant	.10	.02	.08	.13 [†]	.12 [†]	.28***	.24**	.16*	.25***	.29***	.20**	.31***
Exaggerates abilities	.03	.01	.04	-.04	.14*	.09	.10	.10	.20**	.17*	.14*	.12 [†]
Condescending	.13 [†]	.10	.07	.10	.23**	.23**	.18*	.16*	.30***	.20**	.12 [†]	.23**
Argues/fights	.16*	.18**	.09	.08	.25***	.27***	.23**	.18*	.34***	.24**	.20**	.25**
Criticizes people	.10	.08	.04	.04	.21**	.28***	.25***	.21**	.29***	.31***	.20**	.21**
Brags	.12 [†]	.06	.12 [†]	.06	.22**	.25***	.21**	.16*	.32***	.24**	.12 [†]	.18*
<i>Mean</i>	.11	.08	.07	.06	.20	.23	.20	.16	.29	.24	.16	.22

Notes: [†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, two-tailed. Sample 1 (undergraduates): $N = 54$; Sample 2 (Mechanical Turk): $N = 206$. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory; facets: L/A = Leadership/Authority; S/S = Self-absorption/Self-admiration; S/A = Superiority/Arrogance; E/E = Exploiteness/Entitlement.

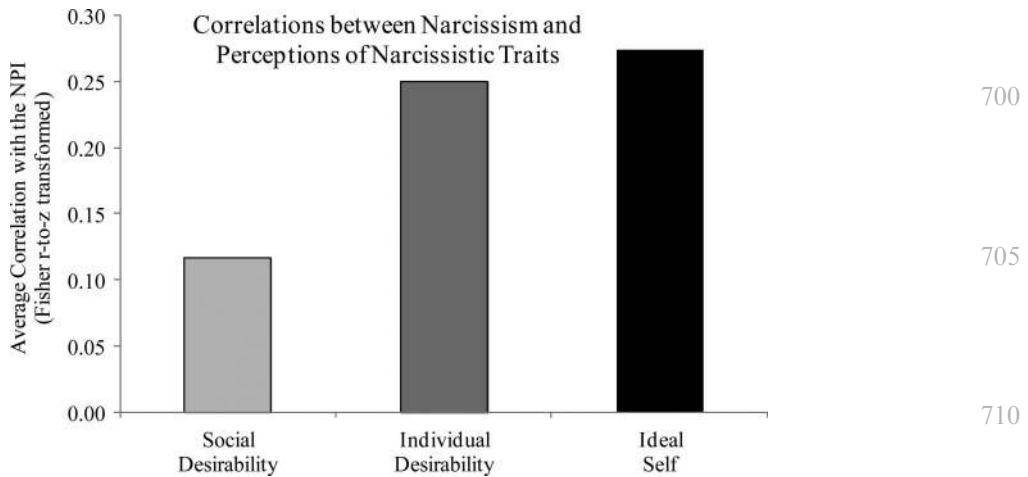


FIGURE 1 The average correlations across two samples between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) and perceptions of social desirability, individual desirability, and one's ideal self on narcissistic traits. The average correlations include the correlations between the NPI and perceptions of traits listed in Table 7 and were weighted by sample size. The average ideal self correlation was based on the correlations from Sample 2.

behavior actually interferes with the goal of attaining the status and admiration they crave (Anderson, Ames, & Gosling, 2008; Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Paulhus, 1998; Robins & Beer, 2001; Vazire & Funder, 2006). Given that they already know that others see them less positively than they see themselves (Carlson et al., 2011), conveying the negative consequences of their behavior will involve more than simply delivering feedback about how others see them.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations to the current research that will hopefully be addressed by future research. First, there are important distinctions between the dimensional, subclinical conceptualization of narcissism and the categorical, clinical conceptualization of narcissism (e.g., Miller & Campbell, 2008). Thus, it is possible that current results may not generalize to clinical populations. However, some research suggests that the E/E facet of the NPI, which represents the more maladaptive features of narcissism, correlates with pathological narcissism (Emmons, 1984, 1987; Raskin & Novacek, 1989). Interestingly, Tables 5–7 show that the associations between E/E facet scores and self-perceptions of personality, behavior, and perceptions of narcissism were quite strong. Thus, clinical populations of narcissists might show a similar pattern; that is, individuals who meet criteria for NPD might also admit that they have narcissistic traits and behave in especially narcissistic ways and may perceive narcissism as an ideal trait that brings them positive gain.

Second, although the NPI is the most commonly used measure of narcissism in the literature, there is some disagreement about the structure of the NPI (e.g., the number of facets) as well as whether the NPI is the best tool for measuring narcissism (e.g., Maxwell, Donnellan, Hopwood, & Ackerman, 2011; Rosenthal,

Montoya, Ridings, Rieck, & Hooley, 2011). Future research might explore whether the current findings replicate among other measures of narcissism. Moreover, future research might examine whether men and women show the same pattern of results among different measures or conceptualizations of narcissism (e.g., vulnerable and grandiose narcissism).

Third, although results replicated across two demographically diverse samples, the current research did not examine whether results replicated across social contexts (e.g., new acquaintances, close others, coworkers). ~~Narcissists~~ make different impressions across social contexts (e.g., Carlson, Naumann et al., 2011), but an unexamined issue is whether their actual behavior varies across contexts or whether it is simply the situation that influences the positivity of others' perceptions (e.g., ~~cooperative versus~~ competitive situations; first impressions versus long-term relationships). Thus, future research might examine whether narcissists' behavior does vary across contexts, ~~whether narcissists are aware of these differences,~~ and whether narcissists are aware of the differential consequences associated with their behavior across social contexts. Likewise, narcissists tend to make positive first impressions that deteriorate over time (e.g., Back et al., 2010; Paulhus, 1998), but an unexamined issue is whether narcissists behave differently over time or whether people simply change their initial interpretation of narcissists' behavior. ~~An interesting future direction will be to~~ determine if narcissists are aware of these changes (if they occur) or whether they realize that the consequences associated with their behavior change over time.

Conclusion

In sum, this research suggests that individuals higher in narcissism tend to freely confess to having fairly narcissistic qualities. These individuals also confess that they are not deluded about the social consequences of their narcissism. Instead, they see narcissism as a trait that brings them personal gain, and they confess that they desire to be more narcissistic. Thus, contrary to the opening quote, by confessing to their narcissism, narcissists are simply revealing how guilty, or honestly arrogant, they really are.

Notes

1. However, recent work suggests that the most commonly used social-personality measure of narcissism, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), measures characteristics that are fairly similar to those assessed by clinical measures of NPD (Miller, Gaughan, Pryor, Kamen, & Campbell, 2009).
2. Samples sizes vary across results due to listwise deletion (i.e., a small number of participants did not complete all measures or items).
3. Data from both samples reflect subsets of data from larger studies. Please contact the author for details about these studies.
4. There were no reliable gender differences in perceptions of narcissistic traits, behavior, or ratings of the desirability of narcissism. Thus, results were not reported separately for males and females.

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