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Narcissism and Commitment in Romantic Relationships: An Investment Model Analysis

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Two studies examined narcissism and commitment in ongoing romantic relationships. In Study 1, narcissism was found to be negatively related to commitment. Mediation analyses further revealed that this was primarily a result of narcissists' perception of alternatives to their current relationship. Study 2 replicated these findings with an additional measure of alternatives. Again, narcissists reported less commitment to their ongoing romantic relationship. This link was mediated by both perception of alternatives and attention to alternative dating partners. The utility of an interdependence approach to understanding the role of personality in romantic relationships is discussed.

Narcissus: Let us join one another.

Echo: Let us join one another.

Narcissus: Hands off! I would rather die than you should have me.

—Bulfinch (1970)

Narcissus, as suggested by the above exchange, was not open to romantic commitment. Instead of forming a relationship with someone as devoted and attractive as Echo, Narcissus kept searching for the perfect romantic partner. Eventually, Narcissus fell in love with the only person who met his exacting standards—his own reflection—and, as the story goes, he died.

It appears that the myth-makers had a clear idea that self-love, or narcissism, is inimical to interpersonal relatedness. Indeed, there is a growing consensus among social scientists that the ancient Greeks were correct. An inflated sense of self-worth is associated with argumentativeness (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995), hostility (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), selfishness (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998), and self-centeredness (Emmons, 1987). However, research has not examined

the association between narcissism and commitment in romantic relationships.

In this article, we extend research on narcissism into the realm of romantic relationships. Will narcissism, as the myth suggests, be associated negatively with commitment in ongoing romantic relationships? We approach this question using the investment model of commitment (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). We begin with the assumption that to fully understand the impact of narcissism on commitment, it is important to examine directly the interdependent structure of the romantic relationship. Specifically, we propose that the impact of narcissism on commitment can be explained by the mediating variables of satisfaction, investments, and alternatives (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Our research strategy contains three parts. First, we assess the link between narcissism and commitment in ongoing romantic relationships. Second, we examine the theoretically relevant mediators of the narcissism-commitment link, notably, satisfaction, investments, and alternatives. Finally, we explore the impact of narcissism on coping with relational conflict.

The Interpersonal Life of Narcissists

Description. A description of narcissism can be obtained from both the clinical and social/personality psychology literatures (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, in press).¹ Relative to nonnarcissists, narcissists possess inflated self-beliefs. Narcissists report that they are more intelligent and

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attractive than is measured by objective criteria (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994) and report inflated predictions of own performance in achievement domains (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). These positive beliefs are maintained with the use of several intrapersonal and interpersonal strategies. Intrapersonally, narcissists defend against negative feedback by using the self-serving bias to a greater degree than nonnarcissists; that is, narcissists take credit for successful outcomes and blame the situation for failure—a process that is often accompanied by anger (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). Narcissists also fantasize about their own power and success (Raskin & Novacek, 1991). Interpersonally, narcissists report inflated perceptions of their own positive input (but not the input of others) in group (John & Robins, 1994) and dyadic tasks (Campbell et al., 2000; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). Narcissists also like to “show off” or otherwise impress others (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). These strategies may be related to problems in narcissists’ interpersonal relationships.

Narcissism and relationships. The clinical literature on narcissism has directed a great deal of attention toward narcissists’ interpersonal relationships. The basic model postulated by Freud (1914/1957) is that there is a limited store of love (i.e., libido) possessed by any given individual. Narcissists turn this love toward the self, whereas nonnarcissists turn this love toward others. Narcissists’ inability to love others manifests itself in less affectionate—and more self-enhancing—interpersonal relationships. This theme has been altered and elaborated by other dynamically oriented clinical theorists (e.g., Kernberg, 1974; Masterson, 1988). Although differing in the specifics, these theorists generally agree that narcissists’ interpersonal relationships possess several potentially detrimental qualities. Narcissists seek admiration from others. Narcissists idealize close others (although only for short periods of time). Narcissists are also highly sensitive to criticism from others. Finally, narcissists show little concern or empathy for close others and are willing to exploit or take advantage of them.

This description may fit not only narcissists’ interpersonal relationships but also their romantic relationships. Narcissists’ romantic relationships are reported by clinicians to be shallow and transitory, that is, lacking in commitment (Masterson, 1988). Narcissists often begin romantic relationships with an inflated appraisal of the partner (idealization). This infatuation, however, ends quickly, perhaps because a better partner is found, perhaps because obtaining a more realistic view of the partner is undesirable, and perhaps because the narcissist experiences true commitment or intimacy as threatening or risky. At this point, the narcissist often begins a new relationship with a fresh partner who does not possess the flaws of the previous partner. Although the nar-

cissist is only using the partner to meet self-esteem needs, the narcissist is instead likely to believe that the partner merely does not meet expectations (Masterson, 1988).

The research in personality and social psychology has confirmed many (although not all) of these clinical perceptions regarding the interpersonal life of narcissists. Narcissists do show a pronounced focus on the self, as evidenced by elevated self-focus (Emmons, 1987), a need for power (Carroll, 1987), and experienced agency (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992). At the same time, narcissists are lacking in empathy (Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984), agreeableness (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), intimacy (Carroll, 1987), and communion (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992). Likewise, narcissists are willing to derogate partners in an effort to maintain self-esteem (e.g., John & Robins, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993). This self-enhancement strategy extends to those who provide the narcissist with undesired feedback. Such individuals are likely to be derogated by the narcissists (Kernis & Sun, 1994). Narcissists also engage in exhibitionistic displays designed to win the attention and admiration of other (Buss & Chiodo, 1991).

Despite this interest in narcissists’ interpersonal life, empirical research on narcissists’ romantic relationships is limited. There is some suggestion that narcissists prefer emotionally shallow, nonintimate relationships that are selected, in part, to bolster the narcissists’ sense of worth. For example, narcissists, relative to nonnarcissists, are romantically attracted to highly successful others who are not interested in maintaining caring relationships. This is especially true if these desirable others admire the narcissist (Campbell, 1999). These potential romantic others may bolster the narcissists’ self-concept via psychological association and admiration but will not demand caring or interpersonal intimacy. Indeed, this may be the mechanism that explains the motivation displayed by certain self-promoting rich and famous individuals to acquire “trophy spouses.” A similar pattern can be seen in research on narcissists’ love styles. Narcissists report love styles in ongoing romantic relationships that emphasize game-playing and pragmatic concerns but deemphasize selflessness (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2001).

Commitment

If narcissism does have negative consequences for ongoing romantic relationships, one place to look for such consequences is in the experience of commitment. Commitment—the desire or intention to maintain a given relationship—is crucial to functioning in romantic relationships. Indeed, commitment is one of the primary predictors of relationship duration (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Will narcissists display less commitment in romantic relationships than

nonnarcissists? Clinicians have made note of the shallow and transitory relationships evidenced by narcissists. Likewise, empirical researchers have noted the self-serving and game-playing qualities of narcissists' interpersonal lives. In short, past research and theory is consistent with the prediction of a negative relationship between narcissism and commitment in ongoing romantic relationships. If this reduced commitment is indeed evident, what are the causes and the consequences? We address these issues in this article.

To aid in understanding the manifestations of narcissists' commitment in romantic relationships, we turn to the investment model of commitment (Rusbult, 1980, 1983), an outgrowth of the interdependence approach to social relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The investment model of commitment in romantic relationships focuses on three important elements of social relationships. Each of these elements—satisfaction, investments, and perceived alternatives—determine commitment in the romantic relationship. Satisfaction refers to the rewards in the relationships minus the costs, either implicitly or explicitly in comparison to what the individual has come to expect in the relationship (i.e., [rewards – costs] – comparison level). Greater satisfaction leads to greater commitment. Investments refer to the amount that the individual has staked in the relationship. Examples of investments would be shared friendship networks, shared resources (dwellings, bank accounts), children, and even memories or time. Greater investments lead to greater commitment. Perceived alternatives refer to the options that the individual has outside of the relationship. Alternatives would include maintaining a relationship with another individual or not having a romantic relationship. Greater perceived alternatives lead to lesser commitment (Rusbult, 1980, 1983).

Commitment has several consequences for romantic relationships. Highly committed individuals are likely to behave in ways that help to maintain the relationship (i.e., relationship maintenance mechanisms). One of the most important strategies for maintaining relationships against the threat of conflict is accommodation (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983). Accommodation refers to making a positive effort to cope with conflict, including discussing the conflict (voice) and remaining loyal to the partner (loyalty). Accommodation also refers to not making negative responses to conflict such as leaving the conflict (exit) or ignoring the conflict (neglect).

Narcissism and Commitment

Clinical accounts of narcissists' romantic relationships include lowered levels of commitment (e.g., Masterson, 1988). Empirical accounts of narcissists' romantic relationships bolster this observation. As noted,

narcissists are attracted to a potential romantic partner based on self-enhancement rather than caring. Likewise, narcissists show a preference for dating highly successful others who are not interested in emotional, close relationships (Campbell, 1999). Narcissists are also game-playing in their ongoing romantic relationships, suggesting a lack of commitment (Campbell et al., 2001). Likewise, narcissists display several more general qualities that are arguably anathema to commitment. Relative to nonnarcissists, narcissists are selfish and self-serving (e.g., Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; John & Robins, 1994), less empathetic and less willing to perspective-take (e.g., Watson et al., 1984), and less interested in intimacy (Carroll, 1987). Taken together, the evidence points to a picture of narcissists that includes lower commitment in ongoing romantic relationships.

Assuming that narcissists display decreased commitment in their romantic relationships, will the association between narcissism and commitment be explained by lower satisfaction and investments or increased alternatives? Narcissism may relate to all three of these factors.

First, narcissists may not be extremely satisfied with their romantic relationships. This may be the result of narcissists possessing inflated views of self compared to others (e.g., Gabriel et al., 1994). If narcissists think they are better than their relationship partners, the narcissists are not likely to remain satisfied with their romantic partner (Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). Clinicians have noted what may be an example of this pattern. Narcissists may idealize their romantic partners for short periods of time, but this idealization rapidly fades.

Second, narcissists are also less likely to have the same level of investments as nonnarcissists. This prediction is supported by two research findings. Narcissists are selfish and self-centered (e.g., Emmons, 1987). Narcissists also report less agape (i.e., selfless love) in romantic relationships (Campbell et al., 2001). However, this lack of investments may be only moderate in a college sample where investments are, in general, low.

Third, narcissists are likely to report more alternatives than nonnarcissists. There are several reasons for this prediction. Narcissists are likely to be constantly on the search for a "better deal" in the form of a better looking or more attractive partner. This prediction follows from narcissists' enhanced attraction to high-status—rather than caring—others (Campbell, 1999). Likewise, narcissists' game-playing love style (Campbell et al., 2001) and sensation seeking (Emmons, 1991) suggests that narcissists enjoy the pursuit of romantic involvement, and thus meeting new romantic partners, to a greater extent than nonnarcissists. Similarly, narcissists' high levels of self-confidence and self-concept positivity (e.g., John & Robins, 1994; Paulhus, 1998; Raskin & Terry, 1988) are likely to lead to the perception of multiple available

alternative romantic partners: If you are truly unique and special, there are probably individuals lining up to date you. Finally, if certain clinical insights are correct, narcissists may develop a pattern of chronically seeking alternative partners as a strategy to avoid any emotional threat associated with losing long-term committed relationships (Masterson, 1988).

Will the lowered commitment on the part of narcissists influence their responses to conflict in their relationship? If the basic tenets of interdependence are correct, narcissists who arguably report lower commitment also should report less overall accommodation in their romantic relationships. Likewise, Rusbult and colleagues (1991) proposed that "self-centered" individuals should display less accommodation. They did find the proposed link between perspective taking and accommodation but not empathetic concern or Machiavellianism. Finally, this level of accommodation should be mediated by commitment.

The Present Research

Our strategy in the present research is threefold. First, we will examine our prediction that narcissism is linked with decreased commitment in ongoing romantic relationships. Second, we will examine the interdependent structure of the relationship to uncover the mediators of the narcissism-commitment link. Finally, we will examine the outcomes of this link on relational conflict, specifically, accommodation.

We predict that narcissists, relative to nonnarcissists, will display less commitment in ongoing romantic relationships. We predict that this link will be mediated by the experience of less satisfaction, less investments, and greater alternatives. Finally, we predict that the reduced commitment displayed by narcissists will be associated with decreased accommodation.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants. Participants were 119 University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) undergraduates (70 women, 49 men). These students all reported being in an ongoing romantic relationship and represent a subgroup of the 198 students who initially reported for the study (the rest did not report being in a relationship). Participants enrolled for the study in exchange for optional course credit. The study used groups of up to 20 participants.

Materials and procedure. Participants completed a booklet of questionnaires. These questionnaires measured aspects of their personality (i.e., narcissism, self-

esteem) and their ongoing romantic relationship (i.e., commitment, satisfaction, investments, alternatives, accommodation). Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Narcissism was assessed with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin & Hall, 1979). This measure consists of 40 forced-choice items (range: 0-40). Specifically, participants read 40 pairs of sentences (e.g., If I ruled the world it would be a better place. The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me) and then selected the one with which they agree. The NPI is intended for use with normal (i.e., nonclinical) populations and is the most widely used measure of narcissism in normal populations. Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSE (range: 10-90) is a widely used 10-item measure of global self-esteem and has good validity.

The relationship variables were assessed with a series of measures. All measures were versions of those developed by Rusbult (1983; Rusbult et al., 1991). Each measure consisted of items responded to on 9-point scales with endpoints at 0 and 8. The responses to each measure were averaged so that the potential range of each construct was 0 to 8. Commitment was measured with nine items (e.g., Do you feel committed to maintaining your relationship to your partner?). Satisfaction was measured with four items (e.g., All things considered, to what degree do you feel satisfied with your partner?). Investments was measured with four items (e.g., Have you invested things in your relationship that you would in some sense lose if the relationship were to end [time or energy, private thoughts and feelings, etc.]?). Alternatives was measured with six items (e.g., How does the alternative of becoming involved with a different romantic partner compare to your relationship with your current partner?). Finally, accommodation was measured with two 16-item scales with endpoints 0 = *never do this* and 8 = *constantly do this* (one assessing own behavior and one assessing perceived partner behavior). The items on the two scales were otherwise the same. A separate accommodation score for self and for partner was calculated by subtracting exit + neglect from voice + loyalty.

Results

Descriptive statistics. The means and range of the personality measures were as follows: NPI ($M = 16.98$, range = 3-34) and RSE ($M = 74.44$, range = 34-90). These variables were correlated, $r(117) = .20$, $p < .05$.

The means and range of the relationship measures were as follows: commitment ($M = 5.28$, range = 0.11-8.00), satisfaction ($M = 5.69$, range = 0.75-8.00), investments ($M = 5.96$, range = 0.00-8.00), alternatives ($M =$

5.00, range = 0.00-7.50), and overall accommodation ($M = 4.14$, range = -4.38 - 13.75).

Narcissism and commitment. Are narcissists less committed in ongoing romantic relationships? We began by examining the link between narcissism and commitment using a regression model with narcissism as the predictor variable and commitment as the outcome variable. If, as predicted, narcissism is associated negatively with commitment, we should observe a negative regression coefficient associated with narcissism. This was indeed what we found, $b = -.20$, $t(117) = -2.15$, $p < .05$.

We then tested a model with narcissism and gender (coded 1, -1) as predictors and commitment as the outcome variable. The gender main effect was not significant, $b = .03$, $t(116) = .31$, $p = .75$; the narcissism effect remained significant, $b = -.20$, $t(116) = -2.14$, $p < .05$. When we added the Gender \times Narcissism interaction term to this model, the narcissism effect was not moderated by participant gender (i.e., there was no NPI \times Gender interaction), $b = .16$, $t(115) = .625$, $p = .53$.

We also examined the relationship between narcissism and commitment while controlling for self-esteem. We did this to determine whether the findings were associated with narcissism but not the related construct of self-esteem. We used a regression with self-esteem (entered first) and narcissism as predictor variables and commitment as the outcome variable. The coefficient associated with narcissism remained significant in the model, $b = -.22$, $t(116) = -2.35$, $p < .05$. The coefficient associated with self-esteem was not significant, $b = .11$, $t(116) = 1.22$, $p = .22$.

The mediating role of satisfaction, investments, and alternatives. To examine the potential mediating role of satisfaction, investments, and alternatives in the relation between narcissism and commitment, we conducted four additional sets of analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, we measured the association between commitment and satisfaction, investment, and alternatives. Consistent with research on the investment model, each of these variables was indeed associated with commitment; for satisfaction, $r = .80$; for investments, $r = .71$; and for alternatives, $r = -.57$ (all $ps < .001$).

Second, we measured the association between narcissism and satisfaction, investments, and alternatives.² The associations were as follows: satisfaction, $r = -.14$, $p = .13$; investments, $r = -.13$, $p = .14$; and alternatives, $r = .19$, $p < .05$. Narcissism was significantly related to alternatives. Although the correlations with satisfaction and investments were in the negative direction, they were not statistically significant.

Third, we placed narcissism and satisfaction, investments, and alternatives in a single regression model with commitment as the outcome variable. As predicted, the

regression coefficient associated with narcissism dropped to nonsignificance, $b = -.05$, $t(114) = -0.98$, $p = .33$. The coefficients associated with satisfaction, investments, and alternatives, however, remained significant, $bs = .52$, $.25$, and $-.20$, respectively, all $ps < .001$. Figure 1 shows the mediational model.

Finally, we performed a regression with only narcissism and alternatives in the model to confirm that this variable alone was sufficient to mediate the narcissism-commitment link. This was indeed the case. The coefficient associated with narcissism dropped to nonsignificance, $b = -.09$, $t(116) = -1.14$, $p = .26$; however, the coefficient associated with alternatives remained significant, $b = -.55$, $t(116) = -7.12$, $p < .001$.

Examining accommodation. Finally, we examined the link between narcissism and accommodation. Narcissism (predictor variable) was associated negatively with the overall perceived accommodation (outcome variable) in the relationship (an average of perceived own and partner accommodation), $r(117) = -.19$, $p < .05$. We then decomposed this measure into perceived partner accommodation and perceived own accommodation. There was evidence for a link with narcissism and perceived accommodation by the partner, $r(117) = -.19$, $p < .05$. There was no evidence for a link with perceived own accommodation, $r(117) = -.13$, $p = .17$.³

Does commitment mediate the relation between narcissism and accommodation? To answer this question, we first examined the link between commitment and accommodation. Consistent with past research using an interdependence approach, this link was significant, $r(117) = .48$, $p < .001$. Next, we entered both narcissism and commitment as predictor variables in a regression model with accommodation as the outcome variable. The relation between narcissism and accommodation dropped to nonsignificance, $b = -.10$, $t(116) = -1.21$, $p = .28$. However, the coefficient associated with commitment remained significant, $b = .47$, $t(116) = 5.67$, $p < .001$. Consistent with the tenets of the investment model, the relationship between narcissism and accommodation is mediated by commitment (see Figure 1).

Discussion

Consistent with predictions, narcissism was negatively related to commitment. Likewise, the relation between narcissism and commitment was determined by the interdependent structure of the romantic relationship. Of the three elements of the interdependent structure, the primary mediator of the narcissism-commitment link was perceived alternatives; that is, narcissists were less committed to their romantic relationships than were nonnarcissists because, compared to nonnarcissists, they perceived having better alternatives to their romantic relationship. Finally, narcissists perceived themselves

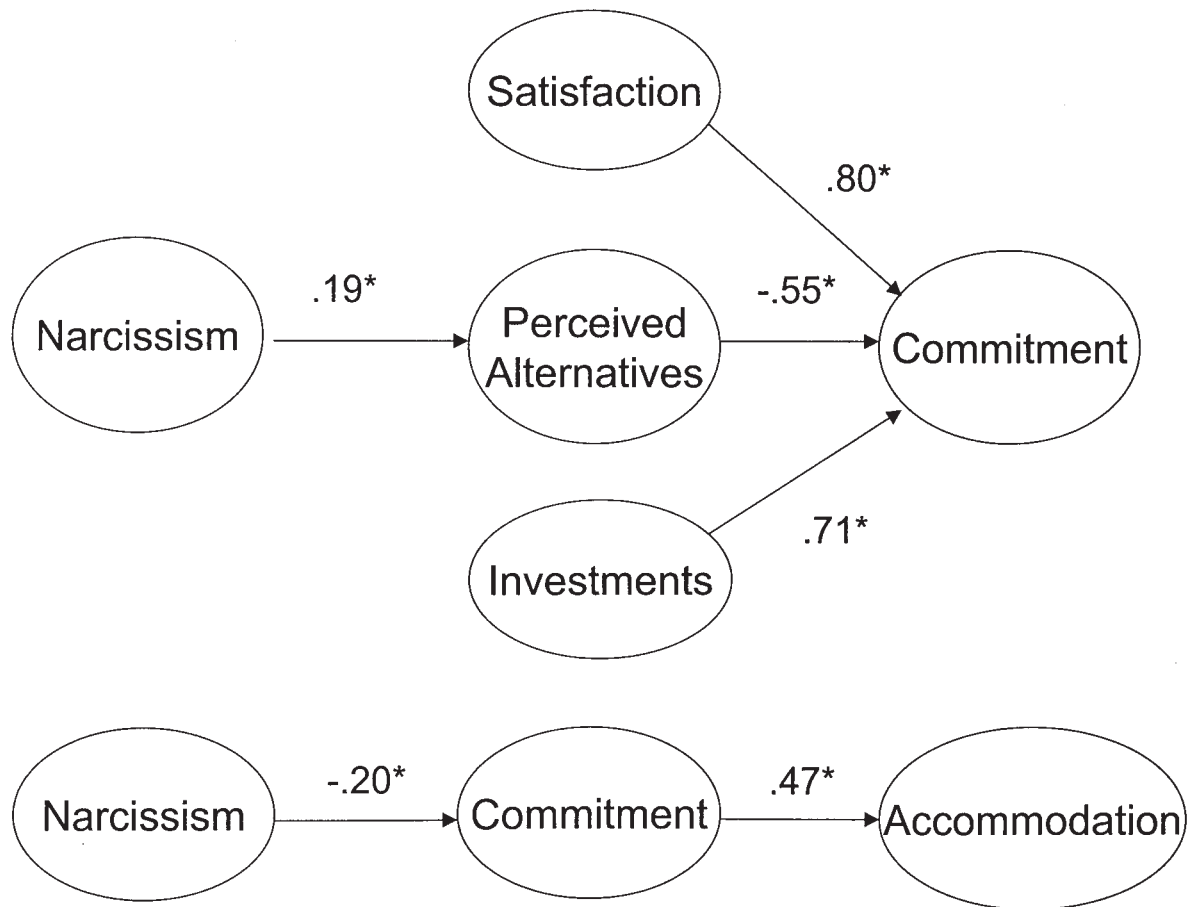


Figure 1 Two mediational models representing the results of Study 1.

NOTE: Numbers refer to beta weights with an asterisk connoting significance at the .05 level.

as having less overall accommodation in their romantic relationship, and this negative association between narcissism and accommodation was mediated by commitment.

In Study 2, we sought to confirm and extend the results of Study 1. First, we examined an additional aspect of relationship alternatives in our analyses. Specifically, we examined the variable of attention to alternatives (Miller, 1997). This construct expands on the perceived alternatives measure used in Study 1. Perceived alternatives refers to the desirability of either another partner or being alone. Attention to alternatives, however, refers to the actual perceptual and behavioral attention given to alternative dating partners; that is, actively thinking about other partners and spending time with, even flirting with, other partners.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants. Study 2 contained two separate samples of participants. Participants in Sample A were 304 UNC-

CH undergraduates (228 women, 76 men). Participants in Sample B were 108 University of Georgia undergraduates (74 women, 34 men).⁴ Students were able to sign up for the study only if they were in an ongoing "romantic or dating" relationship. Length of relationship was collected for Sample B ($M = 15.5$ months, range: 1-64). Participants enrolled for the study in exchange for optional course credit.

Materials and procedure. Participants completed a booklet of questionnaires similar to that used in Study 1. This booklet included all of the questionnaires used in Study 1 as well as an additional measure of alternatives. We expanded our ability to assess alternatives with the inclusion of a measure of attention to alternatives (Miller, 1997). This measure focuses directly on the attention given to alternative dating partners rather than the desirability of alternatives. Sample questions include, "I flirt with people of the opposite sex without telling my partner" and "I am distracted by other people that I find attractive." Each of the five items in the scale was responded to on a 9-point scale where 0 = *never* and 8 = *always* (1-9 in Sample B).

Results

Descriptive statistics. Results for Sample A are presented first. A slash “/” precedes the results for Sample B. The means and range of the personality measures were as follows: NPI ($M = 17.03$, range = 1-40) / ($M = 17.99$, range = 4-32) and RSE ($M = 75.42$, range = 33-90) / ($M = 72.95$, range = 28-90). These correlate significantly at .22/.30. The means and range of the relationship measures were as follows: commitment ($M = 6.04$, range = 0.56-8.00) / ($M = 6.20$, range = 1.71-8.00), satisfaction ($M = 6.42$, range = .75-8.00) / ($M = 6.17$, range = 1.20-8.00), investments ($M = 6.78$, range = 0.50-8.00) / ($M = 5.22$, range = 1.40-8.00), alternatives ($M = 3.90$, range = 1.00-7.00) / ($M = 3.82$, range = .00-8.00), attention to alternatives ($M = 3.37$, range = .20-6.80) / ($M = 4.94$, range = 1.40-8.60), overall accommodation Sample A ($M = 4.98$, range = -8.88-15.75), and own accommodation Sample B ($M = 1.31$, range = -2.25-3.06).

Narcissism and commitment. As in Study 1, we examined the link between narcissism and commitment using a regression model with narcissism as the predictor variable and commitment as the outcome variable. (Results for Samples A and B are presented consecutively.) As predicted, narcissism was associated negatively with commitment, $b = -.25$, $t(302) = -4.55$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $b = -.20$, $t(106) = -2.05$, $p < .05$ (Sample B).

This effect remained significant when we included gender as a predictor variable in the model, $b = -.20$, $t(301) = -3.41$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $b = -.20$, $t(105) = -2.03$, $p < .05$ (Sample B). The main effect of gender in this model was significant in Sample A, $b = -.19$, $t(301) = -3.30$, $p < .001$ (women were more committed than men) but not in Sample B, $b = .01$, $t(105) = .062$, $p = .95$. Finally, the Gender \times Narcissism interaction was added to this model. There was no significant interaction, $b = -.09$, $t(300) = -.568$, $p = .57$ (Sample A), $b = -.31$, $t(104) = -1.07$, $p = .29$ (Sample B).

We next examined the relationship between narcissism and commitment while controlling for self-esteem. We conducted a regression with self-esteem (entered first) and narcissism as predictor variables and commitment as the outcome variable. The coefficient associated with narcissism remained significant in the model, $b = -.28$, $t(301) = -5.03$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $b = -.20$, $t(105) = -2.02$, $p < .05$ (Sample B). The coefficient associated with self-esteem was significant but in the opposite direction, $b = .14$, $t(301) = 2.52$, $p < .05$ (Sample A), or not significant, $b = .02$, $t(105) = .24$, $p = .81$ (Sample B). The narcissism-commitment link is not accounted for by self-esteem.

Finally, we examined the potential confounding impact of relationship length on the narcissism commitment link. Is the negative relationship between narcissism

and commitment accounted for by narcissists' shorter relationships? The data from Sample B demonstrate that this is not the case. Narcissism and relationship length do not correlate, $r(106) = -.13$, $p = .18$. More important, we conducted a regression with relationship length (entered first), narcissism, and gender as predictors and commitment as the outcome variable. Narcissism had a significant relationship with commitment, $b = -.20$, $t(104) = -2.08$, $p < .05$, but relationship length did not, $b = -.05$, $t(104) = -.51$, $p = .61$.

The mediating role of satisfaction, investments, alternatives, and attention to alternatives. These analyses parallel those from Study 1. First, we measured the association between commitment and satisfaction, investments, alternatives, and attention to alternatives. Each of these variables was associated with commitment; for satisfaction, $r = .81$ (Sample A), $r = .62$ (Sample B); for investments, $r = .70$ (Sample A), $r = .53$ (Sample B); for alternatives, $r = -.72$ (Sample A), $r = -.53$ (Sample B); and for attention to alternatives, $r = -.65$ (Sample A), $r = -.59$ (Sample B) (all $ps < .01$).⁵

Second, we measured the association between narcissism and satisfaction, investments, perceived alternatives, and attention to alternatives. The strongest association with narcissism was with alternatives: both perceived alternatives and attention to alternatives. The associations were as follows: satisfaction, $r = -.14$, $p < .05$ (Sample A), $r = -.10$, *ns* (Sample B); investments, $r = -.11$, $p < .05$ (Sample A), $r = -.08$, *ns* (Sample B); perceived alternatives, $r = .30$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $r = .18$, $p < .10$ (Sample B); and attention to alternatives, $r = .36$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $r = .27$, $p < .01$ (Sample B). Satisfaction and investments were correlated significantly with narcissism in Study 2, Sample A, but did not reach significance in Sample B. In short, it is possible that there is a very small but reliable negative relation between narcissism and both satisfaction and investments.

Third, we placed narcissism and satisfaction, investments, alternatives, and attention to alternatives in a single model to determine if the interdependent nature of the situation mediated the association between narcissism and commitment. Consistent with the findings of Study 1, the coefficient associated with narcissism dropped to nonsignificance, $b = -.03$, $t(298) = -1.12$, $p = .26$ (Sample A), $b = -.04$, $t(102) = -.64$, $p = .52$ (Sample B). The coefficients associated with satisfaction, investments, alternatives, and attention to alternatives, however, were significant, $bs = .42$, $.27$, $-.25$, and $-.16$, respectively, all $ps < .001$ (Sample A), $bs = .39$, $.24$, $-.34$, and $-.13$, respectively, all $ps < .001$ except investments $p < .10$ (Sample B).

Finally, we performed a series of regressions with only narcissism and one of the four relationship variables in the model (Sample A) or perceived alternatives and

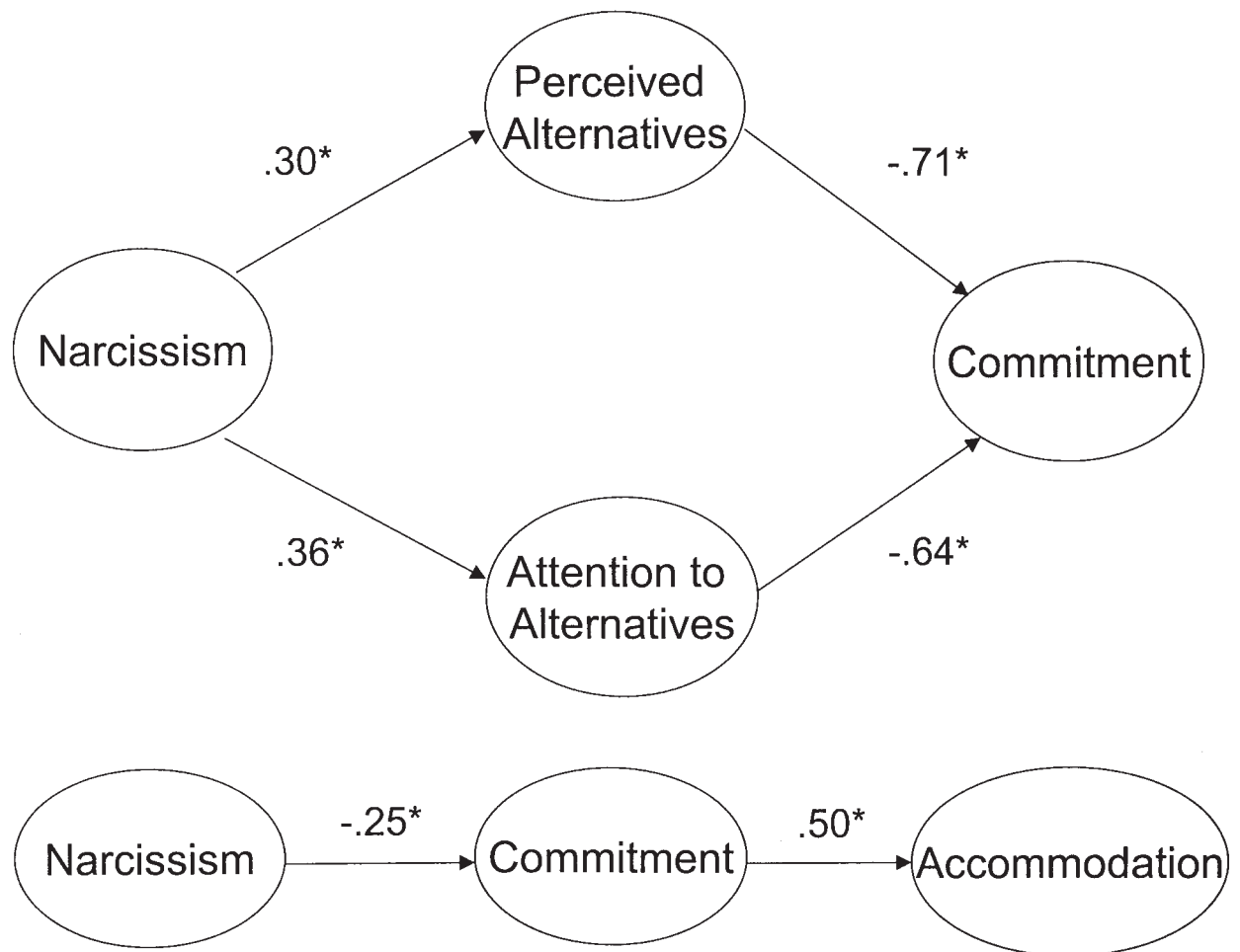


Figure 2 Two mediational models representing the results of Study 2 (Sample A).
NOTE: Numbers refer to beta weights with an asterisk connoting significance at the .05 level.

attention to alternatives (Sample B; these were the only significant correlates of narcissism). The goal was to examine whether each variable alone was sufficient to mediate fully the narcissism-commitment link. As in Study 1, this was indeed the case for perceived alternatives. The coefficient associated with narcissism dropped to nonsignificance, $b = -.04$, $t(301) = -.87$, $p = .38$ (Sample A), $b = -.10$, $t(105) = -1.23$, $p = .22$ (Sample B). The coefficient associated with alternatives remained significant, $b = -.71$, $t(301) = -17.15$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $b = -.52$, $t(105) = -6.19$, $p < .001$ (Sample B). Likewise, this was the case for attention to alternatives. The coefficient associated with narcissism dropped to nonsignificance, $b = -.03$, $t(301) = -.58$, $p = .56$ (Sample A), $b = -.04$, $t(105) = -.46$, $p = .64$ (Sample B). The coefficient associated with attention to alternatives remained significant, $b = -.64$, $t(301) = -13.51$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $b = -.58$, $t(105) = -7.14$, $p < .001$ (Sample B) (see Figure 2 for the Sample A results).

Neither satisfaction or investments, however, mediated fully the narcissism-commitment link. When satisfaction and narcissism were used simultaneously as predictor variables, both the effect of narcissism, $b = -.14$, $t(301) = -4.26$, $p < .001$, and the effect of satisfaction, $b = .79$, $t(301) = 24.06$, $p < .001$, remained statistically significant. Likewise, when investments and narcissism were used simultaneously as predictor variables, both the effect of narcissism, $b = -.18$, $t(301) = -4.39$, $p < .001$, and the effect of investments, $b = .68$, $t(301) = 17.02$, $p < .001$, remained significant. (All results refer to Sample A.)

Examining accommodation. Finally, we examined the link between narcissism and accommodation. As in Study 1, narcissism was associated negatively with the overall perceived accommodation in the relationship (i.e., the average of perceived own and perceived partner accommodation), $r(302) = -.20$, $p < .01$ (Sample A). The relationship reflected both the link with perceived accommodation by the partner, $r(302) = -.13$, $p < .05$ (

Sample A) and perceived own accommodation, $r(302) = -.20$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $r(106) = -.25$, $p < .01$ (Sample B).

As in Study 1, we then examined the link between commitment and accommodation. This link was significant with overall accommodation, $r(302) = .52$, $p < .001$ (Sample A) and own accommodation, $r(106) = .52$, $p < .001$ (Sample B). Next, we entered both narcissism and commitment as predictor variables in a regression with accommodation as the outcome variable. The relation between narcissism and accommodation dropped to non-significance, $b = -.07$, $t(301) = -1.35$, $p = .18$ (Sample A) or marginal significance, $b = -.15$, $t(105) = -1.83$, $p = .07$ (Sample B). However, the coefficient associated with commitment remained significant, $b = .50$, $t(301) = 9.80$, $p < .001$ (Sample A), $b = .48$, $t(105) = 5.82$, $p < .001$ (Sample B). As predicted, the relationship between narcissism and accommodation is mediated by commitment (see Figure 2 for Sample A results).

Discussion

As in Study 1, perceived alternatives mediated the relationship between narcissism and commitment in Study 2. Likewise, Study 2 demonstrated that attention to alternative dating partners was an important mediator of the narcissism-commitment link. Narcissists do not just perceive that they have alternatives to their romantic relationship but actually report attending to and flirting with these alternatives. Study 2 also reconfirmed the role of commitment in mediating the link between narcissism and accommodation in romantic relationships.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the present research, we sought to describe the link between narcissism and commitment in ongoing romantic relationships. We were guided in this process by Rusbult's investment model (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Our specific predictions included the following. First, we predicted that narcissism would be negatively associated with commitment. Second, we predicted that this association would be mediated by the structure of the romantic relationship (i.e., satisfaction, investments, and alternatives). Third, we predicted that the decreased commitment experienced by narcissists would be linked to decreased accommodation.

The results of the two studies are clear: Narcissists are less committed in their romantic relationships. Furthermore, when we examined the theoretically relevant mediators of this link, a similar pattern of results emerged in both studies. Narcissists' lack of commitment in their romantic relationships was mediated by the interdependent structure of the romantic relationship (i.e., satisfaction, investments, and alternatives). This mediation is primarily the result of narcissists'

increased alternatives. Narcissists perceive and attend to alternatives to their dating relationships to a greater extent than do nonnarcissists. As a result, narcissists experience less commitment to their current romantic partner. Finally, we examined the degree of accommodation in romantic relationships. Narcissists perceive less accommodation on the part of their partners (Studies 1 and 2) and of themselves (Study 2). This finding is consistent with Rusbult and colleagues' (1991) original predictions. Furthermore, this lack of accommodation is mediated by narcissists' lesser level of commitment.

Explaining the Interest in Alternatives

One of the more interesting questions that emerges from an examination of this pattern of findings regards the causes underlying narcissists' greater perceived alternatives; that is, Why are narcissists, relative to nonnarcissists, more compelled to perceive and attend to alternatives? We suggest several answers to this question.

The first option is that narcissists are constantly looking for a more attractive or higher status dating partner. We term this the "going for the better deal" hypothesis. Past research is consistent with this notion. In particular, narcissists are more attracted to high-status individuals than are nonnarcissists (Campbell, 1999). This pattern of behavior can be seen in the parade of "trophy spouses" possessed by certain self-promoting celebrities. These additional spouses are generally better models (i.e., younger and/or richer) than the old ones. The celebrities, however, rarely seem satisfied with their new spouse for long. A second alternative involves narcissists' greater reported sensation seeking (Emmons, 1991) and game-playing (Campbell et al., 2001). It is likely that narcissists enjoy the thrills and excitement involved in acquiring new romantic partners. This "narcissists just want to have fun" hypothesis also is consistent with narcissists' lower reported interest in intimacy (Carroll, 1987) and caring (Campbell, 1999). This hypothesis also suggests increased infidelity in relationships. A third hypothesis involves narcissists' inflated self-image. This "inflated attractiveness" hypothesis suggests that narcissists will likely overestimate the number of available partners interested in them. A final "fear of abandonment" hypothesis emerges from the clinical, specifically psychodynamic, tradition. Narcissism may be considered a psychological defense that protects individuals from the fear of abandonment and the painful, depressive state that accompanies it (Masterson, 1988). This places narcissists' seeking of alternatives (and reticence to experience commitment) in a different light. This hypothesis suggests that narcissists' romantic involvements represent a compromise between attachment and risk. Narcissists let themselves be close to others, at least

on a superficial, game-playing level, but then leave the relationship when real commitment is eminent.

Caveats

The data examined in this research relied on participants' self-reports. This neglects the question as to whether narcissists actually have more alternatives than nonnarcissists or only perceive having more alternatives. It is possible, especially in light of narcissists' inflated self-reports on other measures, that narcissists simply think they have greater alternatives but do not actually have these alternatives available. For the purposes of the present analysis, however, this point is not of central importance. Decisions of commitment are based on the perception of alternatives rather than the actual existence of such alternatives (Rusbult, 1980, 1983), although we can expect that these two variables will generally be related.

A second question involves perceptions of accommodation in the relationship. Narcissists may perceive less (or more) accommodation on their own part and on their partner's part than actually exists. Again, the answer to this question is not crucial to the present analysis—the decision to remain or to leave a relationship is largely driven by perceptions of reality rather than by reality itself.

Finally, these results are based on the reports of dating relationships. This same pattern of results may not apply to married couples for several reasons. First, self-esteem can be obtained by having a marriage and family. Narcissists may thus be committed to their marriages as a way to garner self-esteem. Second, it is likely that highly narcissistic individuals will be less likely to get married. This may reduce the link between narcissism and commitment. Third, individuals who chose to be married will on average be highly committed to the relationship. This restricted range of commitment scores may make finding a narcissism-commitment link unlikely.

Implications

The links between individual difference variables and relationship-centered variables are often conceptualized in terms of straightforward associations. For example, secure individuals are more trusting, or high-self-esteem individuals are less manic. The use of an interdependence framework for examining the link between personality and close relationships has the potential for producing a richer and more complex picture. This is because an interdependence approach allows important elements of the relational structure (i.e., satisfaction, investments, and alternatives) to take the role of process variables. In our research, the key element was alternatives. Other individual difference variables may influ-

ence commitment by investments (e.g., insecurity) or satisfaction (e.g., impulsivity).

The study of narcissism and romantic relationships also helps clarify how an inflated self-concept can impact interpersonal life. There is a small but growing body of research that examines the outcomes of an inflated self-concept (operationalized as narcissism, grandiosity, or positivity of self-views relative to a more objective standard) on relational functioning. The thrust of this literature is that self-inflation has potentially negative consequences for relational outcomes (e.g., Colvin et al., 1995; Paulhus, 1998; Schuetz, in press). The present research adds to this literature by focusing on the potentially negative impact of self-love on a highly important set of relational variables. Indeed, these results can be placed in a broader sociological context. Popular culture often promotes the idea that loving the self is a necessary prerequisite for loving others (see Campbell & Baumeister, 2001). The findings of this article suggest that caution is called for when making such statements. Self-love as operationalized as narcissism is detrimental to maintaining committed romantic relationships.

Our findings on narcissism also bring to mind dismissing attachment styles. Indeed, pilot data in Study 2 (Sample B) did show a positive association between narcissism and dismissing attachment ($r = .31, p < .01$). This is consistent with the theoretical position that both dismissing attachment and narcissism contain a generally positive view of self and a negative view of other. However, more research is needed before this association can be confirmed.

Finally, although the present analysis made an effort to uncover gender differences in the expression of narcissism in dating relationships, we found very little evidence for such differences. Although men are more narcissistic than women, the way that narcissistic men and women approach dating relationships does not appear to differ. There is important research that has uncovered gender differences in the expression of narcissism (Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998), and future research could be conducted to locate any such differences in dating relationships.

Conclusion

According to the ancient Greeks, Narcissus's demise stemmed from his constant search for the perfect romantic partner. Narcissus's self-love prevented him from being close to others. This insight appears to hold up in the romantic relationships of today. Narcissism is negatively related to commitment in ongoing dating relationships. This lack of commitment on the part of narcissists is driven by the attention given to alternative partners and may result in more relational conflict. Cer-

tainly, narcissists may enjoy playing the field but they are likely to miss out on any gains associated with maintaining a committed romantic relationship.

NOTES

1. The term *narcissists* refers to individuals with the clinical personality disorder (i.e., narcissistic personality disorder) and individuals with elevated scores of the personality trait of narcissism.

2. The gender main effects and Gender \times Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) interactions are as follows (main effect *b*, main effect *t*, interaction with NPI *b*, interaction with NPI *t*). The *d*'s are 115 and 116, respectively: satisfaction (.04, .44; -.02, -.06), investments (-.10, -1.10; .33, 1.26), alternatives (-.01, -.08; -.05, -.18), perceived own accommodation (.07, .78; .23, .89), perceived other accommodation (-.14, -1.51; .08, .32), and overall accommodation (-.04, -.44; .19, .73). No effects were significant, $p < .05$.

3. The correlations between narcissism and the elements of accommodation are as follows (Study 1 data appear before Study 2[A] data): perceived own: exit (.07/.21, significant at $p < .01$), voice (-.00/-.15, significant at $p < .01$), loyalty (-.12/-.11, significant at $p < .05$), and neglect (.08/.12, significant at $p < .05$); perceived partner: exit (.16, significant at $p < .10$ /.12, significant at $p < .05$), voice (-.07/-.12, significant at $p < .05$), loyalty (-.10/-.10), and neglect (.17, significant at $p < .10$ /.07).

4. One participant who had extreme and inconsistent answers was not included.

5. The gender main effects and Gender \times NPI interactions are as follows (Sample 1) (Sample 2). The *d*'s are 301, 300 and 105, 104, respectively: satisfaction (-.13, -2.16, significant at $p < .05$; .28, 1.78) (-.05, -.50; -.48, -1.65), investments (-.28, -4.23, significant at $p < .05$; -.06, -.39) (.09, .89; -.54, -1.86), alternatives (.10, -.08; .03, .22) (.06, .67; -.30, -1.02), attention to alternatives (.13, 2.40, significant at $p < .05$; .13, .89) (.15, 1.59; -.04, -.12), perceived own accommodation (.08, 1.88; .04, .22) (-.02, -.19; -.08, -.27), perceived other accommodation (-.13, -1.56, significant at $p < .05$; .50, 3.25, significant at $p < .05$), and overall accommodation (-.03, -.54; .32, 2.06, significant at $p < .05$). The correlation between perception of partner accommodation and narcissism is displayed by women but not men in Sample 1. Men report less satisfaction and investments and more attention to alternatives in Sample 1. There were no other gender effects, $p < .05$.

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