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Patrick L. Hill¹ and Brent W. Roberts¹

Abstract

Previous studies have noted that narcissists do, in some cases, experience benefits. The current study adds to this discussion by examining whether age might moderate the links between narcissism and a self-reported benefit (life satisfaction) and an observer-reported benefit (observer ratings of personality). In a sample of college students and their family members ($N = 807$), the authors demonstrate that narcissism positively correlates with life satisfaction for adolescents and emerging adults, but not for adult participants. In addition, the relationship between narcissism and observer-reported neuroticism was weakly negative for undergraduate students, but significant and positive for their mothers. Taken together, these results suggest that narcissism is more beneficial for adolescents and emerging adults than for adults. Both sets of analyses also pointed to the importance of studying narcissism as a multifaceted construct. Findings are discussed with respect to personality development theories that emphasize adult role adoption.

Keywords

well-being, development, person perception, self-worth, personality

Whether the term “narcissist” is used to refer to reality television stars, politicians, or people at work, people today seem more than willing to use the label to derogate others, reflecting the common perception that narcissism is a wholly negative diagnosis. However, while falling short of promoting narcissism, research has begun to demonstrate some benefits of being narcissistic (e.g., Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004; Wallace, Ready, & Weitenhagen, 2009). Research thus has turned to examining more closely the relationship between narcissism and well-being, asking whether certain groups are more likely to benefit from feeling narcissistic and investigating which specific narcissism and well-being variables demonstrate positive relations. In the current study, we sought to consider these questions in three ways, using a study of undergraduates and their family members. First, we examined whether the relationship between narcissism and well-being was more positive for younger than older participants. Second, we examined whether any benefits to being narcissistic held with respect to observer ratings of personality. In other words, do narcissists benefit only with respect to self-reported well-being or do these effects carry over to how others perceive narcissists? Third, we tested whether these relations differed when comparing those facets of narcissism presumed to be more adaptive (e.g., leadership, authority) to those viewed as generally maladaptive (exhibitionism, exploitativeness, entitlement).

Oh To Be Young, Carefree, and Narcissistic

There is no sadder sight than a young pessimist. (Mark Twain)

Our perceptions of adolescents and emerging adults often adhere to Mark Twain’s decree, insofar that we expect these individuals to be more optimistic of their chances in the world. Without such a cloak of optimism and perceived self-agency, it would be difficult to navigate the difficult passage into adulthood. However, these individuals also often are less accomplished given their young age, and thus can be perceived as having an unsubstantiated sense of self-worth. As such, our lay perceptions of adolescents tend to paint them as particularly narcissistic, and in fact these perceptions are largely accurate insofar that adolescents and emerging adults tend to score higher on narcissism inventories than older participants (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Roberts, Edmonds, & Grijalva,

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2010). However, the question remains, might this actually be a good thing?

Psychoanalytic theories have suggested that an inflated sense of self might be beneficial, and in some respects necessary for the transition into adulthood. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, individuals must begin to form their own identities absent parental influences (Blos, 1962; Josselson, 1988). Moreover, it is during these periods that individuals begin to make decisions autonomously, and accordingly would be expected to make mistakes during the learning process. Considering these points in tandem, it becomes apparent how susceptible individuals are during the transition to adulthood. Indeed, as we begin to make decisions (and mistakes) on our own, we also lose those parental safeguards that previously upheld our sense of self-worth. Accordingly, the claim has been made that adolescents and emerging adults might benefit from holding an inflated sense of self, in order to help them through this tumultuous period (Hill & Roberts, in press). However, once one reaches adult status, it appears normative to relinquish these narcissistic self-images in order to promote social well-being, as evidenced in part by the developmental trajectory for narcissism, which demonstrates declines post emerging adulthood (Foster et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2010). Despite this theoretical rationale, though, research has yet to investigate whether narcissism might provide more benefits for adolescents and emerging adults than for older individuals.

It is worth noting that this literature only discusses the benefits to the self of being narcissistic during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Put differently, while narcissism may motivate one toward greater self-esteem and self-agency, it is uncertain whether holding an inflated sense of self would benefit adolescents and emerging adults when they deal with others. One method for examining this claim would be to assess significant others' perceptions of narcissists. In particular, it would be of interest to examine those traits indicative of social well-being and relationship quality, given the nature of narcissism.

Longitudinal research has noted the importance of being extraverted, agreeable, and emotionally stable for later relationship success (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001). In comparison, narcissists tend to be highly extraverted, but less agreeable and often less emotionally stable (e.g., Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Egan & McCorkindale, 2007). This last finding though depends on the form of narcissism under study; neuroticism is more typical of individuals higher on the dimensions of entitlement and exploitativeness than on leadership and authority (Ackerman, Witt, Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, & Kashy, 2011). In sum, narcissists often score lower on traits indicative of social well-being (e.g., agreeableness and emotional stability). However, it remains an open question as to whether observers might be less likely to perceive narcissists as holding this socially maladaptive personality profile when asked to observe younger rather than older individuals. If so, it would present further evidence that the benefits of being narcissism are dependent on age.

The Multiple Faces of Narcissism

As alluded to above, research has noted that narcissism presents in multiple manifestations (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). It is unfortunate then that research on the topic all too often considers narcissism as having a single-factor structure. For example, several studies have employed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and only examined the correlates of the total scale score, despite research demonstrating that this scale presents with multiple factors (e.g., Corry, Merritt, Mrug, & Pamp, 2008; Emmons, 1984; Kubarych, Deary, & Austin, 2004). Indeed, recent work (Ackerman et al., 2011) has presented a three-factor solution for the NPI. First, the Leadership/Authority facet is viewed as the "adaptive" face of the NPI, insofar that it correlates with greater social potency and extraversion, self-esteem, and goal persistence. Second, Grandiose Exhibitionism can be viewed as partially adaptive, insofar that it too shows significant yet somewhat weaker relations with drive, self-esteem, and extraversion. However, this second facet also demonstrates relations with maladaptive constructs such as Machiavellianism and counterproductive behaviors. Third, Entitlement/Exploitativeness largely reflects a maladaptive facet, as it correlates with antisocial tendencies, neuroticism, and poorer functioning within roles seemingly linked to becoming an adult, such as college adjustment and relationship quality.

Using these three facets, one can make more nuanced predictions regarding the possible benefits related to narcissism. First, while narcissism might be more positively linked to well-being for younger participants, these positive relations are more likely to occur with respect to scores on the facets of Leadership/Authority and Grandiose Exhibitionism than Entitlement/Exploitativeness scores. Second, observers also should hold more positive impressions of individuals scoring high on those first two facets than on the third. Therefore, when considering whether younger narcissists benefit more than others, it is important to examine this claim while noting that not all narcissists are built alike.

Current Study

The current study employed a large sample of undergraduates and their family members to test two primary predictions. First, we expected that narcissism would be more positively linked to life satisfaction for adolescents and emerging adults than for those participants in adulthood. Second, we tested whether the relations between narcissism and socially maladaptive traits would be more pronounced for older participants. Put differently, do younger narcissists also benefit with respect to being perceived as having a less socially undesirable personality profile? Moreover, we examined whether these predictions were dependent on the facet of narcissism being assessed.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Students and family members completed the study using an online survey website. All participants provided informed

consent prior to participation and were properly debriefed afterward. All data were encrypted prior to transmission, in order to protect the participants' identities. Participants were asked to complete the study as part of a class exercise on how self- and observer ratings compare among family members. In the survey, students were asked to report on their own personality, and then asked family members to report on them with respect to the Big Five traits. Family members always were asked to report on the student's Big Five traits, and any observers who reported on another family member were excluded from the observer-report analyses. Three hundred sixty-eight undergraduate students participated in return for course credit. The undergraduate sample was 64% female, had a mean age of 20.0 years ($SD = 1.32$), and was mostly Caucasian (68%).

Four hundred thirty-nine family members participated in the study in return for course credit for their students; therefore, on average, we sampled 1.19 family members for every undergraduate student. In the family member sample, 66% of participants were female and had a mean age of 43.4 years ($SD = 14.44$). The majority were mothers (45%), followed by fathers (23%), sisters (14%), brothers (10%), uncles and aunts (4%), cousins (3%), grandparents (2%), and other (1%). The modal level of education for the family sample was having a college bachelor's degree (31%), and most of the sample had at least completed high school (92%). Most of the sample was Caucasian (71%). Participants were not required to answer every question in the survey, and thus sample sizes may differ across analyses based on the number of participants who completed the scales of interest.

Measures

Narcissism. Participants reported on their own narcissistic tendencies using the 40-item NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Participants are provided a forced-choice scale reflecting which statement is true as a self-description. The full scale evidenced good reliability ($\alpha = .86$, average inter-item $r = .13$). We also calculated the three subscales suggested by Ackerman, Witt, Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, and Kashy. (2011) and found similar reliabilities in our sample as they evidenced: Leadership/Authority (11 items; $\alpha = .77$, average inter-item $r = .23$), Grandiose Exhibitionism (10 items; $\alpha = .78$, average inter-item $r = .26$), Entitlement/Exploitativeness (4 items; $\alpha = .45$, average inter-item $r = .18$).

Satisfaction with life. Participants reported on their general life satisfaction using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The 5-item scale demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .85$, average inter-item $r = .53$).

Big Five Personality traits. Participants also completed the 44-item Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999), by rating to what extent different statements were self-descriptive on a scale from 1 (*Disagree Strongly*) to 5 (*Agree Strongly*). The reliabilities for all five scales were good in the current sample: Extraversion (8 items, $\alpha = .88$, average inter-item $r = .48$), Agreeableness (9 items, $\alpha = .80$, average inter-item $r = .31$), Conscientiousness (9 items; $\alpha = .82$, average

inter-item $r = .35$), Neuroticism (8 items; $\alpha = .84$, average inter-item $r = .39$), Openness (10 items, $\alpha = .80$; average inter-item $r = .31$).

Observer-rated personality. Participants were asked to rate a target family member using the same 44-item Big Five Inventory. Students were allowed to choose any family member to rate, while family members were asked to report on the student's personality. For observer analyses, we focused on mothers and their students due to limited sample sizes for the other reporter groups. In our study, observer data necessarily could only be employed for the family member on whom the student reported. For example, while a number of fathers participated in the current study, students were much more likely to report on their mothers, leading to a relatively small sample for matched student–father data. We therefore report on the properties for the observer-rated personality measure using only the matched student–mother data (144 pairs, $n = 288$). Reliabilities were strong for the observer ratings of the Big Five Inventory as well: Extraversion ($\alpha = .88$, average inter-item $r = .48$), Agreeableness ($\alpha = .86$, average inter-item $r = .42$), Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .88$, average inter-item $r = .48$), Neuroticism ($\alpha = .87$, average inter-item $r = .45$), Openness ($\alpha = .86$, average inter-item $r = .40$).

Plan of Analysis

Prior to testing our primary research questions, we examined age differences on the narcissism scales. We first report the sum scores for those participants who completed all items for the specific scale, as it is more typical to report sums across all items for the NPI, rather than participants' average single-item score. We then report the correlations between age and participants' NPI single-item means. Next we performed multiple regression analyses to test whether age moderated the link between narcissism and life satisfaction in our sample. For these tests, we predicted life satisfaction from the standardized narcissism score and standardized score for age, as well as the interaction between these two variables. A significant age by narcissism interaction in these analyses would suggest moderation, and the interaction term should be negative, if adolescents and emerging adults benefit more from narcissism.

We then examined whether narcissism predicted observer-reported benefits, as assessed using observer-reported personality profiles. To test the predictive validity of observer ratings, we first performed correlations between self-reported narcissism and observer-reported Big Five traits, separately for when the target was an undergraduate student participant (thus, using mothers as observers) and for when the target was a mother (student as observers). Next we examined whether role (mother or student) moderated the links between narcissism and observer-reported personality, using a multiple regression analysis with standardized narcissism scores, role (–1 for student, 1 for mother), and their interaction as predictors. Again, a significant negative interaction would provide support that narcissism is more beneficial for younger individuals, now with respect to observer-reported benefits.

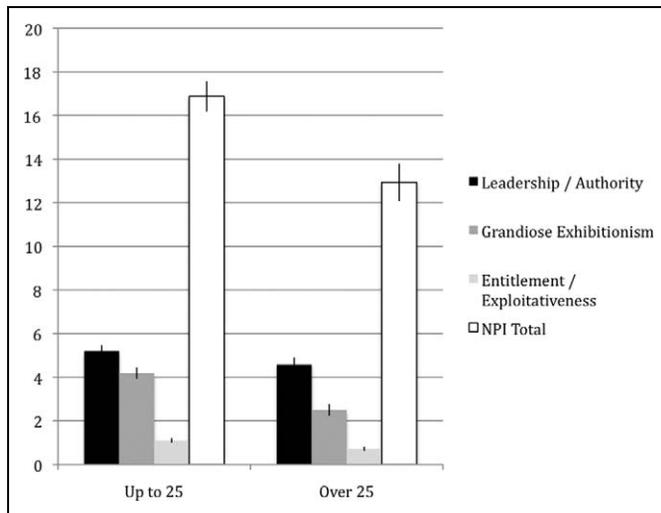


Figure 1. Means for participants on overall NPI and its three facets. Error bars reflect ± 2 SE of the mean. Mean levels significantly differed across the groups for all four narcissism scales.

Results

Figure 1 presents the mean comparisons between adolescents and emerging adults (up to 25 years) and older participants (26+), for those participants who completed every item in the measure, and Table 1 presents the means for these groups. As anticipated, all four narcissism scales demonstrated negative relations with age: NPI total, $r(790) = -.32$; Leadership/Authority, $r(791) = -.14$; Grandiose Exhibitionism, $r(790) = -.34$; Entitlement/Exploitativeness, $r(791) = -.20$, all $ps < .05$. Given this replication of previous work, we proceeded to examine whether age differences existed in the relations between narcissism and self-reported benefits. Table 2 breaks down the correlations between the narcissism scales and self-reported Big Five traits by age group. As can be seen, few differences emerge between the groups, and we replicate previous work suggesting that narcissists tend to report being extraverted but not agreeable or neurotic.

Narcissism and Life Satisfaction Across the Lifespan

The overall sample correlations between narcissism scales and life satisfaction are presented in Column 2 of Table 3. Replicating Ackerman et al. (2011), our results find that the Leadership/Authority facet appears most generally adaptive, while the Entitlement/Exploitativeness facet was negatively related to life satisfaction.¹ Next, we tested whether these effects differed across the lifespan. Results of our moderation interaction analyses are presented in the final column of Table 3. For three of the scales, our results demonstrate a significant negative interaction (β s range from $-.09$ to $-.11$) between narcissism scores and age. These results suggest that the relationships between these narcissism scales (NPI total, Leadership/Authority, and Grandiose Exhibitionism) and life satisfaction were more positive for younger than older participants in our sample. Therefore, it appears that the relations between narcissism and

self-reported well-being do differ across the lifespan.² However, no moderation was evident with respect to Entitlement/Exploitativeness, suggesting that this facet is a negative predictor of life satisfaction to a similar magnitude across the lifespan. In Table 3, we break down the correlations between the narcissism scales and life satisfaction by different age groups, for illustrative purposes.

Narcissism and Observer-Rated Personality

We next examined whether benefits of narcissism differ with respect to observer-rated personality. In Table 4, we present the correlations between self-ratings and observer-ratings of the Big Five traits in our sample, broken down by target (student or mother). For all Big Five traits, observer ratings were moderately to strongly correlated with self-ratings, providing support for their measurement validity.

Table 5 presents the relations for when the student was the target, and Table 6 presents the same relations for when the mother was the target. The gestalt is generally similar for both groups. Narcissism scores positively correlated with observer-rated extraversion, with the exception of the Entitlement/Exploitativeness facet. Narcissism scores negatively correlated with observer-rated agreeableness in all but one instance, although more of these correlations were significant when the mother was the target. Observer ratings of conscientiousness and openness were generally unrelated to narcissism, with a single exception (conscientiousness negatively correlated with NPI total scores when mothers were the target). The clearest discrepancy between mothers and students came with respect to neuroticism. When reporting on students, neuroticism was unrelated to narcissism scores. In contrast, when observed in mothers, narcissism was positively correlated with observer ratings of neuroticism across three of the four scales.

To follow up these correlations, we examined whether role (mother or student) indeed significantly moderated the links between narcissism and observer-rated neuroticism. For NPI total scores, this interaction term was significant, $\beta = .12$, $t = 2.17$, $p < .05$. Moreover, this term was close to statistically significant for Leadership/Authority ($\beta = .11$, $t = 1.87$, $p = .07$) and Grandiose Exhibitionism ($\beta = .11$, $t = 1.89$, $p = .06$). In sum, the relations between narcissism and observer-rated personality largely did not differ across groups.³ However, it does appear that the correlations between narcissism and observer-rated neuroticism were more positive for mothers than for students.

General Discussion

Counter to common wisdom, research has suggested that narcissists may experience benefits relative to others. However, such findings are tempered by work noting that the link between narcissism and well-being is far from universal (Rose, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2004). The current study extended this work into two primary ways. First, we examined whether narcissism proves beneficial across the lifespan, or if having an inflated sense of self helps one most during the transition

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for the Narcissism Scales of Interest, Separated by Age Group

Narcissism scale (possible range)	Up to 25			Over 25			<i>d</i> (Between Groups)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i>	α	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i>	α	
NPI total (0–40)	16.88 (6.87)	397	.84	12.94 (7.02)	266	.86	.57
Leadership/Authority (0–11)	5.20 (4.58)	434	.75	4.58 (2.96)	316	.80	.16
Grandiose Exhibitionism (0–10)	4.19 (2.63)	428	.75	2.51 (2.38)	316	.78	.67
Entitlement/Exploitativeness (0–4)	1.11 (1.09)	446	.44	0.71 (0.92)	329	.43	.40

Table 2. Correlations Between Self-Ratings of Big Five and Personality Broken Down by Age Group

	Up to 25					Over 25				
	Extra	Agree	Consc	Neuro	Open	Extra	Agree	Consc	Neuro	Open
NPI total	.55*	-.16*	.06	-.19*	.27*	.43*	-.16*	.07	-.18*	.21*
Leadership/Authority	.54*	-.09	.17*	-.21*	.22*	.47*	-.07	.14*	-.20*	.24*
Grandiose Exhibitionism	.49*	-.09	-.06	-.06	.15*	.33*	-.18*	-.05	-.01	.10
Entitlement/Exploitativeness	.10*	-.39*	-.17*	.13*	.09	.14*	-.35*	-.03	.06	.04

Note: *N* for the Up to 25 analyses is 451; *N*s for the Over 25 analyses are 339 or 340.
* $p < .05$.

Table 3. Correlations Between Life Satisfaction and Narcissism Scales for the Overall Sample, Those Participants in Adolescence or Emerging Adulthood, and Those Participants Post Emerging Adulthood

Narcissism Scale	Overall <i>r</i>	Up to 25 <i>r</i>	26–50 <i>r</i>	Over 50 <i>r</i>	Combined Over 25	Interaction β
NPI total	.11*	.23*	.10	-.09	.02	-.11*
Leadership/Authority	.17*	.25*	.14	.00	.08	-.10*
Grandiose Exhibitionism	.05	.15*	.04	-.13	-.02	-.09*
Entitlement/Exploitativeness	-.11*	-.09	-.11	-.13	-.12*	-.02

Note: Betas also are reported for the interaction terms in our regression tests of moderation; a significant interaction would indicate that age moderated the link between narcissism and life satisfaction. *N*s for each group (overall, up to 25, 26–50, over 50, and combined over 25) were 798, 449, 179, 161, and 339 respectively.
* $p < .05$.

Table 4. Correlations Between Self and Observer Ratings of Big Five traits, Reported Separately by Study and by Target

	Students	Mothers
Extraversion	.67*	.61*
Agreeableness	.28*	.40*
Conscientiousness	.51*	.42*
Neuroticism	.45*	.40*
Openness	.44*	.53*

Note: The Students column refers to the correlations between students' self-ratings and mothers' observer-ratings, while the Mothers column refers to the correlations between mothers' self-ratings and students' observer-ratings. *N* = 144 for all correlations.
* $p < .05$.

Table 5. Correlations Between Students' Self-Reported Narcissism and Mothers' Reports of Their Big Five Traits

Self-Reported Narcissism	Other Reported Big Five Traits				
	E	A	C	N	O
NPI total	.33*	-.10	-.01	-.07	.15
Leadership/Authority	.26*	-.13	-.04	-.08	.05
Grandiose Exhibitionism	.34*	.01	-.03	-.03	-.12
Entitlement/Exploitativeness	.01	-.26*	-.05	.08	.02

Note: *n* = 144. E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; N = Neuroticism; O = Openness.
* $p < .05$.

to adulthood. To this end, our findings suggest that the link between narcissism and life satisfaction is greater for adolescents and young adults than for adults. Second, we tested whether any such benefits from narcissism carry over to how others view narcissists. Narcissism was largely unrelated to receiving more positive observer reports when young and was related to being seen as more neurotic when older. Moreover, our study provides clear support for a multifaceted view of

narcissism, insofar that the facet of Leadership/Authority (and to a lesser extent, Grandiose Exhibitionism) proved more adaptive, but higher scores on Entitlement/Exploitativeness related to largely maladaptive outcomes. Therefore, we largely replicate the findings of Ackerman et al. (2011) and extend them by examining how these facets predict well-being differently across the lifespan.

With respect to our tests of age moderation, we found that narcissism correlated more positively with life satisfaction for

Table 6. Correlations Between Mothers' Self-Reported Narcissism and Students' Reports of Their Big Five Traits

Self-Reported Narcissism	Other-Reported Big Five Traits				
	E	A	C	N	O
NPI total	.33*	-.24*	-.18*	.18*	-.01
Leadership/Authority	.36*	-.16	-.15	.14	.04
Grandiose Exhibitionism	.26*	-.17*	-.07	.18*	.03
Entitlement/Exploitativeness	.03	-.33*	-.13	.25*	-.12

Note: *ns* range from 143 to 144. E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; N = Neuroticism; O = Openness.

* $p < .05$.

adolescents and emerging adults than for adult participants. It is worth noting that this moderation failed to hold for Entitlement/Exploitativeness, since this facet was negatively related to life satisfaction across age groups. These findings can be viewed as suggesting that having an inflated sense of self might prove beneficial when beginning to take on one's eventual adult roles (i.e., work, family, community). Given the importance of this transition for personality development (e.g., Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007; Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008), it seems that those traits that facilitate adult role adoption can be deemed "adaptive." To this end, it is worth noting that narcissism facet of Leadership/Authority has been linked to social potency, global self-esteem, and goal persistence (Ackerman et al., 2011), all constructs that should seemingly smooth the transition to adulthood. However, none of these constructs are related to the facet of Entitlement/Exploitativeness. Therefore, our results provide support for the claim that the benefits of narcissism are dependent on how it influences adult role adoption (Hill & Roberts, in press).

However, this notion gains nuance insofar that the benefits of narcissism may be largely internal. For neither students nor mothers did the narcissism scales correlate positively with observer ratings of agreeableness, conscientiousness, or emotional stability. The only seemingly "adaptive" correlation evidenced was the positive relation between narcissism (specifically the facets of Leadership/Authority and Grandiose Exhibitionism) and extraversion, which largely reflects the connection between having an inflated sense of self and being more socially potent. Therefore, it does not appear to be the case that narcissists also benefit with respect to prosocial traits.

One can then ask whether narcissism correlates with a maladaptive observer-rated personality profile to a lesser extent for adolescents and emerging adults. Such evidence would point again to the idea that narcissism is more positive for younger than older participants. This moderation was only significant with respect to neuroticism. Narcissism significantly positively related to neuroticism for mothers, but this relation was negative, but nonsignificant, for students. This finding extends the link between self-reported well-being and narcissism to show that the negative ramifications of narcissism are noticeable by others in middle age. Future research should employ facet-level measures of neuroticism to test whether moderation occurs for all facets, or only those more closely linked to life satisfaction.

A final note worth mention regards the close acquaintance between the observers in our study. In contrast to other studies on observer perceptions of narcissists (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011; Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Paulhus, 1998), we examined the interpersonal benefits of narcissism using samples of closely acquainted individuals (mothers and children). It is interesting then to note that we found some evidence for interpersonal benefits even in these long-term relationships, given that the previous work has suggested these benefits tend to occur primarily at zero acquaintance and then decline over time (Back et al., 2010; Paulhus, 1998). Therefore, future research should disentangle whether the enduring interpersonal effects of narcissism differ with respect the type of relationship involved (e.g., college roommates, parents and children, work colleagues, etc.).

A few limitations of the current study warrant discussion. First, and perhaps most important, the design of our study limited the sample available for observer-rating analyses. Asking students to only report on one family member, and then not requiring observer ratings from that member, forced us to only consider students and mothers. Future studies should obtain a wider array of not only family members, but also of ages, in order to better test whether moderation occurs with respect to observer-rated personality. Moreover, such work would better allow us to test whether the moderation results evidenced occur as a result of age, role, or even maturation status, three variables currently confounded due to the use of mothers and children.

Second, it would be valuable to assess individuals between 18 and 25 years who are not currently in college. In doing so, one could assess whether an inflated sense of self benefits all individuals during the emerging adult years. Alternatively, the benefits of narcissism might be short-lived for those not attending college, because they would presumably need to adopt adult roles more rapidly. Third, our studies are limited in their ability to discuss well-being in that we only assessed life satisfaction. That said, it is worth noting that our results largely replicate those of Ackerman et al. (2011), insofar that the facets we found to be adaptive (e.g., Leadership/Authority) and maladaptive (e.g., Entitlement/Exploitativeness) were the same ones they nominated as such using a broader array of well-being measures. Fourth, while our reliabilities were in line with those evidenced by Ackerman et al., the estimates for the Entitlement/Exploitativeness facet are well below standard guidelines for acceptable alphas. It is perhaps unsurprising that this facet evidences such poor reliability, as the NPI was not designed with the intent of studying vulnerable aspects of narcissism. However, future work should examine whether our results hold using more reliable measures of this facet, such as the hypersensitive narcissism measure developed by Hendin and Cheek (1997). Finally, as with any cross-sectional studies, our age effects are possibly confounded by cohort effects; thus, it would be valuable to replicate these findings to avoid any cohort explanations.

In conclusion, our study provides additional insights into when and why narcissism might prove beneficial. Specifically,

it appears that during those developmental periods for which narcissism is more prominent, it may in fact provide greater benefits, with respect to both life satisfaction and observer perceptions of neuroticism. Put differently, the benefits of being narcissistic appear to attenuate as one ages into adulthood. In this respect, our results support Mark Twain's full statement, namely, "there is no sadder sight than a young pessimist, except for an old optimist."

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. Given the low reliability for the Entitlement/Exploitativeness measure, we also examined these correlations using structural equation model analysis, in order to better account for possible measurement error. When so doing, this facet continued to correlate negatively with life satisfaction for all age groups, the only difference being that the magnitude of this correlation was strengthened.
2. The interactions between narcissism and age held when accounting for the possible within-family dependence in life satisfaction scores.
3. While we only discuss the results for neuroticism, it should be noted that the interaction term was not significant in any analyses predicting the other four traits.

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