

# Narcissism and Other-Derogation in the Absence of Ego Threat

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## Abstract

The relation between narcissism and other-derogation has been examined primarily in the context of ego threat. In three studies, we investigated whether narcissistic individuals derogate others in the absence of ego threat. In Study 1, 79 judges watched four videotaped dyadic interactions and rated the personality of the same four people. In Study 2, 66 judges rated the personality of a friend. In Study 3, 72 judges considered the average Northeastern University student and rated the personality of this hypothetical person. Across the three studies, targets' personality characteristics were described on the 100-item California Adult Q-Sort (CAQ; Block, 2008). Judges' ratings of targets were compared to a CAQ prototype of the optimally adjusted person to assess target-derogation. Judges' narcissism and other-derogation were positively related in Studies 1 and 2. Narcissism positively predicted and self-esteem negatively predicted target-derogation after controlling for each other in Study 3. Narcissistic individuals derogate others more than non-narcissistic individuals regardless of whether ego threat is present or absent.

In the Greek myth *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus was so enamored with himself that he could love no other. His physical appearance mesmerized the local wood nymphs, including Echo, who fell in love with Narcissus at first sight. After waiting many days in the woods for Narcissus to notice her, Echo finally had a chance to meet him. She ran to him and threw her arms around him. But Narcissus was repulsed and stated, "Hands off! I would rather die than you should have me!" Echo, brokenhearted, ran away yearning for the love that she would never have.

The roots of contemporary theory and research on narcissism are apparent in the myth of Narcissus. Both emphasize a sense of self that is grandiose and superior. But they diverge on at least one key point. Narcissus rejected and denigrated Echo (and others), believing that his exceptional physical beauty rendered others unworthy of his love and attention. Thus, by extrapolation, narcissistic individuals derogate others in everyday life because they perceive themselves to be superior to most people. In contrast, psychological research examining the relation between narcissism and other-derogation typically has included a situational manipulation, such as negative feedback, that threatens participants' feelings of self-worth (e.g., Kernis & Sun, 1994). Thus, from the psychological research perspective, narcissistic individuals lash out and derogate others to bolster their feelings of self-worth in response to assaults on their ego.

Despite evidence consistent with the latter perspective, it is unclear whether ego threat is a necessary or sufficient condi-

tion to elicit other-derogation. Like the myth of Narcissus, we considered the possibility that relatively narcissistic individuals derogate others independent of perceived threat. Specifically, in three studies, we investigated the relation between participants' narcissism and their tendency to negatively evaluate others' personality traits under conditions of little or no ego threat.

## Narcissism and Ego Threat

Numerous studies have demonstrated a relation between narcissism and flattering self-evaluations. Narcissism is related to overestimation of intelligence and physical attractiveness (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994), performance (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; John & Robins, 1994; Robins & Beer, 2001), and personality (Carlson, Naumann, & Vazire, 2011; Carlson, Vazire, & Oltmanns, 2011; Park & Colvin, 2014). Narcissism is positively related to subjective well-being, and negatively related to loneliness, anxiety, sadness, and depression (Rose, 2002; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004; Watson & Biderman, 1993).

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Narcissistic individuals create psychological breakwaters to keep threatening information from reaching their highly favorable self-concept (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Morf, Torchetti, & Schürch, 2011). Indeed, research suggests that narcissistic individuals use defensive strategies in response to ego threat. They also make use of self-serving attributions to a greater degree than people low in narcissism. In one study, participants in general downplayed the importance of a test they just failed; however, people high in narcissism attributed failures to collaborators and successes to themselves to a greater extent than those low in narcissism (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000).

The relation between narcissism and aggression after ego threat has been demonstrated in several studies. After receiving negative performance feedback, narcissistic individuals were more likely than less narcissistic ones to exhibit aggressive behavior (i.e., blasts of white noise) toward an evaluator (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) and express anger and verbal aggression (Stucke & Sporer, 2002). This narcissistic aggression was documented when ego threat came in the form of social rejection (Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

## Narcissism and Other-Derogation

It is an aggressive act to belittle or derogate another person (Stucke & Sporer, 2002), and research has demonstrated a positive link between narcissism and other-derogation, especially when ego threat was present. People high in narcissism rated peers' personality traits more negatively than those low in narcissism if the peer exhibited superior task performance (Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993; South, Oltmanns, & Turkheimer, 2003). Similarly, after receiving negative performance feedback, participants who scored relatively high on narcissism appeared to retaliate by rating the evaluator low on competence (Kernis & Sun, 1994; Smalley & Stake, 1996).

However, studies examining the relation between narcissism and other-derogation in the absence of ego threat have produced inconsistent results. One study reported null findings (South et al., 2003), whereas two studies reported significant findings (Lamkin, Clifton, Campbell, & Miller, in press; Wood, Harms, & Vazire, 2010). Recently, Back et al. (2013) developed a new measure of narcissism that assesses admiration and rivalry. In a follow-up study on interpersonal perception, they used the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and their new measure to assess narcissism. Results indicated that rivalry was the only significant predictor of other-derogation (M. D. Back, personal communication, January 23, 2014).

Despite inconsistent findings, there is reason to believe that narcissism and other-derogation are related in situations in which ego threat is low or absent. Brown and Bosson (2001) argue that narcissism entails a constant pursuit of self-worth. If narcissism is indeed related to the constant effort to build, buttress, defend, and enhance a grandiose self (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Morf et al., 2011), it should be present

whether or not there is ego threat. Furthermore, recent studies reported a positive relation between narcissism and aggressive behavior in nonthreatening situations, implying a similar pattern for narcissism and other-derogation (Maples et al., 2010; Reidy, Foster, & Zeichner, 2010).

To enhance our assessment of narcissism and other-derogation in the context of no ego threat, we identified and sought to improve three features from previous research. First, previous studies have typically assessed a relatively small number of personality traits (8 to 20 items). In this study, judges rated targets on all 100 items of the California Adult Q-Sort (CAQ; Block, 2008), which covers a broad range of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics. Second, trait positivity, and related tools used to assess other-derogation, is often measured by indirect or subjective methods. In contrast, we used the CAQ prototype of optimal adjustment, based on clinical psychologists' and psychiatrists' ratings, to determine how favorably judges evaluate targets (Block, 1961). Finally, participants' self-esteem was evaluated to determine whether narcissism contributes to the prediction of other-derogation independent of self-esteem (Studies 1 and 3).

## Two Portraits of Self-Love: Narcissism and Self-Esteem

People compare themselves to others, particularly when objective evaluation criteria are unavailable, to self-evaluate work performance, personal relationships, and personality (Festinger, 1954). Given that there are few objective criteria with which to evaluate self-rated personality characteristics, personality evaluation tends to be a process involving social comparisons. People learn their level of agreeableness, for example, by comparing their behavior with the behavior of others. Thus, derogating another's personality can be an efficient strategy for achieving positive self-evaluations of personality. Some may even argue that thinking highly of oneself necessitates thinking lowly of others. This idea can be tested by investigating whether individuals high in narcissism and individuals high in self-esteem differ in terms of how they think about and behave toward others.

Both narcissism and self-esteem are associated with a positive self-concept, but they diverge in their relationship with agency and communion. Narcissistic people pursue agentic goals. They strive for personal achievement and power, often to the detriment of their interpersonal relationships. In contrast, people with high self-esteem pursue goals that balance agency and communion. They strive for competence and interpersonal connectedness (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Park & Colvin, 2014). These differences indicate that (a) narcissistic individuals are willing to sacrifice their interpersonal relationships to maintain their positive, and agentic, self-concept; and (b) people with high self-esteem maintain it by setting and achieving personally important goals, some of which are interpersonal.

Campbell and colleagues (2002) examined narcissism and self-esteem in the context of the better-than-average effect, a tendency to rate one's traits more positively than the average person's traits. Although both narcissism and self-esteem were related to the better-than-average effect on agentic traits, only self-esteem was related to the effect on communal traits. Furthermore, when participants compared themselves to their romantic partner, narcissism, but not self-esteem, predicted the tendency to rate their own traits more positively than their partner's traits. That is, people high in narcissism were more likely than those low in narcissism to denigrate their partner's personality to enhance their self-image; however, people with high self-esteem did not display this tendency.

Narcissism and self-esteem exhibit similar relationships in research on aggression and other-derogation. Among the studies reviewed above, six measured self-esteem and narcissism to predict aggression or other-derogation (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Kernis & Sun, 1994; Maples et al., 2010; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993; Smalley & Stake, 1996; Twenge & Campbell, 2003). With one exception (Kernis & Sun, 1994), participants' self-esteem was unrelated to aggressive behavior or other-derogation.

These results indicate that both narcissism and self-esteem are associated with a positive self-concept, but only narcissism is related to willingness to sacrifice interpersonal relationships for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing a positive self-concept. Thus, thinking highly of oneself does not require other-derogation, at least for people with high self-esteem. To test this supposition, we measured both narcissism and self-esteem in Studies 1 and 3.

## Overview

We examined the relation between narcissism and other-derogation in the absence of ego threat in three studies. In Study 1, all judges watched the same four videotaped dyadic interactions and rated the personality of the same four target persons. In Study 2, judges rated the personality of a friend. In Study 3, judges rated the personality of the average college student. Across the three studies, the 100-item CAQ (Block, 2008) was used to describe targets' personality.

## STUDY 1

Study 1 investigated narcissism and other-derogation with strangers serving as targets. Judges watched four videotaped dyadic interactions between a designated target person and another person. After each videotape, judges rated the target on the CAQ, a broadband measure of personality (Block, 2008). They also completed self-report measures of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988) and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). We used the "optimally adjusted person prototype" to assess how negatively (or positively) judges rated targets.

The data presented in Study 1 are a subset from a larger research project on personality and interpersonal perception.

Portions of the larger data set have been published elsewhere (Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007; Colvin & Longueuil, 2001; Vogt & Colvin, 2003, 2005), but the data presented in this article have not been previously published. Only the procedures and measures that pertain to Study 1 are described.

## Method

**Targets and Judges.** Four videotaped targets were selected from an independent study (two males and two females; for detailed information about the targets, see Vogt & Colvin, 2003). Each video was 12 min long and consisted of the target interacting with another person in three different contexts: (a) a getting-acquainted interaction with an opposite-sex stranger, (b) a cooperative task with the same stranger, and (c) a casual interaction with a same-sex close friend.

Judges were recruited by posting notices around the Northeastern University campus. Data were collected over five research sessions, which took approximately six months to complete. The present analyses included completed data for 79 judges (45 women). The mean age was 20.41 years ( $SD = 3.19$ ). Approximately 72% of judges identified themselves as European American, 11% as African American, 9% as Asian American, 4% as Latino American, and 4% as other. Judges were compensated up to \$100 for their participation.

**Procedure.** Judges came to the laboratory on five occasions for a 2-hr research session. They completed a battery of personality measures, including a measure of narcissism. After watching a videotape of a dyadic interaction, they rated the target's personality on the CAQ.

## Measures

**Judge Narcissism.** Judges completed the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory on a 4-point scale (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988).<sup>1</sup> Although the original NPI required participants to select the most self-descriptive of two opposing statements, the Likert response format has been used in previous studies (Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003; Park, Ferrero, Colvin, & Carney, 2013). The NPI includes items such as "I really like to be the center of attention" and "I am an extraordinary person." The Cronbach's alpha reliability for the present sample was .89. In addition, three facets of narcissism were calculated following Ackerman et al. (2011): leadership/authority (L/A;  $\alpha = .89$ ), grandiose exhibitionism (GE;  $\alpha = .71$ ), and entitlement/exploitativeness (E/E;  $\alpha = .58$ ).

**Judge Self-Esteem.** Judges completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965;  $\alpha = .83$ ). This measure includes items such as "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others." Responses were made on a 4-point scale.

**Judge Ratings of Target Personality.** After watching each 12-min videotaped interaction, judges rated the target's

personality on the CAQ (Block, 2008). The CAQ consists of 100 statements, each printed on a separate card, that describe social, cognitive, and affective attributes. The task of Q-sorting requires judges to place cards into a forced, approximately normal, nine-category distribution that ranges from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 9 (*highly characteristic*). Each CAQ profile has a mean of 5.00 and a standard deviation of 2.09. The reliability and validity of the CAQ has been well established (Block, 2008).

**CAQ Prototype of Optimally Adjusted Person.** We used Block's (2008) "optimally adjusted person prototype" to evaluate the valence of judges' ratings of targets. The prototype is a consensual description of a hypothetical highly adjusted person. To create the prototype, nine clinical psychologists or psychiatrists independently sorted the CAQ cards into nine piles, ranging from *extremely uncharacteristic of optimal adjustment* (1) to *extremely characteristic of optimal adjustment* (9), to describe the hypothetical optimally adjusted, high-functioning person. The clinicians' ratings were aggregated, resulting in the optimally adjusted person prototype (Block, 2008, p. 131). The Spearman-Brown reliability for the prototype was .97. Two CAQ items indicative of optimal adjustment (score of 9) are "has warmth; has the capacity for close relationships" and "is dependable and responsible." Two CAQ items indicative of maladjustment (score of 1) are "feels cheated and victimized by life" and "has a brittle ego defense system." Two CAQ items that were rated neutral (score of 5), or neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic of optimal adjustment, are "is a talkative person" and "has a rapid personal tempo."

**Target-Derogation.** The extent to which a judge derogated a target's personality was calculated using the following method. Each judge's CAQ rating of a target was correlated with the optimally adjusted person prototype. If a judge assigned high scores to items representing adjustment (i.e.,

high adjustment score) and low scores to items representing maladjustment (i.e., low adjustment score), the resulting correlation coefficient would be positive, and vice versa. Thus, a positive correlation coefficient at this step indicates a positive evaluation of the target, whereas a negative value indicates a negative evaluation. Next, the correlation coefficient was multiplied by  $-1$  so that higher scores represented relatively negative ratings of targets by judges (i.e., target derogation).<sup>2</sup> Target-derogation scores were calculated for each target (4 targets  $\times$  79 judges = 316 scores); in addition, composite scores were created by averaging target-derogation scores for the four targets ( $\alpha = .54$ ).

## Results

**Judge Narcissism.** Mean scores on narcissism for men ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ) and women ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ) were not significantly different,  $t(77) = 1.57$ ,  $p = .12$ . Also, there were no significant interactions between judges' narcissism and gender on target-derogation for the four targets,  $|t|s < 1.84$ , *ns*. Therefore, subsequent analyses were conducted on combined data for female and male judges.

**Judge Narcissism and Target-Derogation.** As shown in Table 1, judges' narcissism predicted target derogation,  $rs \geq .22$ ,  $ps \leq .06$ . Narcissism also predicted the composite derogation score across all four targets, indicating that narcissistic individuals rated targets' personality more negatively than less narcissistic individuals in the absence of ego threat.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the three facets of narcissism, composite target-derogation was positively related to L/A and E/E but not to GE.

**Judge Self-Esteem and Target-Derogation.** As shown in Table 1, judges' self-esteem was unrelated to target-derogation, except for Male 2.<sup>4</sup> The composite target-derogation was related to self-esteem at a marginally significant level,  $r = .19$ ,  $p = .09$ . We regressed composite target-derogation on narcissism and

**Table 1** Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	Target-Derogation ( <i>r</i> )					<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
	Female 1	Female 2	Male 1	Male 2	Composite	
Female 1	—	.43***	.21+	.12	.64***	-.44 (.25)
Female 2		—	.24*	.13	.66***	-.50 (.25)
Male 1			—	.27*	.72***	-.23 (.30)
Male 2				—	.57***	.29 (.24)
Composite					—	-.21 (.15)
Narcissism	.30**	.23*	.22+	.27*	.38***	2.67 (0.38)
L/A	.25*	.21+	.19+	.21+	.33**	2.78 (0.59)
GE	.11	.12	.08	.10	.16	2.38 (0.46)
E/E	.41***	.29**	.15	.18	.38***	2.55 (0.59)
Self-esteem	-.07	.12	.07	.38***	.19+	3.10 (0.56)

Note. L/A = leadership/authority; GE = grandiose exhibitionism; E/E = entitlement/exploitativeness.  
 $+p \leq .09$ .  $*p \leq .05$ .  $**p \leq .01$ .  $***p \leq .001$ .

self-esteem. After controlling for each other, narcissism remained significant,  $\beta = .38, p = .002$ , but self-esteem became nonsignificant,  $\beta = .01, p = .98$ .

**Judge Target-Derogation.** One question that arises given that judges and targets were unacquainted is whether judges rated targets according to their stereotype of college students instead of behavioral observations of targets in the videotaped interactions (Cronbach, 1955). To examine this possibility, we calculated the mean target-derogation score for each of the four targets. These scores ranged from  $-.50$  to  $.29$  (see Table 1). Six dependent  $t$ -tests were conducted to examine whether judges derogated some targets more than others, which they did. All target-derogation means were significantly different from each other,  $|t|s > 2.51, ps < .01$ . Furthermore, the pattern of correlations was inconsistent among target-derogation scores. Altogether, these findings indicate that judges perceived differences between targets' personality traits and did not apply a one-size-fits-all stereotype when rating targets.

## Discussion

Study 1 provided evidence that narcissism is positively related to other-derogation in the absence of ego threat; in contrast, self-esteem was not significantly related to other-derogation. One strength of the study—all judges evaluated the same four targets—may also be the study's primary limitation. By relying on judges' evaluations of the same four targets, the relation between narcissism and target-derogation may generalize no further than the current study, particularly if narcissistic judges' negative ratings of targets were elicited by characteristics unique to the four targets. If the four targets exhibited submissive behavior, for example, relatively narcissistic judges might experience exceptionally strong feelings of superiority and condescension that otherwise would not occur. On the other hand, targets may have expressed self-confidence and social dominance that would threaten narcissistic individuals. In Study 2, we circumvented the limitations in Study 1 by having judges rate the personality of their own target (i.e., judge's friend).

## STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the findings from Study 1 by having judges rate the personality of a close friend. Because each judge-target pair was unique, replication would reduce the possibility that other-derogation in Study 1 was due to the specific characteristics of the four target persons. However, if narcissistic individuals make friends with individuals who possess a negative self-concept, the positive relation between judges' narcissism and target-derogation might be found. To test this possibility, targets (i.e., friends of judges) provided self-ratings of personality.

In Study 2, participants took on the role of *target* and rated their personality on the CAQ. They nominated two friends who knew them well to serve as judges and rate the target's personality. Judges also completed the NPI. The results to be presented come from a larger research project on personality and self-perception. The data analyzed in Study 1 and Study 2 come from independent research projects. Only the procedures and measures relevant to the data to be presented are described.

## Method

**Targets, Judges, and Procedure.** Targets were undergraduate students at Northeastern University who participated in exchange for course credit. They completed a battery of self-report measures using online survey software (www.qualtrics.com), engaged in several tasks, and nominated two friends with whom they were acquainted for at least one year. Friends (i.e., judges) were contacted by email to complete an online survey. If the survey was not complete within one week, judges received an email reminder. Friends did not receive compensation for their participation.

Our goal for this study was to examine the relation between judges' self-reported narcissism and ratings of their friend (i.e., participant). As described previously, each participant recruited two friends to serve as judges. It is standard practice to aggregate judges' ratings of a target to enhance reliability. However, our primary interest focused on the relation between judges' self-rated narcissism scores and their ratings of target personality. Thus, we selected one judge (i.e., friend) per target using the following steps. First, prospective judges required complete data. Second, if both judges had complete data, a coin was flipped to randomly select one judge. As a result, data from 66 pairs of targets and judges were analyzed. Sixty-six college students (73% women) served as targets whose mean age was 18.83 years ( $SD = 1.16$ ). Approximately 50% of targets self-identified as European American, 29% as Asian American, 6% as Latino American, 3% as African American, and 12% as other. Approximately 59% of judges were women. Judges' age and ethnicity were not collected.

## Measures

**Target Self-Rated Personality.** Targets rated their personality on the CAQ. Instead of the traditional sorting procedure, targets rated each CAQ item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all descriptive*) to 6 (*very descriptive*).

**Judge Ratings of Target Personality.** Judges rated targets' personality on the CAQ using a 6-point scale.

**Judge Ratings of Relationship Quality.** Each judge answered four questions about his or her relationship with the target: "Compared to other friends of yours, how close are you to this friend?"; "Compared to other friends of yours, how much do you like this friend?"; "Compared to other friends of

yours, how well do you know this friend?"; and "For how many years have you known your friend?" The first three questions were answered on a 6-point scale.

**Judge Narcissism.** Judges completed the 18-item NPI (Rosenthal & Hooley, 2010;  $\alpha = .90$ ) on a 6-point scale.

**Judge Target-Derogation and Target Self-Derogation.** Judges' derogation of targets' personality and targets' self-derogation were calculated in the same manner as described in Study 1.

## Results

**Judge Narcissism.** Male judges' narcissism scores were significantly higher ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) than female judges' narcissism ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ),  $t(64) = 2.36$ ,  $p = .02$ . However, the Narcissism  $\times$  Gender interaction predicting target-derogation was not significant,  $t = 0.76$ ,  $p = .45$ . Therefore, subsequent analyses were conducted on data that combined female and male judges.

**Judge Narcissism and Target-Derogation.** As shown in Table 2, narcissism and target derogation were positively correlated ( $r = .26$ ), replicating Study 1. This result cannot be explained by narcissistic judges having friends possessing a negative self-concept. If this had occurred, we would have expected judge narcissism and target self-derogation to be positively correlated; instead, the correlation was not significant ( $r = .03$ ).

Using the CAQ adjustment prototype, we calculated the similarity in valence of judges' ratings of targets and targets' self-ratings. The correlation was marginally significant,  $r = .24$ ,  $p = .06$ , suggesting that judges and targets had similar perceptions of targets' psychological adjustment. To determine whether narcissistic judges' ratings of others are biased, we regressed judges' target-derogation on judges' narcissism and targets' self-derogation. Both judge narcissism ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and target self-derogation ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .06$ ) independently predicted target-derogation, although the latter was marginally significant. This result suggests that target-derogation is indeed a perceptual bias of relatively narcissistic individuals.

**Relationship Quality and Target-Derogation.** Table 2 displays correlations between four relationship quality variables and target-derogation. The only significant relation was a negative correlation between "Liking" and target-derogation.

**Exploratory Analyses: Narcissism and Accuracy.** Researchers in personality psychology, and other scientific disciplines, often differentiate bias and accuracy (Funder, 1995; John & Robins, 1994). Our empirical results suggest people who score high on narcissism display negative bias in their ratings of others. With respect to perception of others, the term *bias* represents errors in perception, or in simple terms, what went wrong. In contrast, *accuracy* represents valid perception, or again in simple terms, what went right. The two concepts are relatively independent, suggesting that both bias and accuracy are present in judgments of personality.

As a complement to the narcissism and negative bias results, we examined the relation between narcissism and accurate perception. Although multimethod criteria are optimal for evaluating judgmental accuracy (Colvin & Bundick, 2001), we used targets' CAQ self-ratings as accuracy criteria (e.g., Biesanz & Human, 2010). We correlated narcissism with two accuracy scores following Furr (2008): overall and distinctive accuracy. Narcissism tended to have negative relations with overall accuracy ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p = .06$ ) and distinctive accuracy ( $r = -.10$ ,  $p = .10$ ). Overall, the results suggest that narcissism is associated with negative bias and inaccuracy when judging others.

## Discussion

The results of Study 2 indicated that relatively narcissistic judges derogated their friends' personality. In the discussion of Study 1, we speculated that narcissistic judges' derogation of targets could have been an artifact resulting from judges rating the same set of four targets. Given that 66 independent targets were rated in Study 2, it seems unlikely that specific target characteristics could elicit target-derogation in narcissistic judges. Furthermore, the relation between judge narcissism and derogation of targets remained significant after controlling for targets' self-derogation, suggesting the narcissism-derogation relation is independent of targets' self-perceptions of personality.

**Table 2** Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Study Variables

Variable	2	3	4	5	6	7	M (SD)
1. Judges' narcissism	.26*	-.22+	-.28*	-.21+	-.18	.03	3.04 (0.89)
2. Judges' target-derogation	—	-.19	-.46***	-.15	.01	.24+	-.48 (.27)
3. Judge-rated "close"		—	.63***	.76***	.33**	.10	5.48 (0.81)
4. Judge-rated "like"			—	.52***	.10	-.12	5.65 (0.67)
5. Judge-rated "know"				—	.35**	.11	5.38 (0.87)
6. Years known					—	.04	4.89 (3.99)
7. Targets' self-derogation						—	-.49 (.21)

+ $p \leq .09$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

Narcissism and target-derogation were positively related whether targets were strangers (Study 1) or close friends (Study 2). This finding suggests that narcissistic individuals' concept of other people is generally negative. We tested this idea in Study 3 by having judges rate the personality of the "average" university student. According to the literature in cognitive psychology (Murphy, 2002), people have widely varying beliefs about the typicality of particular objects. When applied to social objects, this finding suggests that people's beliefs about the personality traits of the average university student might exhibit considerable variability. More importantly, narcissistic individuals' beliefs about the personality traits of the average student may be significantly more negative than the beliefs of less narcissistic ones.

### STUDY 3

In Study 3, we investigated whether the narcissism-derogation relation would replicate when judges rated a hypothetical average university student. In Studies 1 and 2, relatively narcissistic judges rated targets more negatively than less narcissistic judges independent of acquaintance, suggesting that narcissism might include a general negativity bias toward others. If true, this bias might occur when narcissistic individuals rate the personality of *people in general* (i.e., the average Northeastern University student).

When rating the personality of the hypothetical average person, judges may overly rely on a judgment strategy called "assumed similarity" (Cronbach, 1955). This strategy is likely to be used when judges have little or no diagnostic information on which to base their judgments of a target's personality. Judges assume that the unknown target is similar to themselves, consider their own personality, and rate the target as they would rate themselves. In the present study, judges were university students who rated the personality of the "average" university student. Because judges and the "average" university student share group affiliation, there may be a higher likelihood that judges "assume similarity" when rating the average student. To examine this possibility, judges rated their own personality and the personality of the average university student.

### Method

**Judges and Procedure.** Judges were 72 undergraduate students from Northeastern University (47.2% women) who participated in exchange for course credit. The mean age was 18.97 ( $SD = 1.25$ ). Approximately 53% of judges identified themselves as European American, 26% as Asian American, 4% as Latino American, 6% as African American, and 11% as other. They were invited to the lab to complete a battery of questionnaires using an online survey program (www.qualtrics.com).

### Judge Ratings

#### Personality Ratings of the Average University Student.

Judges were instructed to rate the personality of the average Northeastern University student on the CAQ using a Likert response scale ranging from 1 (*not at all descriptive*) to 7 (*very descriptive*).

**Self-Ratings of Personality.** Judges rated their own personality on the CAQ using a 7-point Likert response scale.

**Narcissism.** Judges completed the 40-item, forced-choice version of the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988;  $\alpha = .79$ ). Each item contains a pair of statements, one of which reflects narcissism (e.g., "I am an extraordinary person" vs. "I am much like everybody else"). The total score on the NPI can range from 0 to 40. In addition, three subscales of narcissism were calculated following Ackerman et al. (2011). The subscales of L/A ( $\alpha = .80$ ) and GE ( $\alpha = .69$ ) had reasonably high internal consistency. However, internal consistency for the E/E subscale was unacceptably low ( $\alpha = .12$ ), so we excluded it from the analyses.

**Self-Esteem.** Judges completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965;  $\alpha = .86$ ). Responses were made on a 7-point scale.

**Derogation of Target and Self.** Derogation scores were created indicating judges' derogation of the average student's personality and judges' derogation of their own personality. Computation of scores was the same as described in Study 1.

### Results

**Narcissism.** Mean narcissism did not differ for men ( $M = 15.55$ ,  $SD = 6.48$ ) and women ( $M = 14.97$ ,  $SD = 5.74$ ),  $t(70) = 0.40$ ,  $p = .69$ . Furthermore, the Narcissism  $\times$  Gender interaction predicting target-derogation was not significant,  $t = 0.22$ ,  $p = .83$ . Therefore, all subsequent analyses were conducted on data that combined female and male judges.

#### Narcissism, Self-Esteem, Target-Derogation, and Self-Derogation.

Table 3 displays correlations between narcissism, self-esteem, target-derogation, and self-derogation. Narcissism was positively related to self-esteem ( $r = .34$ ). Both narcissism and self-esteem were negatively related to self-derogation, indicating that people who score high on narcissism, self-esteem, or both rated themselves more positively than people who scored low on narcissism, self-esteem, or both.

Narcissism and target-derogation were positively correlated ( $r = .14$ ), but the relation was not statistically significant. There was, however, a significant positive correlation between judges' target- and self-derogation ( $r = .25$ ), suggesting that judges' ratings of self and the average university student were similar (assumed similarity; Cronbach, 1955). To statistically

**Table 3** Study 3: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	Derogation of Average Person	Derogation of Self	Self-Esteem	M (SD)
Derogation of average person	—	.25*	-.21+	-.43 (.29)
Derogation of self		—	-.70***	-.43 (.27)
Self-esteem			—	4.97 (1.06)
Narcissism	.14	-.30**	.34**	15.28 (6.11)
Leadership/Authority	.11	-.28*	.29**	4.82 (2.99)
Grandiose Exhibitionism	.13	-.36**	.43***	3.49 (2.36)

Note. The Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscale of the NPI was not included in the analyses because it was insufficiently internally consistent for use in this study. + $p \leq .08$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

**Table 4** Study 3: Target-Derogation Regressed on Predictors

Predictor	Target-Derogation ( $\beta$ )			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Narcissism	.24*		.24*	.26*
Self-derogation	.32**	.20		.23
Self-esteem		-.07	-.29*	-.13

Note. \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

control for assumed similarity, judges' target-derogation was regressed on judges' narcissism and self-derogation. As shown in Table 4 (Model 1), narcissism predicted target-derogation ( $\beta = .24$ ) after controlling for self-derogation. That is, after controlling for how negatively (or positively) judges rated their own personality, judges' narcissism significantly predicted the derogation of the average student and thus provides additional support for the positive association between narcissism and other-derogation.

Next, we examined whether narcissism and self-esteem uniquely predict target-derogation. We regressed target-derogation on narcissism and self-esteem (see Table 4, Model 3). The results revealed that narcissism was positively related ( $\beta = .24$ ) and self-esteem was negatively related ( $\beta = -.29$ ) to target-derogation. When targets' self-derogation was included in the regression model (Model 4), the only significant relation was between narcissism and target-derogation.

## Discussion

The zero-order correlation between narcissism and derogation of the average student was not significant. However, judges appeared to "assume similarity" and reference their own personality when rating the average university student. As a result, judges who possessed a positive self-concept tended to rate the average student positively, whereas judges who possessed a negative self-concept tended to rate the average student negatively. After statistically controlling for assumed similarity, a significant relation was observed between narcissism and derogation of the average university student.

Also examined was the relation between the so-called "two portraits of self-love"—narcissism and self-esteem (Campbell et al., 2002)—and target-derogation. After statistically controlling for the two, we found that narcissism positively predicted and self-esteem negatively predicted target-derogation, indicating the two concepts indeed represent two unique portraits of self-love, and other-love, as demonstrated in the present study. These results imply that thinking highly of oneself does not preclude one from thinking highly of others, except for narcissistic individuals who think highly of themselves by thinking negatively about others.

## META-ANALYSIS OF STUDIES 1-3

Narcissism predicted other-derogation in each of our three studies, but the effect sizes are best characterized as small to moderate relative to typical effect sizes in the personality literature. Meta-analysis is usually used to glean insights about research domains by summarizing their entire empirical literature. But it is also an effective tool for demonstrating the reliability of a smaller set of effect sizes. Thus, we conducted a "mini" meta-analysis of the correlations observed in the three studies. We first averaged the four correlation coefficients in Study 1 because these were from the same sample. We then calculated the overall effect size. Both unweighted and weighted means were .22. The confidence interval for the weighted mean ranged from .09 to .34. The combined  $Z$  was 3.18,  $p = .001$ . Finally, fixed and random effects models were identical. The result provides further support that narcissism and other-derogation are positively related in the absence of ego threat.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Research has repeatedly shown that narcissistic individuals respond to ego-threatening situations by derogating people in their social environment (Kernis & Sun, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993; Smalley & Stake, 1996; South et al., 2003). However, in the absence of ego threat, the results between narcissism and other-derogation were not consistent (Back et al., 2013; Lamkin et al., in press; South et al., 2003; Wood

et al., 2010). To resolve these contradictory findings, we examined narcissism and other-derogation in nonthreatening contexts in three studies. In Study 1, judges watched four videotaped dyadic interactions and rated the personality of the same four designated target individuals. Judges' narcissism, as measured by the NPI, and derogation of targets were positively related, indicating that narcissistic judges attributed relatively negative traits to the four targets, whereas less narcissistic judges attributed relatively positive traits to the same four targets. Self-esteem was unrelated to other-derogation except for one target.

In Study 2, each judge rated the personality of his or her own target, a friend of the judge. Targets rated their own personality as well. Judges' narcissism was positively related to target-derogation, replicating Study 1. This positive relation remained significant after controlling for targets' self-derogation, indicating that narcissistic derogation of others is just as likely to occur regardless of whether the target person has a positive or negative self-concept.

In Study 3, judges considered and rated the personality of the average Northeastern University student. To evaluate whether judges' ratings of targets were influenced by "assumed similarity," judges provided self-ratings of personality. In addition, judges completed measures of narcissism and self-esteem. Judges' narcissism and derogation of the average Northeastern University student were positively related, controlling for their own self-derogation. A multiple regression analysis revealed that narcissism positively predicted and self-esteem negatively predicted target-derogation.

Taken together, these findings indicate people who score high on narcissism derogate others in contexts that present no ego threat. This finding helps explain narcissistic individuals' constant, but unsuccessful, pursuit of self-worth (Brown & Bosson, 2001; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Narcissistic individuals emit positive first impressions, attracting others' attention, but admiration from others declines over time such that even their close friends negatively describe them (Park & Colvin, 2014). This decline may be explained, in part, by the antagonistic, other-derogating aspect of narcissism. As clearly shown in our study, narcissistic people derogate both strangers (Study 1) and close friends (Study 2) regardless of whether they feel threatened. This tendency leads to failure at acquiring admiration from others that is necessary to maintain a grandiose self-image, which may in turn intensify other-derogation (Back et al., 2013).

The results of the present research support the argument that narcissistic individuals are more concerned about agency than communion (Campbell, 1999; Campbell & Foster, 2007). In Campbell et al. (2002), people high in narcissism were more likely than those low in narcissism to rate their romantic partner lower on positive traits relative to themselves. In the present study, narcissistic individuals derogated the personality of their close friends (Study 2). These findings suggest that they are willing to sacrifice their interpersonal relationships to maintain their favorable self-image.

Earlier we raised the possibility that maintaining a highly favorable self-concept may require a negative opinion of others (i.e., other-derogation) because personality judgment is more likely to depend on social comparison processes than objective criteria (Festinger, 1954). However, this speculation was not supported by the findings in Studies 1 and 3. Although both narcissism and self-esteem presume a positive self-concept, only narcissism positively predicted other-derogation, controlling for self-esteem. Self-esteem was either unrelated or negatively related to other-derogation, controlling for narcissism. That is, unlike narcissistic individuals who generally evaluate other people negatively, people with high self-esteem tend to perceive others favorably. This difference implies that there are two distinct portraits of self-love (Campbell et al., 2002).

Across the three studies, we used clinicians' CAQ descriptions of the optimally adjusted person in the calculation of other-derogation scores. Despite evidence for the validity of these descriptions (Block, 2008), we were concerned about whether lay judges' perceptions of the CAQ items were similar to clinicians' perceptions. For example, clinicians might evaluate impulsive tendencies in the context of psychopathology, whereas student judges might consider peers who act quickly with seemingly little thought to be confident and decisive. To evaluate this concern, we asked six undergraduate students to rate the positivity of each CAQ item on a 9-point scale. The students' CAQ profiles were highly correlated, resulting in a composite CAQ profile that was highly reliable ( $\alpha = .96$ ). The clinician and student profiles were highly correlated,  $r = .90$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that clinicians and students agreed on the positivity of CAQ items.

Despite speculating about mechanisms underlying narcissism and other-derogation, the present research did not directly address this issue. Narcissistic individuals might use other-derogation to create and maintain a positive self-concept. Alternatively, given narcissistic individuals' perceived superiority over others, they might simply look down at others. These alternatives represent two perspectives on the development of narcissism. Some theorists argue narcissism is a compensatory mechanism for an underlying fragile self-concept that motivates narcissistic individuals to bolster their self-concept (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977). Other theorists argue narcissism is a consequence of praise heaped on children, independent of actual behavior or performance, producing a self-concept that is overly positive and distorted (Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, & Ramnath, 2004). More research is required to resolve this controversy.

The present study does not address whether judges experienced ego threat during their participation. Participants were not subjected to an ego threat manipulation. However, narcissistic individuals, who are hypersensitive to threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), may have experienced ego threat while rating others because the concept of evaluation became salient. Furthermore, narcissistic individuals may have experienced ego threat during the rating of a friend because it reminded

them of times when the friend outperformed them. Future research could address this issue by including one or more measures of perceived threat.

The present research examined other-derogation derived from judges' perceptions of others, not actual behavior toward others. While conversing with others, narcissistic individuals might redirect conversations or ignore comments made by partners to return attention to themselves (Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990). The logical next step in this line of research is to examine the relation between narcissism and behavioral other-derogation in the absence of ego threat.

Finally, narcissism in our research was assessed by the NPI, which is assumed to assess "normal" or "subclinical" narcissism by some researchers. Recently, Miller, Lynam, and Campbell (in press) examined the validity of the NPI in comparison to other measures of narcissism and found that the NPI had the highest similarity with the expert-rated profile of narcissistic personality disorder described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Furthermore, in an article reporting results on clinical and student samples, Miller, Gaughan, Pryor, Kamen, and Campbell (2009) examined the relation between self-reported NPI scores and ratings of narcissistic personality disorder derived from a semistructured interview. The correlation coefficient between the two narcissism scores was .54 in the clinical sample and .59 for the student sample. These are strong correlations given they come from independent data sources. However, the magnitude of the correlations is not sufficient to claim the NPI and the clinical interview are interchangeable (McCornack, 1956). On the other hand, the relation between the two methods is too strong to claim the NPI cannot assess pathological narcissism (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Trull & McCrae, 2002). Although we tentatively argue that the findings from our study may apply to pathological narcissism, we wait for more research to be done (Miller & Campbell, 2008, 2010; Miller et al., 2009; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Trull & McCrae, 2002).

In conclusion, narcissistic people tend to evaluate others negatively. Their derogating evaluations are directed at both friends and strangers in the presence or absence of ego threat.

## Notes

1. We measured narcissism using the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), which assesses grandiose narcissism. Thus, the results reported in this article may or may not apply to vulnerable narcissism. For the comparison between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, see Miller et al. (2011).
2. Target-derogation scores were analyzed with and without Fishers' *r*-to-*z* transformation. The results from both analyses were very similar. The results reported in this article were based on scores without the transformation.
3. To determine whether people who score high on narcissism evaluate the concept of optimal adjustment differently than people who

score low on narcissism, we recruited an independent sample of 61 participants to complete the NPI and rate the favorability of each CAQ item. The NPI was then correlated with each of the 100 CAQ favorability scores. Only eight correlations were significant out of 100, and no meaningful pattern could be discerned among the significant correlations. As a result, it appears that people have a similar concept of optimal adjustment whether they score high or low on narcissism.

4. We wondered why Male 2 stood out and learned that judges' derogation scores of Male 2 were much higher than the other three targets. In fact, judges in general rated Male 2's personality in a negative way but rated the others in a positive way. When we compared each target's own personality description with the adjustment prototype, Male 2 had the lowest correlation coefficient, implying that Male 2 himself described his own personality in a less positive way compared to the other three targets. Thus, albeit speculative, it is possible that Male 2 was relatively maladjusted, and judges high in self-esteem reacted more negatively to Male 2's maladjustment.

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