

Narcissism and Self-Enhancement: Self-Presentation, Affect, and the Moderating  
Role of Contingencies of Self-Worth

Submitted by

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## Abstract

Narcissists typically present themselves in self-enhancing ways to gain validation (through positive social appraisals) of grandiose, yet uncertain self-views. Using e-mail, Studies 1 and 2 investigated several intra- and interpersonal variables that may influence narcissists' self-presentational behaviour. University students rated themselves on self domains requiring either external validation (e.g., attractiveness) or internal validation (e.g., morality), after being randomly assigned to be either accountable or non-accountable to an evaluative audience for their self-ratings (Study 1), to present their self-ratings to either a single or multiple person evaluative audience (Study 2), and to expect to present their self-ratings to either a high or low status evaluative audience (Studies 1 and 2). Results suggested that when degree of external self-worth contingency (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001) was high, narcissists were insensitive to strategic self-presentational requirements, presenting themselves in a typically self-enhancing manner on external domains when accountable and when presenting to a multiple person audience. Non-narcissists showed more contextual sensitivity when degree of external self-worth contingency was high, and were more modest when these social contextual variables were present. Participants in Study 3 were given bogus positive or negative personality feedback on either their moral virtue or competitive spirit. Narcissists reported greater anger after receiving negative feedback, while also responding to negative feedback with inflated self-presentations. A key finding was that the combination of a high degree of self-worth contingency and negative feedback resulted in increases in self-reported

depression and drops in state self-esteem in narcissists. Results suggest that narcissists are chronically vigilant for self-enhancement opportunities, but may be insensitive to social constraints and norms in their efforts to construct their grandiose identities. Narcissists are especially vigilant for self-enhancement opportunities on contingent domains, yet when negative feedback is received in these domains where self-worth is staked, depression and lowered self-esteem may result.

## Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of this thesis, this thesis contain no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work had been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

As the supervisor of this thesis, Dr. Arthur A. Stukas made important contributions on a conceptual and theoretical level, and also in the research design and analyses. However, for the most part, I designed and conducted the experimental work, analysed the data, and developed all the written work.

All the research reported in this thesis was approved by the La Trobe University Faculty of Science, Technology, and Engineering Human Research Ethics Committee (Study 1: FHEC03/R81; Study 2: FHEC05/R80; Study 3: FHEC04/R72).

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