“Isn’t It Fun to Get the Respect That We’re Going to Deserve?” Narcissism, Social Rejection, and Aggression

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Across four studies, narcissists were more angry and aggressive after experiencing a social rejection than were nonnarcissists. In Study 1, narcissism was positively correlated with feelings of anger and negatively correlated with more internalized negative emotions in a self-reported, past episode of social rejection. Study 2 replicated this effect for a concurrent lab manipulation of social rejection. In Study 3, narcissists aggressed more against someone who rejected them (i.e., direct aggression). In Study 4, narcissists were also more aggressive toward an innocent third party after experiencing social rejection (i.e., displaced aggression). Narcissists were not more aggressive after social acceptance. Self-esteem plays little role in predicting aggression in response to rejection. These results suggest that the combination of narcissism and social rejection is a powerful predictor of aggressive behavior.

Keywords: *social rejection; social exclusion; narcissism; aggression*

> Eric Harris (one of the Columbine shooters): I could convince them that I’m going to climb Mount Everest, or I have a twin brother growing out of my back. I can make you believe anything.
>
> Dylan Klebold (one of the Columbine shooters): Directors will be fighting over this story.
> Harris: Tarentino . . . Spielberg.
>
> Harris (after picking up a shotgun and making a shooting noise): Isn’t it fun to get the respect that we’re going to deserve?

Over the past few years, a series of school shootings have occurred across the United States, sparking a discussion of why these incidents took place and how to prevent them. One analysis found that most of the school shooters experienced rejection by their peers (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, in press). Experimental and correlational evidence shows that young people who are socially rejected are more aggressive toward others (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). However, not everyone who experiences rejection responds in the same way. Many children are rejected by their peers, but only a few become school shooters or perpetrate serious aggression against others. Some rejected children and adults become sad or anxious instead of becoming angry and aggressive. In other words, there are individual differences in emotion and behavior following social rejection. What type of person will become angry and lash out at others? In this article, we focus on narcissism as one individual difference that may influence emotion and behavior after social rejection.

Both real-life events and previous psychological research suggest that narcissism might be a crucial moderator of aggressive and angry reactions to rejection. The quotes in the epigraph above, spoken by the Columbine shooters and reported in *Time* magazine (December 20, 1999), seem to reflect narcissistic thinking. Although we cannot be certain that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had narcissistic personalities, there is an eerie and strik-

Authors’ Note: During part of the completion of this research, the first author was supported by an NRSA postdoctoral grant from the National Institutes of Health, MH12329. We would like to thank Roy F. Baumeister, Brad J. Bushman, Kathleen R. Catanese, and Michael Kernis for their help and advice. Address correspondence concerning this article to Jean M. Twenge, Department of Psychology, San Diego State University, 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182-4611; e-mail: jtwenge@mail.sdsu.edu.

PSPB, Vol. 29 No. 2, February 2003 261-272
DOI: 10.1177/0146167202239051
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ing resemblance between their statements and the traits measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the most common measure of narcissism. In the first quote, Harris claims he can make people believe anything, strikingly similar to NPI item #35, "I can make anyone believe anything I want them to." Harris's statement about getting respect closely echoes item #14, "I insist upon getting the respect that is due me." Both perpetrators believed that directors would want to film their story, a variant on item #37, "I wish someone would someday write my biography," and a general illustration of their craving for attention (e.g., item #7, "I like to be the center of attention"). Thus, the combination of rejection by peers and a narcissistic, grandiose view of the self seemed to be two motivating factors behind the shootings at Columbine and possibly other acts of violence.

Psychological research also supports the view that narcissism is linked to increased violence and aggression. Narcissism (or "egotism") appears to be an important factor in a range of violent incidents, from martial violence to rape (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Narcissism also was linked to aggression in a laboratory situation (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). In many of these examples, violence is part of a (warped) strategy for gaining "respect" and retaliating against a person or group that has caused the self insult or harm. As we detail below, narcissism is linked with anger and aggression in a number of complex ways.

Narcissism and Aggression

What is narcissism? As we use the construct in this article, narcissism refers to a normal personality trait that differs between people (as measured by the NPI) rather than the personality disorder described by the American Psychiatric Association (Narcissistic Personality Disorder [NPD]). It is important to note, however, that the NPI was developed to measure the characteristics of NPD (it is based directly on the DSM-III criteria) in the normal population; thus, the difference between normal narcissism and NPD is largely one of degree. The NPI is far and away the most common measure used by social and personality researchers to assess narcissism in normal populations. The most recent review on narcissism, for example, focused almost exclusively on empirical data collected with the NPI (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Because narcissism is a complex construct, the NPI is also complex, with seven (Raskin & Terry, 1988) or possibly four (Emmons, 1984) correlated subfactors. Although (or perhaps because) there is some disagreement about the factor-structure of the NPI, the vast majority of research uses the total scale score as the primary predictor variable. Of importance, the NPI has been validated extensively in normal populations (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). The NPI correlates with observer rating of narcissistic acts (Buss & Chiodo, 1991) as well as inflated self-beliefs compared to accurate criteria (e.g., John & Robins, 1994). In short, the NPI is used to assess overt or observable narcissism; people who report being narcissistic on the NPI look and act like narcissists. This is distinct from the "covert," or hidden, narcissism that has been postulated by some researchers (e.g., Wink, 1991). Covert narcissists are emotionally depleted, lack energy, and are relatively unhappy (e.g., Rose, in press). Although covert narcissism has narcissism in its name, it is a very different construct from narcissism as measured by the NPI or even as conceptualized in common language.

In general, narcissism is a complex trait that includes inflated views of self, intrapsychic and interpersonal strategies for maintaining these inflated self-views, and poor relational functioning (see Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001, for a recent review). To begin with, narcissists have highly positive self-views, particularly in the domains of physical attractiveness and agentic traits such as intelligence and extraversion (Campbell, Rudich & Sedikides, 2002; Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994). Narcissists' self-views, however, can appear unstable. Indeed, narcissism is associated with high unstable self-esteem (Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998). Narcissists rely on several strategies to maintain their inflated self-beliefs. For example, they fantasize about fame and power (Raskin & Novacek, 1991) and blame situational factors when they do not succeed (e.g., Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000). Most important for our discussion here, these confrontations with failure can be accompanied by anger (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998).

Narcissists also maintain their inflated self-views interpersonally by seeking to dominate others (Carroll, 1987) and "showing off" (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). When narcissists fail to win, they react badly. Narcissists distort their own positive contributions to tasks and blame others for failures (Campbell et al., 2000; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; John & Robins, 1994). They derogate competitors (Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993) and individuals who give them unflattering feedback (Kernis & Sun, 1994). In short, when narcissists confront evidence that disagrees with their self-views, they externalize blame. Thus, they may be likely to react to threats with anger (an externalizing emotion) rather than sadness or anxiety (both internalizing emotions).

One would expect that these narcissistic strategies for maintaining inflated self-opinions are linked to a lack of closeness in their interpersonal relationships. This is indeed the case. Compared to nonnarcissists, narcissists

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report lower levels of empathy (P. J. Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984), intimacy (Carroll, 1987), communion (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), caring (Campbell, 1999), commitment (Campbell & Foster, 2002), and selflessness (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002). Instead of intimacy, narcissists seem willing to use or exploit relationships with others for their own ends (e.g., Biscardi & Schill, 1995; Campbell, 1999). This behavior is not without costs. Over time, narcissists become disliked by others (Paulhus, 1998).

Links with aggression. The link between threatened egotism (i.e., inflated self-views) and aggression has been extensively documented across a range of situations (Baumeister et al., 1996). The authors noted that, contrary to much popular opinion, low self-esteem is not a cause of violence. Rather, violence was often a response to ego threats by persons with inflated self-views. For example, gang violence is often provoked by ego threats. Someone shows the egotistical individual "disrespect" and the response can often be violent. Not surprisingly, men imprisoned for a violent crime scored significantly higher on the NPI than did male college students (Bushman, Baumeister, Phillips, & Gilligan, 2001).

Empirical research has uncovered evidence for narcissists' antisocial behavior in response to failure feedback. As noted previously, narcissists get angry when they receive failure feedback (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998); they blame others for the negative feedback rather than themselves. Narcissists are also willing to derogate others after receiving threatening feedback (e.g., Kernis & Sun, 1994).

Direct evidence for the link between narcissism and aggression following failure feedback also has been reported. Bushman and Baumeister (1998) presented a pair of experiments in which some participants received bogus negative feedback (a negative evaluation of a written essay). This feedback was ostensibly presented by a peer. The participant was then given the opportunity to blast loud white noise at the person who had insulted them. (Of course, no individuals were actually blasted with the noise.) The authors found that narcissists were more willing than nonnarcissists to aggressively cause pain to the person issuing the insult.

These researchers also examined displaced aggression following failure feedback. Although narcissists were willing to cause pain to those responsible for the failure feedback (i.e., direct aggression), narcissists were no more likely than nonnarcissists to respond to failure feedback by blasting "innocent" individuals (i.e., displaced aggression). In sum, there is solid evidence that narcissists respond to failure feedback by aggressing against the sources of those threats. However, the aggressive responding has not been shown to extend to noninvolved others.

Social Rejection and Aggression

In an overarching review, Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that human beings have an innate need to belong. People need to belong to social groups and feel accepted by others. This need is arguably rooted in human evolution, where individuals who were alienated from the group were less likely to reproduce and made easy prey (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Rejected individuals are also prone to other maladaptive behaviors, such as self-defeating choices (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002) and reduced reasoning ability (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002).

Therefore, it would seem logical that people would respond to social rejection with prosocial and appeasing behaviors. However, research suggests that social rejection instead allows the expression of aggressive impulses. In a series of studies, Twenge et al. (2001) found that socially excluded individuals reacted with increased aggression. In one experiment, participants who believed others had rejected them blasted an unrelated person with higher levels of noise (compared to those who believed others had accepted them). In another experiment, participants who believed they would be alone later in life gave a more negative job evaluation to someone who had insulted them. Thus, on average, people react to social exclusion with aggression. However, there are necessarily individual differences in how aggressively people respond to rejection; we propose that narcissism is one of these moderating individual differences.

The Present Research

To recap, narcissists respond to failure feedback with anger (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998) and aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). There is no evidence of displaced aggression in response to failure feedback. Likewise, research has not examined whether narcissists respond to social rejection with aggression. Research on social rejection has found a link to aggression, but this work has not examined individual difference variables such as narcissism.

Will narcissists respond to social rejection with increased anger and aggression? We predict that this will indeed be the case. This prediction rests on several grounds. First, social rejection is likely to be perceived by narcissists as an ego threat. Thus, social rejection should result in aggression (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Likewise, social rejection implies disrespect, and narcissists' response to social rejection should include anger and aggression (Baumeister et al., 1996). Finally, this prediction is consistent with the behavior observed in several of the school shooters (e.g., Leary et al., in press). On the other hand, we should note that it is possible that narcissists will emerge relatively unscathed by social

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rejection. This may be the result of narcissists' relative disinterest in close relationships (e.g., Carroll, 1987) or their immunity to rejection from those whom they do not perceive as having high social status. The present research will test these two competing positions.

We examine this prediction in four studies. In Study 1, participants recalled a past event from their own lives when they experienced social rejection and then reported their mood during these events on a scale designed to measure both externalized and internalized negative emotions (i.e., anger vs. more internal emotions such as sadness or anxiety). In Study 2, we manipulated social rejection in the laboratory and then measured feelings of anger versus internalized emotions. In Study 3, we measured direct aggression (i.e., aggression against members of the rejecting group) following social rejection. Finally, in Study 4, we measured displaced aggression (i.e., aggression toward an innocent third party) following social rejection.

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we wanted to examine the relationship between narcissism and reactions to social rejection. We used a narrative approach (e.g., Baumeister, Dori, & Hastings, 1998; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997), asking participants to tell a story about a time they felt socially rejected. Participants then described their emotional responses on a 33-item Likert-scale mood measure. This strategy allowed us to explore participants' self-reports of their reactions to a social rejection that actually happened.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 56 undergraduates (30 men, 26 women) fulfilling a course requirement in introductory psychology. Participants were 72% White and 28% racial minority; average age was 18.7 years.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

Participants completed the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965), and the revised Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (JFFIS) (Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Janis & Field, 1959). All of these measures have satisfactory validity and reliability. To simplify interpretation, all measures were scored so that high scores reflected positive self-feelings. For regression analyses including the self-esteem measures, we *z* scored the RSE and JFFIS and added them together to form a composite score (the two measures were correlated at .79). This both simplifies analysis and prevents multicollinearity.

Participants were then asked to tell a story about a time they felt rejected. The instructions read as follows:

> Think about a time when you were rejected by a person or a group about your own age. (If the rejection is by an organized group of people make sure it is of people about your same age. For example, being rejected from a college or job is NOT what we are asking about.) That is, describe an episode in which you wanted to spend time with or do something with someone and that person or persons did not let you. Please do NOT describe a romantic rejection, if possible. If you have several instances in mind, try to choose one that is either especially memorable and/or especially recent, so the experience will be fresh in your mind and your thoughts and feelings easy to recall. Please tell the whole story. Please describe the circumstances, how you felt, and what you did.

Participants were then asked to complete a mood measure; they were instructed to complete it in reference to their feelings at the time they felt rejected: "Now we would like you to use the scale below to describe how you felt DURING THE TIME OF THE STORY YOU JUST TOLD (*NOT* NOW). When you were rejected or left out, how did you feel?"

The mood measure included 7 items referring to feelings of anger (irritated, angry, hostile, annoyed, wrathful, enraged, and irate) and 26 items referring to more internalized negative affect (e.g., sad, anxious, humiliated, foolish, ashamed, fearful, guilty, embarrassed, and unhappy). Participants responded to each adjective on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Although the sample size was too small for a factor analysis of the mood items, the two scales did demonstrate satisfactory reliability: The alpha for the anger items was .86 and for the internalized negative affect items was .96.

Results

Did narcissists report more anger following social rejection? Anger was positively correlated with narcissism when we controlled for internalized negative affect, $r(52) = .36$, $p < .01$ (p values throughout are based on one-tailed tests, given the unidirectional predictions based on previous research). In addition, internalized negative affect was negatively correlated with narcissism when we controlled for anger, $r(52) = -.40$, $p < .001$. (Anger and internalized negative affect were correlated .46, and we controlled each for the other to examine their unique influence. NPI scores do not correlate with either variable in simple bivariate correlations, suggesting a suppressor effect.) These results were similar when sex of participant was also controlled. In sum, narcissists feel more anger and less internalized negative affect after a reported, past rejection experience.

In contrast, the self-esteem measures were not correlated with anger when controlled for internalized nega-

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tive affect ($r = .01$ for the RSE and $r = .00$ for the JFFIS). This effect also occurred when narcissism, the self-esteem composite, and internalized negative affect were regressed on anger (see Table 1); narcissism predicted feelings of anger, whereas self-esteem did not.

However, both self-esteem measures were correlated with internalized negative affect when controlled for anger, $r(52) = -.63$, $p < .001$, for the RSE and $r(52) = -.55$, $p < .001$, for the JFFIS. When narcissism, self-esteem, and anger are regressed on internalized negative affect, self-esteem produces the highest beta (–.51, $p < .001$), although the beta for narcissism is still significant (–.21, $p < .05$). Thus, whereas both narcissism and self-esteem predict feelings of internalized negative affect after rejection, only narcissism predicts feelings of anger.

To summarize, narcissists report that they respond to rejection with greater anger but less internalized negative emotion than do nonnarcissists. This finding also stands when gender and self-esteem are controlled. Narcissism uniquely predicts anger after a rejection experience.

TABLE 1: Regression Predicting Anger After Past Rejection Experience (Study 1)

Predictor Variable	*Unstandardized* B	*Standardized* β	t
Narcissism (NPI)	0.39	.32	2.62**
Self-esteem composite	–0.26	–.05	–0.34
Internalized negative affect	0.14	.51	3.30**

NOTE: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.
$^{**}p < .01$.

STUDY 2

Study 1 demonstrated that narcissists reported reacting to social rejection with more anger and fewer internalized negative emotions. Study 1 was potentially limited, however, in that it asked participants to recall a time when they felt rejected. Narcissism could have influenced the type of stories participants told, which might then have influenced their reports of emotional experience. Perhaps narcissists were more likely to tell stories about rejections that made them angry rather than those that made them sad or anxious. If this is true, narcissists may not react to social rejection with more anger and fewer internalized negative emotions as a general rule.

To address this possibility, we conducted a second study that manipulated social rejection by peers in the laboratory. For Study 2, we adapted a procedure used by Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs (1995); Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, and Holgate (1997); and Twenge et al. (2001). A group of people performed a get-acquainted task and afterward all participants were asked to name the two people they would like to work with individually. We then informed some of the participants that no one had chosen to work with them, a palpable and seemingly unanimous social rejection.

We also included a socially accepted group in this study: Some participants were told that everyone had chosen to work with them. We used this as a comparison group to determine if narcissists also reported more anger and/or fewer internalized negative emotions after social acceptance. All participants then completed the same emotion measure used in Study 1: a list of emotion items including 7 anger items and 26 internalized negative affect items. We hoped that by actually manipulating social rejection in a laboratory setting we could gain converging evidence on narcissists' affective reactions.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 55 undergraduates (33 men, 22 women) fulfilling a course requirement in introductory psychology. Participants were 76% White and 24% racial minority; average age was 18.8 years. Two additional participants expressed suspicion about the manipulation; their data were not included in any of the statistical analyses.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

Participants arrived at the lab in single-sex groups of 4 to 6 people after signing up for a study called Group Decisions. They were first asked to complete a demographic form and the NPI. They were given nametags on which they wrote their first names. They were then given both written and oral instructions to (a) learn each others' names and then (b) talk for about 15 min using a set of questions as a guide. The questions were taken from the relationship closeness induction task developed by Sedikides and colleagues (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). This task has been shown to induce closeness equally well in narcissists and nonnarcissists (Campbell et al., 2000). After 20 min, the experimenter led the participants to separate rooms, where they completed a demographic form. They then completed a page with the following instructions: "We are interested in forming groups in which the members like and respect each other. Below, please name the two people (out of those you met today) you would most like to work with." The experimenter collected these sheets, telling the participants she would return with their group assignments.

Participants were then randomly assigned to be accepted or rejected by the group. Some participants ($n = 20$) were told that no one had chosen them (and thus they had been rejected by the group). Others ($n = 35$) were told that everyone had chosen them (and thus they had been accepted by the group). Men and women were

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evenly distributed across conditions. They were then asked to complete the 33-item mood measure with anger and internalizing, internalized negative emotion words (the same measure used in Study 1). In this sample, reliability for the anger items was .78 and reliability for the internalized negative affect items was .88.

After they completed the questionnaire, participants were carefully debriefed. They were told that the rejection by the group was randomly assigned. Participants were reassured that they had indeed been chosen by some group members and that the feedback was untrue. The experimenter also apologized for the deception.

Results

The results of Study 2 were similar to those for Study 1: Narcissists demonstrated more anger after social rejection. The inclusion of a group of accepted participants also showed that narcissists' anger was unique to the rejection experience because narcissists did not report more anger after being accepted. When entered into a regression equation to predict anger, the interaction between narcissism and condition (acceptance or rejection) was significant (see Table 2 and Figure 1; the regression equation in the table includes the main effects of narcissism and condition as well as the interaction).

Among the rejected participants, narcissism was positively correlated with anger in a bivariate correlation, $r(33) = .31$, $p < .05$. Narcissism was not correlated with internalized negative emotions, $r(33) = .03$. Similar to Study 1, anger and internalized negative emotions were highly positively correlated ($r = .71$), so we performed a partial correlation to examine the unique variance of anger. This analysis showed that anger was positively correlated with NPI scores when controlled for internalized negative emotions, $r(31) = .42$, $p < .01$. Internalized negative emotions were negatively correlated with NPI scores when controlled for anger, $r(31) = -.30$, $p < .05$. These results were unchanged when sex of participant was also controlled. In addition, there were no significant interactions between sex and NPI scores or with condition.

An analysis of the accepted group's data showed that narcissists reported less internalized negative affect even after social acceptance, $r(18) = -.37$, $p < .05$. They also felt somewhat less anger after acceptance, $r(18) = -.35$, $p < .08$. Thus, narcissists seem to experience fewer feelings of sadness, anxiety, guilt, and embarrassment across situations. If narcissists feel fewer internalized negative emotions even when they are accepted, it appears that rejection was not causing all of these feelings. Greater feelings of anger, however, require the stimulus of social rejection; narcissists are not simply angry all the time.

To summarize, Study 1 (using a narrative technique) and Study 2 (using a laboratory technique) both revealed a similar pattern of findings. Compared to non-narcissists, narcissists respond to social rejection with more anger and fewer internalized negative emotions. However, narcissists seem to experience fewer internalized negative emotions all the time (or at least across two situations very different in their valence: social rejection vs. social acceptance). The consistent difference between narcissists and non-narcissists lies in anger after rejection. Narcissists are not angrier after social acceptance.

TABLE 2: Regression Predicting Anger After Current, Laboratory Rejection or Acceptance Experience (Study 2)

Predictor Variable	*Unstandardized* B	*Standardized* β	t
Main effects			
Narcissism (NPI)	0.08	.15	1.14
Condition (rejection vs. acceptance)	1.16	.14	1.06
Interaction			
NPI × Condition	1.10	.28	2.07*

NOTE: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.
*$p < .05$.

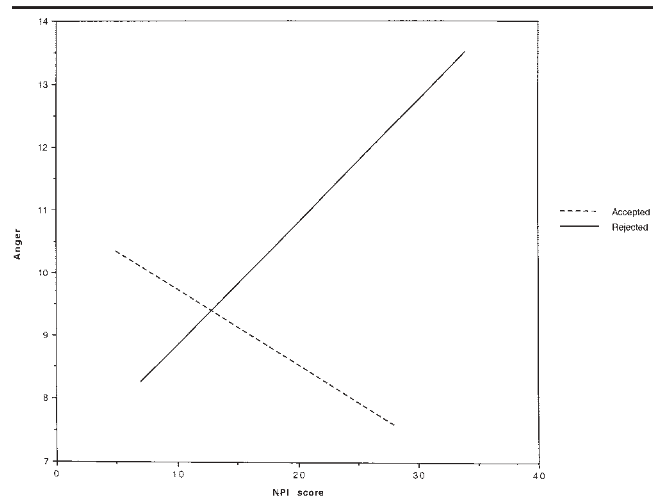

Figure 1 Narcissism and anger after social rejection versus social acceptance.
NOTE: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.

STUDY 3

Are narcissists also likely to lash out with aggression toward the people who rejected them? We sought to answer this question in Study 3. Similar to the method used in Study 2, participants experienced a social rejection from a group of peers they had talked with in the laboratory. Participants were then given the opportunity to administer blasts of unpleasant noise to one of the group members. Participants believed they were playing

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a game via computer with this person. In the game, the loser of each trial was punished by hearing a blast of noise, delivered through headphones (see, e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). The participants were told that they could set the intensity and duration of the noise blast heard by the other person. Thus, participants believed they had a weapon with which they could hurt another human being.

We also made two other changes to the method used in Study 2. First, participants also completed the RSE and JFFIS. This was done so that we could determine the independent effect of narcissism on aggression apart from self-esteem (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Second, we used a different mood measure (the PANAS; D. Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) that would tap anger feelings in a different way.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 31 undergraduates (16 men, 15 women) fulfilling a course requirement in introductory psychology. Participants were 74% White and 26% racial minority; average age was 18.9 years. Three additional participants expressed suspicion about the manipulation and/or the computer setup; their data were not included in any of the statistical analyses.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

Participants first completed the NPI, RSE, and JFFIS. As in Study 2, participants arrived at the lab in single-sex groups of 4 to 6 people. They talked for 15 min and were then led to separate rooms, where they nominated the two people with whom they desired further interaction. All participants were told that no one had picked him or her. Each participant then completed the PANAS mood measure. The PANAS includes 10 negative mood items, 2 measuring anger, and 8 measuring internalized negative emotions.

Participants then began the computer game, which they believed they were playing with a randomly chosen member of the group. (They were not told which person, specifically, they were playing.) In actuality, the computer was programmed to mimic a person's responses. (This computer program was graciously provided by Brad J. Bushman.) Participants were told that they would have to press a button as fast as possible on each trial; whoever lost the trial would hear a blast of white noise through the headphones attached to the computer. Each participant set in advance the noise that the other person would hear, including both the intensity (a level ranging from 0 to 10) and the duration (controlled by holding down the mouse button to set the length of time that the other person would hear the noise). Thus, the participants were effectively given a weapon that could be used to hurt the other person.

A Macintosh computer controlled the events in the reaction time task and recorded the participants' noise levels and noise durations for each of 25 trials. Previous research has shown that the first trial is the best measure of unprovoked aggression because the participants have not yet received bursts of noise from their opponents (see, e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Thus, the noise intensity and duration levels from the first trial were used here as the measure of aggression. The two variables (intensity and duration) from the first trial were z scored and summed to serve as a composite measure of aggression.

After each participant completed the computer game, he or she was carefully debriefed. They were told that the rejection by the group had been experienced by everyone. They were reassured that they had indeed been chosen by some group members and that the feedback was untrue. The experimenter also apologized for the deception. They were also told that they were not actually playing the computer game with another person and that the responses were produced by a computer program.

Results

Would narcissists be more aggressive toward persons who had socially rejected them? We found that narcissism was indeed positively correlated with the composite measure of aggression, $r(31) = .52$, $p < .002$. The RSE was not significantly correlated with aggression, $r(31) = .19$, *ns*, nor was the JFFIS, $r(31) = .18$, *ns*.

When narcissism and self-esteem were included in a simultaneous regression equation to predict aggression, narcissism was still a significant predictor, whereas self-esteem was not (see Table 3). We combined the RSE and JFFIS (which correlate .80) into a composite to simplify the analysis. Thus, the link between narcissism and aggression remains robust even when self-esteem is statistically controlled. These results were almost identical when sex of participant was included in the equation. We also tested for the interaction between sex and narcissism; this interaction was not a significant predictor of aggression. Thus, narcissism was positively correlated with aggression, whereas self-esteem was not.

Clearly, narcissism is linked to aggression against the perpetrators of a social rejection. Does the link between narcissism and anger found in Studies 1 and 2 replicate with a different affect measure (the PANAS)? It appears that it does. Narcissism was significantly correlated with feelings of anger, both in a bivariate analysis, $r(29) = .32$, $p < .05$, and when controlled for internalized negative affect, $r(28) = .40$, $p < .01$. Narcissism was not correlated with internalized negative affect in a bivariate analysis ($r =$

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TABLE 3: Regression Predicting Direct Aggression After Current, Laboratory Rejection Experience (Study 3)

Predictor Variable	*Unstandardized* B	*Standardized* β	t
Narcissism (NPI)	0.12	.51	2.97**
Self-esteem composite	0.03	.03	0.17

NOTE: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.
$^{**}p < .01$.

–.05); however, the effect was significant when controlled for anger, $r(28) = –.25$, $p < .05$. This result is similar to that found in Studies 1 and 2, although the correlation with internalized negative emotions is lower. Overall, this study demonstrates again that narcissists are angrier after rejection; even more important, they are also more behaviorally aggressive toward people who have rejected them.

STUDY 4

Study 3 showed that narcissists were more aggressive toward a peer who had rejected them socially; thus, participants who scored high on the NPI were more likely to aggress directly against the source of a social rejection. In Study 4, we explored displaced aggression. Participants in this study were given the opportunity to aggress against an innocent third party—someone who was not a member of the group who administered the rejection.

We also included an accepted group in this study, randomly assigning some participants to hear that everyone had chosen them as a partner for further interaction. Thus, this group experienced social acceptance rather than social rejection. Including this comparison group allows us to determine if narcissists are also more aggressive after social acceptance.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 61 undergraduates (31 men, 30 women) fulfilling a course requirement in introductory psychology. Participants were 82% White and 18% racial minority; average age was 18.4 years. Four additional participants expressed suspicion about the manipulation and/or the computer setup; their data were not included in any of the statistical analyses.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

As in Study 3, participants met a group of their peers and nominated who they wanted to work with next. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions: Rejected participants ($n = 39$) were told that no one had chosen them for further interaction and accepted participants ($n = 22$) were told that everyone had chosen them. Participants then completed the PANAS mood measure. All participants then played the reaction time game, in which they chose the noise intensity and duration for the other participant. However, in this study, they were told that they were playing the game with a participant who was making up an experiment and thus someone who was not a member of the group who administered the rejection. Consequently, any aggression they expressed was displaced because the target was an innocent third party. As in Study 3, the noise choices for the first turn were *z* scored and added to form a composite measure of aggression.

Results

Were narcissists more likely to aggress against an innocent third party after experiencing a social rejection versus a social acceptance? The results showed that they were. In a regression equation predicting aggression, the interaction between narcissism and condition (acceptance vs. rejection) was significant at $p < .01$ (see Table 4). After rejection, narcissists were more aggressive even toward a new, innocent person; however, narcissists were not more aggressive after being socially accepted (see Figure 2). Among rejected participants, the correlation between NPI scores and aggression was significant, $r(37) = .42$, $p < .01$. In contrast, the accepted participants did not show a significant correlation between narcissism and aggression, $r(20) = –.17$, *ns*. Increased aggression seems to require the crucial combination of social rejection and high narcissism.

For the rejected participants, narcissism also was correlated with aggression when self-esteem (a composite of the RSE and JFFIS) was allowed to compete with narcissism to explain aggression in a simultaneous regression equation (the beta for narcissism was .39, $p < .01$, whereas the beta for self-esteem was .08, *ns*). The results were similar when sex of participant was entered into the equation. A Narcissism × Sex interaction term was not significant. In short, narcissism is linked to aggression against innocent third parties following social rejection even when self-esteem and gender were statistically controlled.

Is narcissism linked to angry affect as well? We performed separate analyses for the rejected and accepted participants who responded to the PANAS (the *n*s are smaller here because a few subjects did not complete the PANAS). For the rejected group ($n = 37$), anger was correlated with narcissism ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) but internalized negative affect was not ($r = –.17$, *ns*). Anger was also correlated with narcissism when controlled for internalized negative affect, $r(34) = .46$, $p < .01$, but internalized negative affect was not correlated with narcissism when controlled for anger, $r(34) = –.10$. This result was largely consistent with Study 3. For the accepted group ($n = 17$), there were no significant correlations between narcis-

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TABLE 4: Regression Predicting Displaced Aggression After Current, Laboratory Rejection or Acceptance Experience (Study 4)

Predictor Variable	*Unstandardized* B	*Standardized* β	t
Main effects			
Narcissism (NPI)	0.06	.21	1.65*
Self-esteem composite	0.06	.06	0.47
Condition (rejection vs. acceptance)	1.44	.42	3.58***
Interaction			
NPI × Condition	0.46	.28	2.43**

NOTE: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

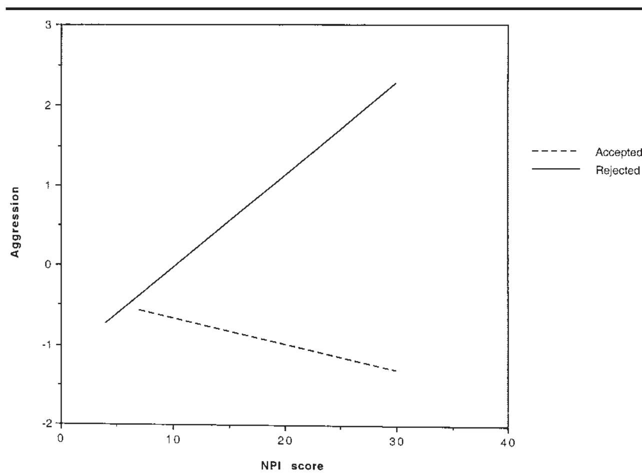

Figure 2 Narcissism and aggression after social rejection versus social acceptance.
NOTE: NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory.

sism and emotion. The interaction between condition (accepted vs. rejected) and narcissism was significant when regressed on anger ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .05$; narcissism and condition were also included in the regression equation). Similar to the results in Study 2, these results demonstrate that narcissists are angrier following social rejection but not following social acceptance. This study does not find a significant effect for internalized negative affect in either condition.

In sum, narcissism is linked to aggression toward an innocent third party following social rejection (but not after social acceptance). This finding differs from other research that has not found evidence of displaced aggression following a specific ego threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Why the difference? In this research, narcissists were rejected by three or four students from the same university (a defined group). They were then given the chance to aggress against another university student. It is possible that the rejection by the group (university students) compelled the narcissists to aggress against another member of the rejecting group (i.e., a fellow university student who was not involved in the original rejection) (Gaertner & Iuzzini, 2001). This possibility parallels the actual events in several of the school shootings. In many of these episodes, students who merely attended the same high school as the perpetrator were shot along with the students who actually rejected the perpetrator (Leary et al., 2001). The Bushman and Baumeister study did not include failure feedback from a group of students; thus, displaced aggression against an uninvolved group member would not be expected.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The goal of the present research was to test a model of narcissism and aggressive responding following social rejection. We predicted that narcissism would be positively related to angry and aggressive responses following social rejection. The results of four converging studies were clear. In Study 1, narcissism was associated with more anger and fewer internalized negative emotions after a past episode of social rejection related in a narrative. Study 2 manipulated social rejection in the laboratory; narcissists again reported increased anger and decreased internalized negative emotions compared to nonnarcissists. Narcissists were not more angry after being socially accepted. In Study 3, we extended the previous two studies by adding a behavioral measure of aggression. Following social rejection in a laboratory setting, narcissists were more likely than nonnarcissists to blast their rejecters with longer and louder bursts of white noise. Finally, in Study 4, we measured displaced aggression after rejection. Participants were given the opportunity to aggress against an "innocent" third party (someone who was not in the group doing the rejecting but still a university student). Narcissism was positively associated with a willingness to use this form of displaced aggression after a rejection experience. However, narcissism was not correlated with aggression or anger after an experience of social acceptance. Thus, the highest levels of aggression seem to require both high narcissism and an experience of social rejection.

The present research serves as a complement to earlier work by Bushman and Baumeister (1998). In these studies, narcissists responded to failure feedback with direct aggression (i.e., blasting an evaluator with noise). There was no evidence for displaced aggression against an "innocent" third party. The present research used methods similar to Bushman and Baumeister's; however, the catalyst for the aggression was social rejection from a group rather than failure feedback from an individual. Using this manipulation, we found evidence of direct

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aggression (i.e., aggression aimed at a person involved in the rejection), similar to their studies. In contrast to Bushman and Baumeister, we also found evidence for displaced aggression. It appears that social rejection facilitates displaced aggression on the part of narcissists, at least against individuals who might be viewed as members of the rejecting group, even if this group is as broad as "students from the same university."

The findings of the present research are particularly compelling given narcissists' reported lack of concern for interpersonal relatedness. As we noted previously, narcissists are low in the need for affiliation and high in the need for power, uninterested in caring relationships, game playing rather than selfless, and willing to take credit from close others for success and blame close others for failure. This apparent independence on the part of narcissists, however, may veil a deep need for social acceptance—or perhaps for social dominance. The need is only evident in the aftermath of social rejection. Rejected narcissists are not serene or unperturbed by relational dissolution. Rather, they become angry and violent toward rejecters and third parties alike.

Indeed, this may be a reasonable, albeit partial, depiction of the events at Columbine. Although we can only speculate, it may be that two individuals with inflated self-opinions became angry in the face of perceived social rejection. Certainly, there were other variables that influenced this attack. The attack might not have occurred without the availability of firearms or a basic script derived from popular movies. Narcissism and perceived social rejection, however, appear to be at least two of the central causes.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

The studies reported in this article have several strengths. Foremost, converging methods yielded consistent patterns of results. Narcissism was linked to anger and aggression using a narrative method and a laboratory manipulation, two different self-report emotion measures, and a measure of behavioral aggression. The behavioral measure of aggression in particular provides a highly realistic test of our hypothesis because participants are given the opportunity to cause pain to another human being. Participants who were socially accepted did not show a correlation between narcissism and anger or aggression, and the interaction between acceptance/rejection and narcissism predicted aggression in Study 4. This interaction also predicted anger in Study 2. Narcissists are not angry and aggressive all of the time, only when they are rejected and their status is threatened.

This study also provides the first evidence that reactions to social rejection might differ between individuals. Previous research (Twenge et al., 2001) established that social rejection provides a strong situation causing aggressive behavior. However, the present research shows that not everyone reacts to rejection in exactly the same way. Thus, there are both personal and situational causes of aggression following social rejection. Only some types of people (e.g., narcissists) react to rejection with very high levels of aggression.

These studies also demonstrate that self-esteem did not predict aggression after social rejection. Similar to Bushman and Baumeister (1998), we found that narcissism is a crucial variable for predicting aggressive behavior, whereas self-esteem is not. Thus, for example, school programs that attempt to identify students who might become violent should not name low self-esteem as a risk factor. Instead, high narcissism is a much more relevant risk factor for aggressive behavior, as is social rejection.

There are also limitations to this research. In particular, future research may want to include potential mediating variables that clarify how narcissists interpret social rejection. Our initial interpretation is that narcissists perceive rejection both as an ego threat as well as a loss of social status. Status and esteem are closely linked in narcissists, and past research has identified esteem as an outcome of status (Campbell, 1999; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991); however, narcissists may use additional avenues for gaining esteem. Narcissists' aggression therefore might both reflect anger at the ego threat coupled with an effort to gain status by aggressing against the rejecters. Overall, it seems likely that the aggression displayed by narcissists was both instrumental (with a goal in mind) as well as hostile; as Bushman and Anderson (2001) argue, the two types need not be distinguished from each other.

Likewise, future research should be aimed at uncovering the boundary conditions of narcissists' displaced aggression. Will narcissists aggress against a student from another university? Against a nonstudent? A child? We speculate that narcissists' aggression against "innocent" others is in part a result of the narcissist perceiving these individuals as part of a rejecting group (see, e.g., Gaertner & Iuzzini, 2001). This is apparently what occurred in many of the school shootings, when young persons who felt rejected by their peers chose to retaliate against everyone in their school, even those they had not interacted with. If this is true, their aggression would not extend to truly unconnected others. This is certainly an important topic for future research.

There is a related element of our research paradigm that needs to be highlighted. The participants in our studies were in a sense also members of the rejecting group. That is, participants and rejecters were from the same university. This design parallels the situation at Columbine (perpetrators and victims were from the same school). It is possible, however, that the advantages of

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and causes for using aggressing against individuals in one's own group are different from the advantages of and causes for aggressing rejecters from an outside group. Indeed, there may be instances where aggression in not expressed against rejecting outgroup members. This is an important question for future research.

Implications and Concluding Comments

Some experts may argue that violence reduction may be best obtained by eliminating social rejection (e.g., Aronson, 2000). If individuals avoid feeling rejected, they will not express aggression. This assertion is consistent with our findings; efforts directed to reducing social rejection such as those noted by Aronson are certainly justified. One caveat that arises, however, is that narcissistic individuals may be so highly attuned to ego threat or social rejection that they perceive threats where none are intended. Not everyone will be the most popular kid in school, and not everyone will be captain of the football team. Most individuals will accept this form of "social rejection," but narcissists may not. We could strive to eliminate all social hierarchies in schools, but this is likely to be impossible. Furthermore, it may reduce the social benefits of having status hierarchies in the first place. Thus, we would argue that efforts must be directed toward reducing narcissism as well as reducing rejection.

Can schools affect the self-concept and self-regulatory strategies of their students? They certainly try to do just that in many instances. In the past 15 years, efforts have been directed instead at *raising* self-opinions under the guise of the self-esteem movement (Blume, 1989; Outwater, 1990; Seligman, 1995; Swann, 1996; for a review, see Haney & Durlak, 1998). A recent meta-analysis found that these programs do indeed significantly increase reported self-esteem (Haney & Durlak, 1998). These programs are widespread, which might explain why children's self-esteem has increased steadily since the early 1980s (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Given the dangers associated with narcissism and the dubious importance of self-esteem (e.g., Baumeister, 1996), we would suggest that efforts to lower narcissism in schools are far more important than efforts directed toward raising self-esteem. We have self-esteem to spare in this country (e.g., Seligman, 1995; Twenge & Campbell, 2001). This is even true in minority groups that were at one time thought to be constrained by the bounds of low self-esteem (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Likewise, some authors argue that our society is excessively narcissistic (e.g., Lasch, 1978).

The central question is whether and how narcissism could be lowered in a classroom setting. To use broad brushstrokes, effective efforts would increase empathy and perspective taking, reward striving and mastery instead of dominance, and promote character over popularity. As Seligman (1995) suggests, it is more important that children develop confidence based on actual skills and abilities rather than be praised for making mistakes. The devil, as always, is in the details, and it is beyond our ken as researchers to provide more detailed direction. Rather, we hope that those in educational fields will debate this topic and develop strategies that address this issue.

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Received August 6, 2001
Revision accepted July 1, 2002

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