

## Assessing Hypersensitive Narcissism: A Reexamination of Murray's Narcism Scale

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A new measure of hypersensitive narcissism was derived by correlating the items of H. A. Murray's (1938) Narcism Scale with an MMPI-based composite measure of covert narcissism. In three samples of college students (total  $N = 403$ ), 10 items formed a reliable measure: the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS). The new HSNS and the MMPI-based composite showed similar patterns of correlations with the Big Five Inventory, and both measures correlated near zero with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, which assesses overt narcissism. Results support P. Wink's (1991) distinction between covert and overt narcissistic tendencies in the normal range of individual differences and suggest that it would be beneficial for personality researchers to measure both types of narcissism in future studies. © 1997 Academic Press

The clinical diagnostic criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (*DSM-III*, American Psychiatric Association, 1980) stimulated the interest of personality psychologists in the normal range of individual differences in narcissistic tendencies (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Wink & Gough, 1990). In addition to developing new scales such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1981), researchers also began to use earlier clinical measures such as the Narcissistic Personality Disorder Scale (NPDS; Ashby, 1978) in studies of non-clinical samples (i.e., undergraduate students; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984). Surprisingly, studies using both the NPI and the NPDS obtained correlations between these two scales ranging from  $-.09$  to  $.12$  (Chatham, Tibbals, &

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Harrington, 1993; Emmons, 1987; Hibbard, 1992; Mullins & Kopelman, 1988; Watson *et al.*, 1984). This lack of correlation suggests not only a problem with convergent validity, but also that a “jingle fallacy” may exist in the measurement of narcissism. The jingle fallacy occurs when different constructs have been labeled with the same name, leading the unsuspecting researcher to believe that all scales which bear the same name are interchangeable (Thorndike, 1904 as cited in Block, 1995).

Wink (1991) explored the lack of correlation between the NPI and the NPDS by investigating their relations with other measures of narcissism. His principal-components analysis of six MMPI-based narcissism scales yielded two orthogonal dimensions: the NPDS, the Narcissism-Hypersensitivity Scale (Serkownek, 1975), and Pepper and Strong’s (1958 as cited in Wink, 1991) narcissism scale all loaded on one component, while the MMPI-based alternative form of the NPI (Raskin & Novacek, 1989), and the narcissism scales of Morey, Waugh, and Blashfield (1985 as cited in Wink, 1991) and Wink and Gough (1990) loaded on the second principal component. This finding was replicated recently by Rathvon and Holmstrom (1996) in a study developing an MMPI-2 description of narcissism (see also Hibbard, 1992).

Wink (1991) interpreted the two principal components by drawing from the psychodynamic theory that distinguishes between overt and covert forms of narcissism (i.e., Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977). Whereas the overt form, similar to Reich’s (1949/1970) conception of the phallic narcissist, manifests itself with the boisterous, self-aggrandizing, vain, and interpersonally exploitative characteristics commonly associated with the *DSM-III* interpretation of narcissism, the covert form manifests itself with symptoms of vulnerability and hypersensitivity that have been emphasized more in some psychodynamic accounts (e.g., Kernberg, 1975, p. 229; Perry & Perry, 1996, p. 16). Wink (1991) named these two components Grandiosity-Exhibitionism (overt) and Vulnerability-Sensitivity (covert) and concluded that these two “faces” of narcissism can be measured using two sets of uncorrelated scales. Wink (1991) also noted that, in spite of their differences in interpersonal style, overtly and covertly narcissistic individuals do tend to share an underlying sense of entitlement and grandiose self-relevant fantasies.

The NPI and its MMPI-based alternative form have become accepted and widely used as measures of the overt type of narcissism emphasized in the *DSM-III*, the *DSM-III-R* (1987), and now the *DSM-IV* (1994). Researchers interested in the covert type of narcissism, however, have had to rely upon the less well known MMPI-based clinical measures that were studied by Wink (1991). In their review of narcissism measures, Raskin and Terry (1988) pointed to Murray’s (1938) Narcism Scale, which was created with his other indices of personality characteristics via his exploratory study of

Harvard University undergraduates, as an example of a neglected narcissism resource.<sup>1</sup> Despite its age, Murray's conception of narcissism remains a modern discourse on how an individual can be both vulnerable and self-absorbed at the same time. He also conceptualized the overt-covert distinction to be a split inherent to the dynamics of narcissism. Murray (1938, p. 180) noted that while narcissistic individuals may appear aggressively self-aggrandizing and exploitative, exhibiting delusions of grandeur and extravagant needs for attention, they may also manifest a proneness to feelings of neglect or belittlement and tend to exhibit hypersensitivity, feelings of anxiety, and delusions of persecution. The items in Murray's Narcism Scale reflect his conception of the narcissistic individual's dual dynamics: many of his items assess covert experiences of anxious self-preoccupation while some of them focus on more overtly self-aggrandizing and exploitative narcissistic tendencies.

In the present research we explore the neglected resource of Murray's Narcism Scale for the light it may be able to shed on the current ambiguities surrounding the conceptualization and measurement of narcissism. We decided to pursue a mirror-image of Raskin and Novacek's (1989) procedure in which they developed an MMPI-based alternate form of the NPI by correlating MMPI items with the NPI. In our study we correlate items from Murray's Narcism Scale with a composite of two MMPI-based measures of covert narcissism (the NPDS and the Narcissism-Hypersensitivity Scale) as well as with the NPI. Murray's Narcism Scale was constructed with face valid items, and his item pool could provide a constructive alternative to the current reliance upon MMPI items for the assessment of covert narcissistic tendencies in the normal range of individual differences. An MMPI-based description of Murray's measure should identify the items in his scale that are consistent with contemporary approaches to covert narcissism and facilitate the transformation of a previously overlooked narcissism scale into a shorter scale that could be used to assess those narcissistic tendencies which are not measured well by the NPI.

## METHOD

### *Participants and Procedure*

We will report here data from three samples of college students involved in an on-going project investigating the relationship between narcissism and shyness (Cheek & Hendin, 1996; Cheek & Melchior, 1985). Samples 1 ( $N = 109$ ) and 2 ( $N = 151$ ) consist of undergraduate women from a small, liberal arts college who completed a packet of questionnaires which included Murray's (1938) Narcism Scale, the NPDS (Ashby, 1978), Serkownek's (1975)

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<sup>1</sup> Murray (1938) used the term "narcism," which is an alternate spelling of narcissism, to name his scale and the term "narcisensitivity" to describe the hypersensitivity that he observed in narcissistic individuals.

Narcissism-Hypersensitivity Scale, and the 40-item version of the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Sample 2 also completed the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Sample 3 consists of 143 male undergraduates from a large, mid-Western university who completed both Murray's Narcism Scale and the 27-item Form A of the NPI (Raskin & Hall, 1981).

## Measures

*Murray's narcism scale.* This 20-item scale was developed in Murray's (1938) exploratory study of 51 Harvard University undergraduate males. We administered the items using a response format of 1 to 5 (1 = "very uncharacteristic or untrue; strongly disagree;" 5 = "very characteristic or true; strongly agree"). Cheek and Melchior (1985) found the alpha reliability of this scale to be .76.

*The narcissistic personality disorder scale.* The NPDS (Ashby, 1978; Ashby, Lee, & Duke, 1979) is a 19-item true-false scale (e.g., "I often feel as if things were not real."). It was derived by empirical criterion keying of items on the MMPI that differentiated between a group of narcissistic patients and two groups of non-narcissistic patients (see Solomon, 1982 for additional validity data). Ashby (1978) reported an alpha coefficient of reliability of .81. Subsequent researchers have found somewhat lower reliabilities; Wink (1991) found the alpha reliability of the scale to be .60. In the present study, alpha was .52 in Sample 1 and .61 in Sample 2. Both reliability analyses were performed without the item that we dropped (item #4 "I used to like drop-the-handkerchief") because many of our participants skipped this item apparently due to unfamiliarity with the item's content.

*The narcissism-hypersensitivity scale.* Serkownek's (1975) 17-item true-false scale (e.g., "I have often felt that strangers were looking at me critically") was empirical criterion keyed from the MMPI and is based on the MMPI Masculinity-Femininity scale. Wink (1991) found the alpha of this scale to be .72. Alpha reliabilities for our two samples were lower: .53 in Sample 1 and .46 in Sample 2.

*The composite MMPI-based measure of covert narcissism.* Based on Wink's (1991) principal-components analysis, we combined the items from the NPDS and the Narcissism-Hypersensitivity Scale to create a 35-item true-false composite measure of covert narcissism ( $\alpha = .70$  in both samples).

*The narcissistic personality inventory.* The 40-item revised form of the NPI (Raskin and Terry, 1988) is a true-false scale created by factor analysis of Raskin and Hall's (1979) original pool of 54 items. Raskin and Terry (1988) found the alpha for the 40-item scale to be .83. We found an alpha reliability of .80 for Sample 1 and .78 for Sample 2. Concerning the earlier version of the NPI, Raskin and Hall (1981) reported the alternate form reliability between the two original 27-item Form A and Form B versions to be .72. We found an alpha coefficient of reliability for Form A in Sample 3 of .76. A number of factor analytically derived subscales of the NPI exist; we report here only the Exploiteness/Entitlement (E/E; Emmons, 1987) subscale because of its previous relation to the NPDS (Emmons, 1987).<sup>2</sup> Using the 40-item version of the NPI in Samples 1 and 2, we were able to match 7 out of the 8 E/E items (e.g., "I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve") scored from the 54-item version of the NPI.

*The big five inventory.* The 35-item version of this inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) is rated from 1 to 5 with a 1 representing "disagree strongly" and 5 representing "agree strongly." John *et al.* report reliabilities for the BFI scales: Extraversion ( $\alpha = .88$ ); Agreeableness ( $\alpha = .75$ ); Conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .81$ ); Neuroticism ( $\alpha = .83$ ); Openness to

<sup>2</sup> Results for the other subscales of the NPI are available from the first author.

TABLE 1  
Correlations of Items from Murray's Narcism Scale with a Composite MMPI-Based Covert Narcissism Scale and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory

Murray narciss items	Sample 1 (N = 109)		Sample 2 (N = 151)	
	MMPI	NPI	MMPI	NPI
I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others.	.37**	.12	.33**	.15
My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or by the slighting remarks of others.	.40**	-.12	.39**	-.03
When I enter a room I often become self-conscious and feel that the eyes of others are upon me.	.46**	-.26**	.36**	-.03
I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others.	.27**	.12	.30**	.21**
I dislike being with a group unless I know that I am appreciated by at least one of those present.	.26**	.04	.42**	-.03
I feel that I am temperamentally different from most people.	.33**	.06	.41**	.15
I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way.	.37**	.01	.35**	.12
I easily become wrapped up in my own interests and forget the existence of others.	.28**	.09	.38**	.20*
I feel that I have enough on my hands without worrying about other people's troubles.	.32**	.07	.19*	.13
I am secretly "put out" when other people come to me with their troubles, asking me for my time and sympathy.	.28**	.06	.21**	.02
I talk a good deal about myself, my experiences, my feelings and my ideas.	-.01	.41**	.08	.28**
I have great faith in my own ideas and my own initiative.	-.41**	.45**	-.20*	.31**

*Note.* The composite MMPI-based covert narcissism measure is the sum of Ashby, Lee, and Duke's (1979) NPDS and Serkownek's (1975) Narcissism Hypersensitivity Scale.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

experience ( $\alpha = .83$ ). In the current study, we found similar reliabilities except for Openness to experience ( $\alpha = .68$ ).

## RESULTS

Analysis of the 20 items of Murray's Narcism Scale in relation to the NPI and the composite MMPI-based measure of covert narcissism for Samples 1 and 2 revealed 10 items which were significantly positively correlated with the measure of covert narcissism in both samples (see Table 1). These 10

items formed a reliable scale which we named the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS;  $\alpha = .72$  for Sample 1,  $M = 28.7$ ,  $SD = 6.2$ ;  $\alpha = .75$  for Sample 2,  $M = 29.7$ ,  $SD = 6.1$ ;  $\alpha = .62$  for Sample 3,  $M = 29.3$ ,  $SD = 4.7$ ).<sup>3</sup> Because the alpha for the male participants in Sample 3 was relatively low, we also scored the new HSNS in another group of 101 college males from Cheek and Melchior's (1985) data, who had completed Murray's Narcism Scale, but not the NPI, and obtained a mean of 29.8, a standard deviation of 6.0, and an alpha of .76.

The item content of the newly formed HSNS reflects the hypersensitivity and vulnerability that Murray had associated with narcissism in general, but which current researchers associate more specifically with covert narcissism (e.g., Wink, 1991). The remaining 10 items of the Narcism Scale were divided into two groups. One group contained the two items which were significantly positively correlated with the NPI in both samples and tended to be negatively correlated with the MMPI-based composite measure of covert narcissism (see bottom section of Table 1). The remaining eight Murray Narcism items appeared to be ambiguously related to the other measures of narcissism; they did not show a consistent replicated pattern of correlations across the two samples, and are, therefore, not presented in Table 1.

As would be expected from this method of scale construction, the new HSNS correlated highly with the composite MMPI-based measure of covert narcissism (Sample 1,  $r = .63$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Sample 2,  $r = .61$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results approximate Nunnally's (1978, chapter 7) criteria for alternative forms of tests of the same psychological construct (e.g., the estimated correction of these correlations for attenuation due to imperfect reliability is .90 in Sample 1 and .85 in Sample 2). The HSNS correlations with the NPI were low (Sample 1,  $r = .02$ , ns; Sample 2,  $r = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In Sample 3, the HSNS was again uncorrelated with the NPI (in this case Form A;  $r = -.04$ , ns). As may be seen in Table 2, the HSNS and the MMPI-based composite show similar patterns of correlations with the NPI and its Exploiteness/Entitlement (E/E) subscale across the two samples. Our data replicate the findings of previous studies that covert narcissism measures tend to be uncorrelated with the total NPI but moderately positively correlated with its E/E subscale (Emmons, 1987; Watson *et al.*, 1984).

Finally, we compared the Big Five correlates of the three narcissism scales in Sample 2. As may be seen in Table 3, the HSNS and the composite MMPI-based measure of covert narcissism show similar patterns of correlation with the BFI, and both have a pattern of correlations that is dissimilar from the

<sup>3</sup> Factor analyses of the 10 items of the new HSNS in all three samples revealed that all 10 items loaded significantly (average  $> .30$ ) on the first unrotated factor, supporting our interpretation of a unidimensional scale (cf. Briggs & Cheek, 1988).

TABLE 2  
Correlations among Measures of Narcissism

	Hypersensitive narcissism scale	MMPI-based narcissism scale	Narcissistic personality inventory (NPI)	Exploiteness/entitlement (E/E) NPI subscale
Hypersensitive narcissism scale		.63*	.02	.26*
MMPI-based narcissism scale	.61*		-.05	.18
Narcissistic personal inventory (NPI)	.16	.07		.74 <sup>a</sup>
Exploiteness/entitlement (E/E) NPI subscale	.34*	.25*	.74 <sup>a</sup>	

*Note.* Correlations above the diagonal are from Sample 1 ( $N = 109$ ); correlations below the diagonal are from Sample 2 ( $N = 151$ ).

<sup>a</sup> These are uncorrected part-whole correlations; E/E is a subscale of the NPI.

\*  $p < .01$ .

TABLE 3  
Correlations of the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale, the Composite MMPI-Based Covert Narcissism Scale, and the NPI with the Big Five Inventory

Scale	Big five inventory				
	E	A	C	N	O
Hypersensitive narcissism scale	-.28**	-.44**	-.12	.51**	-.18*
MMPI-based narcissism scale	-.17*	-.34**	-.17*	.57**	-.05
Narcissistic personality inventory (NPI)	.33**	-.13	.03	-.07	.16*
Exploiteness/entitlement (E/E) subscale of the NPI	.11	-.25**	.05	.21*	.01

*Note.* E, Extraversion; A, Agreeableness; C, Conscientiousness; N, Neuroticism; O, Openness.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N = 151$ .

NPI.<sup>4</sup> The E/E subscale of the NPI shows a pattern of correlations with the BFI that falls in between the rather disparate patterns for the HSNS and the overall NPI. These results for the NPI are essentially consistent with earlier studies that used the NEO-PI to assess the big five traits (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

## DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that the new HSNS, derived from Murray's (1938) Narcism Scale, possesses appropriate psychometric qualities to be useful as an alternative to the MMPI-based covert narcissism scales such as Ashby's (1978) NPDS and Serkownek's (1975) Narcissism-Hypersensitivity Scale. Moreover, the HSNS and the MMPI-based composite measure showed highly similar patterns of correlations with the NPI, its Exploiteness/Entitlement (E/E) subscale, and the Big Five scales. The face valid item content of the HSNS would appear to have some advantages over the sometimes obscurely or controversially worded MMPI items for the assessment of covert narcissistic tendencies in the normal range of individual differences.<sup>5</sup>

Renewed attention to the covert form of hypersensitive narcissism has the potential to improve contemporary narcissism research, which sometimes has been limited by exclusive reliance upon the measurement of overt narcissistic tendencies via the NPI. Consider, for example, Gramzow and Tangney's (1992) study of the relationship between narcissism and proneness to shame. Gramzow and Tangney pointed out that shame has long been closely associated with narcissism in psychodynamic theories developed from clinical case studies (e.g., Lewis, 1987). Using the NPI to operationalize narcissism and the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) to measure shame proneness, they obtained an unexpected negative correlation ( $r = -.34$ ) between narcissism and shame (for negative correlations between the NPI and other measures of shame, see Harder, Cutler, & Rockart, 1992; Wright, O'Leary, & Balkin, 1989). In a series of analyses of the NPI subscales and shame score residuals, Gramzow and Tangney did find modest positive correlations between shame and the E/E subscale of the NPI (in the .14 to .18 range).

Gramzow and Tangney (1992) concluded that more extensive assessment of narcissism would be needed in order to fully explicate the theoretically significant relationship between shame and narcissism. In fact, Hibbard (1992) simultaneously published research showing that covert narcissism

<sup>4</sup> We found a significant difference between the two correlation coefficients of the HSNS and the NPI with each of the BFI scales except Conscientiousness.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the item about "drop-the-handkerchief" that we had to drop from the NPDS, a number of the other MMPI-based covert narcissism items ask about sexual behavior and religious beliefs.



(assessed by the NPDS) correlated .45 with shame (assessed by the Shame Rating Scale) whereas the NPI correlated  $-.21$  with that measure of shame. In our own research, TOSCA shame proneness correlates positively in the .36 to .49 range with the new HSNS and negatively in the range of  $-.12$  to  $-.21$  with the NPI (Cheek & Hendin, 1996). All of these results for measures of shame are consistent with Wink's (1991) interpretation of the overt and covert "faces" of narcissism. In the case of shame, at least, it is clear that including measures of covert narcissism provides a significant improvement in psychological understanding compared to sole reliance upon the NPI.

Nevertheless, the NPI has enjoyed success in the past two decades as the preeminent narcissism scale for research in the normal range of individual differences. Many validation studies have concluded that the NPI does assess some important aspects of narcissism, and it continues to be widely used by contemporary personality researchers (e.g., John & Robins, 1994; Kernis & Sun, 1994). As noted by Cramer (1995), one growing trend in research using the NPI is the interpretation of its E/E subscale as a measure of unhealthy, maladaptive narcissism and some or all of its remaining subscales as measuring more healthy, adaptive narcissism (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Watson & Biderman, 1993; see also Hickman, Watson, & Morris, 1996). Rhodewalt and Morf (1995), however, concluded that the E/E subscale of the NPI is only a relatively weak or indirect measure of the covert narcissistic tendencies of vulnerability and hypersensitivity that were emphasized by Wink (1991).<sup>6</sup> Their interpretation is consistent with the moderate positive correlations in the range of .25 to .32 between E/E and covert narcissism as assessed by the NPDS reported by Watson *et al.* (1984) and Emmons (1987). Similarly, our results for E/E show only moderate positive correlations in the range of .18 to .34 with the MMPI-based covert narcissism composite and the new HSNS. Therefore, it appears that the E/E subscale of the NPI does not provide sufficient assessment of the covert "face" of narcissism described by Wink (1991).

The optimal assessment of covert narcissism will require further research. We see the development of the new HSNS from Murray's (1938) pool of items as only a good first step toward achieving a more complete understanding of the conceptualization and measurement of narcissistic tendencies within the normal range of individual differences. It appears, for example, that some of the items from O'Brien's (1987) Multiphasic Narcissism Inventory (OMNI) might improve the sampling of the domain of covert narcissism (Hendin, 1994; Hickman *et al.*, 1996).<sup>7</sup> Some clinical psychologists and psy-

<sup>6</sup> Direct assessment of covert narcissistic tendencies would also appear to be superior to the indirect technique of examining the interaction of the NPI and neuroticism scores that was adopted by Davis, Claridge, and Brewer (1996).

<sup>7</sup> Although Hibbard (1992) suggests that gender differences are not a big issue in the measurement of narcissism, potential gender differences should be studied in future research on the correlates and developmental roots of hypersensitive narcissism (Wink, 1996).

chiatrists also have suggested that hypersensitivity should receive more attention in the definition and assessment of the narcissistic personality disorder (e.g., Gabbard, 1989; Perry & Perry, 1996). In the meantime, personality research employing Wink's (1991) distinction between overt and covert narcissism is already proving to be fruitful (for a review see Wink, 1996; see also Wink & Donahue, 1997).

We view the covert "face" of narcissism as assessed by the HSNS to be one of many facets of the higher order construct that Maslow (1942) labeled psychological insecurity and that has been more recently called negative emotionality (e.g., Waller, Tellegen, McDonald, & Lykken, 1996), which is consistent with the .51 correlation between the HSNS and Big Five Neuroticism reported in Table 3. Contemporary personality researchers have a growing interest in various facets of psychological insecurity, such as the cognitive-affective disposition of sensitivity to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996), the self-concept processes of Clance's (1985) impostor phenomenon (Worcel & Norem, 1995), and the temperamental quality of high sensory-processing sensitivity (Aron & Aron, 1997). Therefore, we expect that future research using the new measure of hypersensitive narcissism will shed light not only on the topic of narcissism, but also on these broader current concerns of personality psychologists.

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