

# **“It's All About Me!”**

## **How Narcissistic College Students Think About Career**

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# Basis in Myth

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*Echo and Narcissus*  
John William Waterhouse (1903)

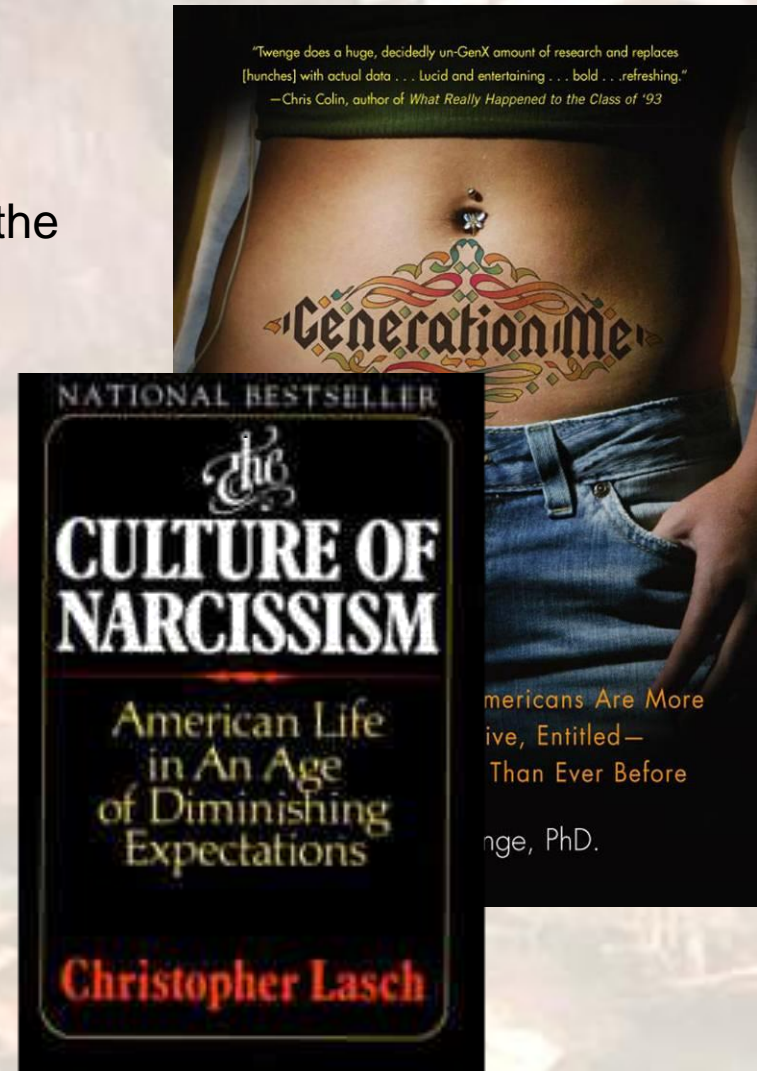
## Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (AD 8)

- Relationship with parent
- Social popularity
- Hunting metaphor
- Rejects echo's words for reflection of self (feedback threatens ego)
- *It seems to me, then that our myth deals with human drive for self-knowledge and self-realization, with the admonition "Become who you are!"*  
(Jacobs, 1990, p. 29)



# Popular Literature & Narcissism

- The Culture of Narcissism (Lasch, 1979)
  - A psycho- socio- political analysis of the “Me Decade” of 70s culture
  - Conservative political take
- Generation Me (Twenge , 2006)
  - Harder social science approach
  - Millennials (born > 1982) are most narcissistic generation in history
  - More mental health issues (e.g., anxiety & depression) (Benton, et al., 2003)
- Many news and magazine articles



# Continuum of Narcissism

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← **Healthy Self-Esteem**

**Personality Disordered** →

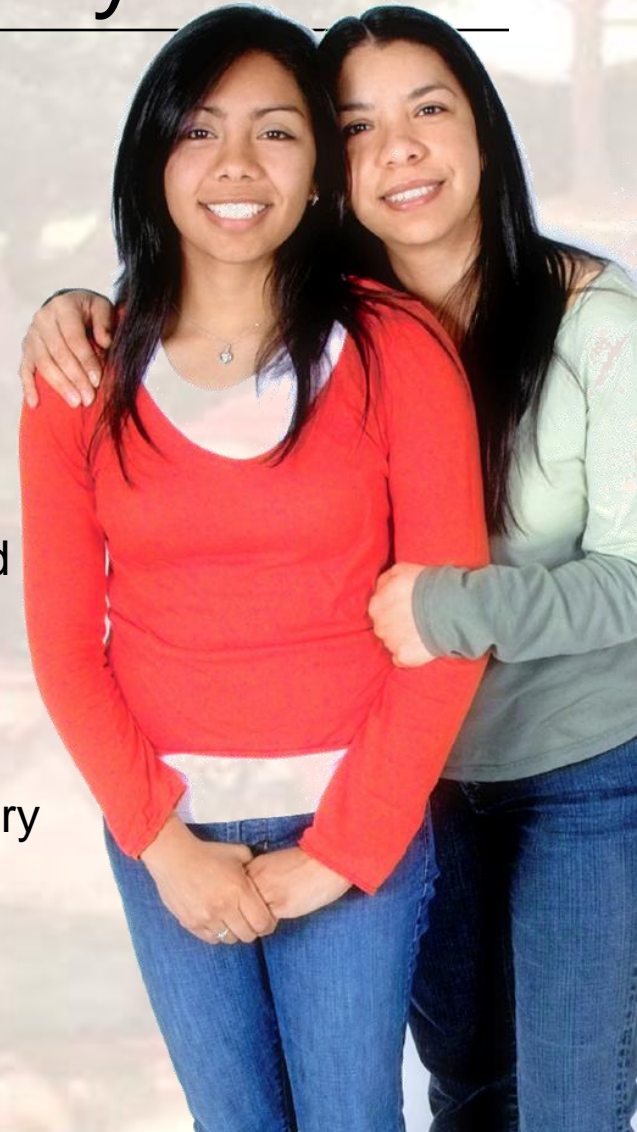
- Freud (1914) contrasted healthy & pathological narcissism
- Personality Disorder appeared in DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) & was revised in DSM-IV (1994)
- Today, considered “normally distributed”? (Mullins & Kopelman, 1988; Burstein & Bertenthal, 1986)
- self-report measures line up along a continuum: healthy self-esteem to personality disordered (Watson, et al., 1992)
- Hickman (1996) noted that:
  - dimensions of narcissism (e.g., leadership, superiority, and self-admiration) correlate directly w/ optimism & inversely w/ pessimism
  - more pathological measures of narcissism (e.g., exploitation/entitlement) tended to display opposite relationships



# Narcissism Theory: Analytic

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- Ellis (1928) narcissism is an individual's actual sexual attraction to himself.
- Freud (1914) Libido invested in ego, not external objects (e.g., people)
- Kernberg (1996) preoedipal fixation based in both environmental & constitutional factors
- Kohut (1975) "developmental arrest later in childhood"
  - idealization & acceptance of powerful others
  - Emphasis on "Self"
- Millon's (2001) "personology" biopsychosocial evolutionary theory historically based in analytic theory (that which is adaptive is reinforced & survives)



# Narcissism Theory: Cognitive-Behavioral

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Beck (1990) conceptualized the narcissistic personality style in terms of beliefs, affects, & interpersonal strategies (i.e., behaviors) adopted

## **Core Beliefs**

- Since I'm special, I deserve special privileges
- I'm superior to others & they should acknowledge this
- I am above the rules

## **Conditional Beliefs**

- If others don't recognize my special status, they should be punished
- If I am to maintain my superior status, I should expect others' subservience

## **Instrumental Beliefs**

- I must at all times insist upon or demonstrate superiority

## **Strategy**

- Any behavior that reinforces my superiority is okay, regardless of societal rules (from which I'm exempt)

## **Affect**

- I get angry when others do not accord me the admiration that I am entitled

# Overt Narcissism

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**a.k.a. grandiose or oblivious**

## **Behavioral signs**

- express grandiose fantasies
- make demands on others out of sense of entitlement
- devalue others who threaten self-esteem
- anger if their expectations are not met

## **Psychological Core**

- lack of insight into the incongruence between expectations & reality and the impact of expectations on others
- Regulate self-esteem through overt self-enhancement and denials of weakness
- associated with greater levels of exhibitionism, aggression, sociability, dominance, and self-acceptance
- Significantly higher grandiosity than covert groups (Hibbard, S. & Bunce, S. C. 1995)





# Covert Narcissism

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a.k.a. narcissensitivity, closet, hypervigilant, hypersensitive & vulnerable

## Behaviors

- shyness, constrained affect, feigned empathy
- use of external sources to regulate self-esteem
- pattern of interpersonal conflict leading to anger/hostility & then shame/depression giving impression of labile mood
- interpersonal anxiety (especially in developing relationships), social withdrawal & avoidance

## Psychological core

- grandiose expectations
- sense of entitlement, which is disavowed





# Covert Narcissism

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a.k.a. closet, hypervigilant, hypersensitive & vulnerable

## Described by Wink (1991)

- associated with greater psychological distress, lowered sociability, and lower degrees of self-acceptance
- higher levels of vulnerability, dependent masochism, shame, and emotional lability



# Overt & Covert Similarities

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**Wink (1991) noted overt & covert narcissists are likely to:**

- Have less self-control, suggesting a tendency toward self-indulgent, risk-taking, and impulsive behavior
- Score lower on responsibility, socialization, & good impression scales indicating a need for self-expression even at the expense of others
- Be rated by partners as bossy, demanding, intolerant, argumentative, conceited, arrogant, and cruel
- Experience boredom (Wink & Donahue, 1997)



# Diversity & Narcissism

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## **Foster, Campbell, & Twenge (2003)**

**Age:** Youth greater narcissism ( $r = -.22$  w/ income & gender controlled)

**Income:** Higher income ( $r = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ )

**Gender:** Males > Females w/ age & income controlled

**Ethnicity:** White & Asian < Blacks & Hispanics  
w/ age & income controlled, no interactions with gender

**Geography:** U.S.\* > Europe > Canada > Asia\* > Middle East\*

# Narcissism & Career

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## **Benson (1980)**

- *narcissistic guardians*: idealized vocational fantasies that protect the self at a time of vulnerability due to developmental conflicts
- defend against threats to self-esteem
- illusory “lubricant” maintains a cohesive & satisfying self
- prevents more regressed & disruptive solutions to stressors

## **Robbins (1983) *Self-Expression Inventory***

- created a measure of narcissism related to career development
- initial items were created based on Kohut’s concepts of “consolidation of ambitions” & “consolidation of goals”
- items reduced via factor analysis to “grandiosity” & “goal instability”



# Narcissism & Career

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## **Mako, T. J. (1991)**

- individuals endorsing greater amounts of narcissism on the *Narcissistic Personality Inventory* valued & engaged in more self-focused career exploration while avoiding activities requiring environmental exploration
- higher levels of career indecision associated with
  - lower levels of authority and self-sufficiency
  - higher levels of exhibitionism
- “Thus for individuals with narcissistic tendencies, a higher level of career decidedness may be based primarily upon participating in and valuing of self-exploration activities” (p. 127)

# Research Question & Hypotheses

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## **Trial Study for Dissertation**

What are the relationships among overt & covert narcissism, neuroticism, & dysfunctional career thoughts?

- Neuroticism (anxious/hesitating scale) will be inversely related to narcissism (confident asserting scale) as in past findings (Millon, 2004)
- Neuroticism will be positively related with the total and scale scores on CTI score (Sampson, et al, 1996)
- There will be no relationship between overt and covert narcissism and dysfunctional career thoughts scores on the CTI
- There will be no difference in group means for overt/covert narcissism & neuroticism for high & low dysfunctional career thoughts groups



# Sample

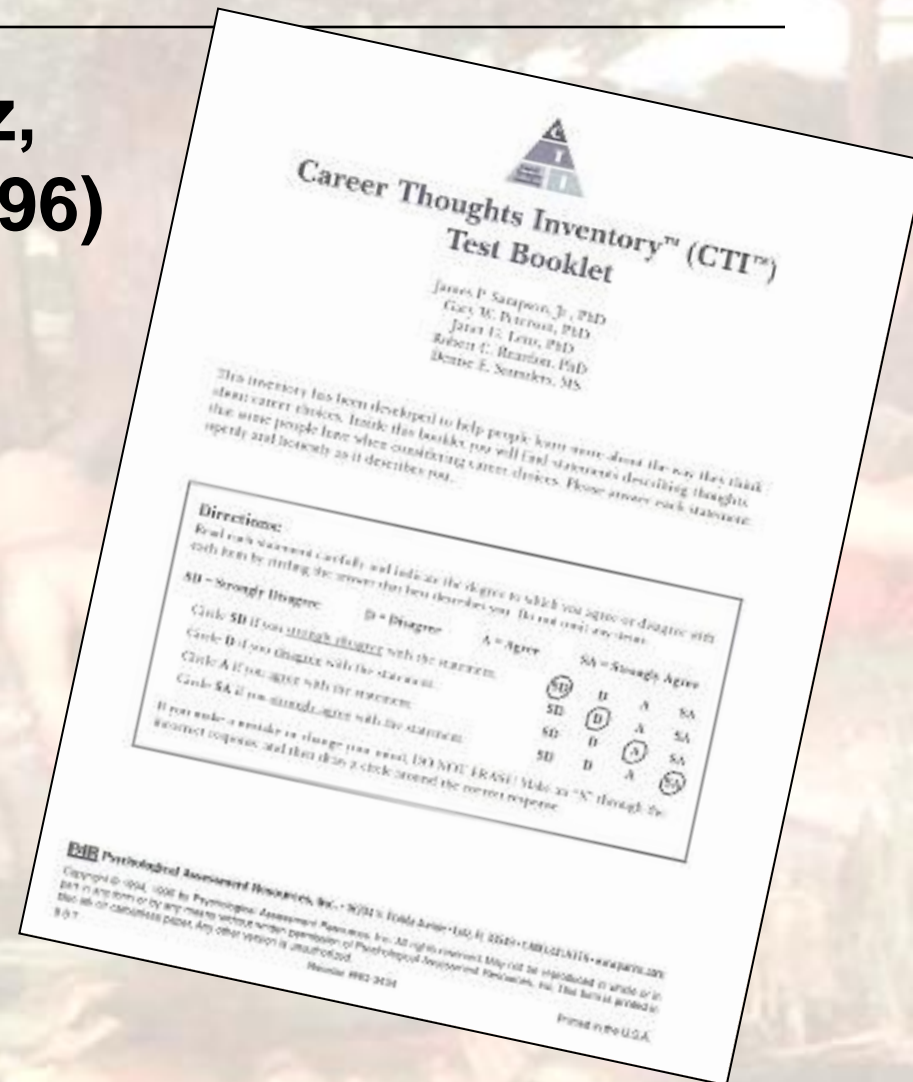
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- Students enrolled in two sections of a career development class in Summer 2006 (n=37)
- Typical student was male, Caucasian, junior, 21 years of age, carrying 14 credit hours who was able to name occupational alternatives, and a first choice, but who were unsure about their choice

# Instruments: Career Thoughts Inventory

Sampson, Peterson, Lenz,  
Reardon, & Saunders (1996)

- 48 item measure of dysfunctional career thoughts
  - “My interests are *always* changing.”
  - “I’ll *never* find a field of study or occupation I really like.”
- Total Score
- Decision Making Confusion, Commitment Anxiety, & External Conflict Scales

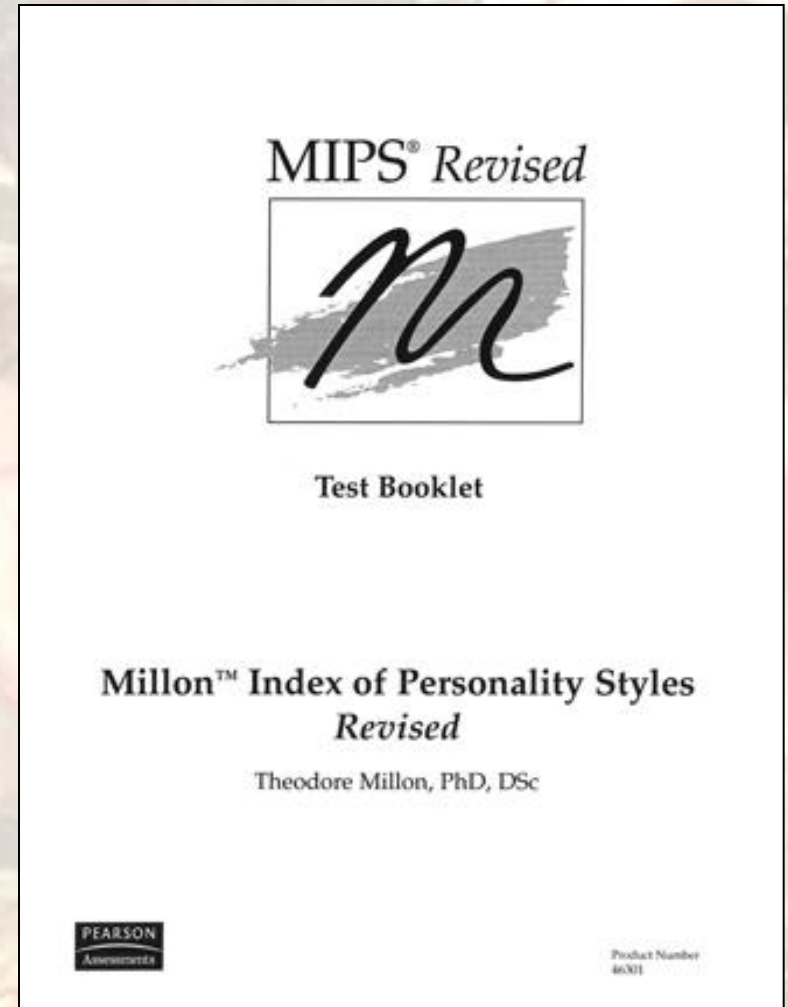


# Instruments: Millon Index of Personality Styles (MIPS-R)

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## Millon (1988)

- 180 item true-false measure of normal personality traits
- Assesses motivational, thinking, & behaving styles
- Behaving styles inspected
  - Anxious/hesitating scale (neuroticism)
  - Confident/asserting scale (overt narcissism)





# Instruments: Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS)

## Hendin & Cheek (1997)

- 10 item, Likert measure of covert narcissism
- Reduced from Murray's (1938) longer "narcism" scale
- Uncorrelated with measures of overt narcissism
- Related to neuroticism ( $r = .51$ ,  $p > .05$ ) & inversely to extraversion ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .01$ )

ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

HSNS

Answer the following questions by deciding to what extent each item is characteristic of your feelings and behavior. Choose a number from the scale printed below and mark the matching bubble on the red answer sheet provided.

1 = very uncharacteristic or untrue, strongly disagree  
2 = uncharacteristic  
3 = neutral  
4 = characteristic  
5 = very characteristic or true, strongly agree

1. I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others.
2. My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or the slighting remarks of others.
3. When I enter a room I often become self-conscious and feel that the eyes of others are upon me.
4. I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others.
5. I feel that I have enough on my hands without worrying about other people's troubles.
6. I feel that I am temperamentally different from most people.
7. I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way.
8. I easily become wrapped up in my own interests and forget those present.
9. I dislike being with a group unless I know the people in the group.
10. I am secretly "putting on" a good act to impress those present.

# Results

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- Anxious/hesitating & confident/asserting scales of MIPS-R inversely related ( $r = -.458, p < .05$ )
- One significant correlation between the anxious/hesitating scale (Neuroticism) & External Conflict subscale on CTI ( $r=.40, p < .05$ )
- No significant relationships between overt narcissism as measured by MIPS-R confident/asserting scale & dysfunctional career thoughts
- No significant relationships between covert narcissism as measured by the HSNS & dysfunctional career thoughts

# Results

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- No significant relationship between covert narcissism (HSNS) and neuroticism (anxious/hesitating scale of MIPS-R)
- No significant differences in means of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, or neuroticism for high & low dysfunctional career thoughts groups
- At times, saw a pattern of expected relationships
  - lower dysfunctional career thoughts in high overt narcissists



# Results

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## *Means, Standard Deviations, & Effect Sizes for Low & High Confident/ Asserting Groups*

	CTI Item	Confident/Asserting		Cohen's D	CIP Model
		None & Low (n = 12)	Medium & High (n = 25)		
47	I'm afraid if I try out my chosen occupation, I won't be successful.	1.67 .985	1.04 .789	-.67	Execution
20	Choosing an occupation is so complicated, I can't get started.	1.33 .887	.76 .663	-.65	Analysis
6	The views of important people in my life interfere with choosing a field of study or occupation.	1.5 1	.92 .640	-.64	Valuing
23	I know what job I want, but someone's always putting obstacles in my way.	1.33 .778	.92 .493	-.52	Execution
3	I get so depressed about choosing a field of study or occupation that I can't get started.	1.17 .835	.76 .597	-.48	Communication
34	I don't know how to find information about jobs in my field.	1.0 .603	1.0 .763	0	Occupational Knowledge
30	I can narrow down my occupational choices to a few, but I don't seem to be able to pick just one.	1.5 .522	1.72 .54	.30	Valuing

# Results

## *Means, Standard Deviations, & Effect Sizes for Low & High Hypersensitive Narcissism Groups*

CTI Item	Confident/Asserting		Cohen's D	CIP Model
	Low (n = 17)	High (n = 25)		
14 I'm always getting mixed messages about my career choice from important people.	.82 .64	1.2 .70	-.57	Valuing
18 Jobs change so fast it makes little sense to learn much about them.	.71 .47	.95 .40	-.57	Options Knowledge
46 I need to choose a field of study or occupation that will please the important people in my life.	1.1 .91	1.5 .89	-.50	Valuing
13 I'll <u>never</u> find a field of study or occupation I really like.	.47 .62	.7 .73	-.34	Synthesis
16 I've tried to find a good occupation many times before, but I <u>can't</u> ever arrive at good decisions.	.88 .70	1.1 .72	-.31	Metacognitions
37 My age limits my occupational choice.	1.1 / .56	.6 / .68	.74	Synthesis
35 I worry a great deal about choosing the right field of study or occupation.	2.1 .75	1.45 .94	.71	Communication
31 Deciding on an occupation is hard, but taking action after making a choice will be harder.	2 .87	1.5 .89	.57	Execution
27 I'm so confused, I'll <u>never</u> be able to choose a field of study or occupation.	.94 .56	.7 .47	.47	Communication
17 My interests are <u>always</u> changing.	1.71 / .47	1.45 / .76	.42	Self Knowledge

# Discussion

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- Lack of power due to small n
- Sample too homogenous (low CTI scores & somewhat decided)
- MIPS-R may not measure desired constructs
- Previously documented relationship between covert narcissism and neuroticism would predict a relationship with the CTI, but this was missing



# Future Research

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- MIPS-R will be replaced, but HSNS, & CTI retained
- Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988) is a better option for Covert Narcissism
- Inclusion of Vocational Interests as measured by the Self Directed Search (Holland, 1997)
  - Aspirations
  - Summary Scores
  - Congruence
  - Self Estimates of Abilities
  - Differentiation
  - Profile Elevation

# Instruments: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

## Raskin & Terry (1988)

- 40 forced choice items
- Overt narcissism
- Most popular instrument in normal populations (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004)
- Overall good psychometrics
- but seven subscales have poor internal consistency

- NPI  
(Raskin, R. & Terry, H., 1988)
- Below are several pairs of attributes (i.e., descriptions of you).  
Choose the one that you MOST AGREE with.
1. a) I have a natural talent for influencing people.  
b) I am not good at influencing people.
  2. a) Modesty doesn't become me.  
b) I am essentially a modest person.
  3. a) I would do almost anything on a dare.  
b) I tend to be a fairly cautious person.
  4. a) When people compliment me I get embarrassed.  
b) I know that I am a good person because everybody keeps telling me so.
  5. a) The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.  
b) If I ruled the world it would be a better place.
  6. a) I can usually talk my way out of anything.  
b) I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.
  7. a) I prefer to blend in with the crowd.  
b) I like to be the center of attention.
  8. a) I will be a success.  
b) I am not to concerned.
  9. a) I

# Implications for Practice

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- Do current screening methods assume that clients are capable of “seeing” their problems?
- Does our focus on screening for negative distortions, miss the presence of positive distortions?
- Do narcissists even present for career services? If so, when & why?
- Can clients be “too positive”?
- Should we be careful about encouraging clients to be “realistic”?



# The "Pyramid" & Narcissism

May react with anger at actual or perceived slights (e.g., kicked out of major)

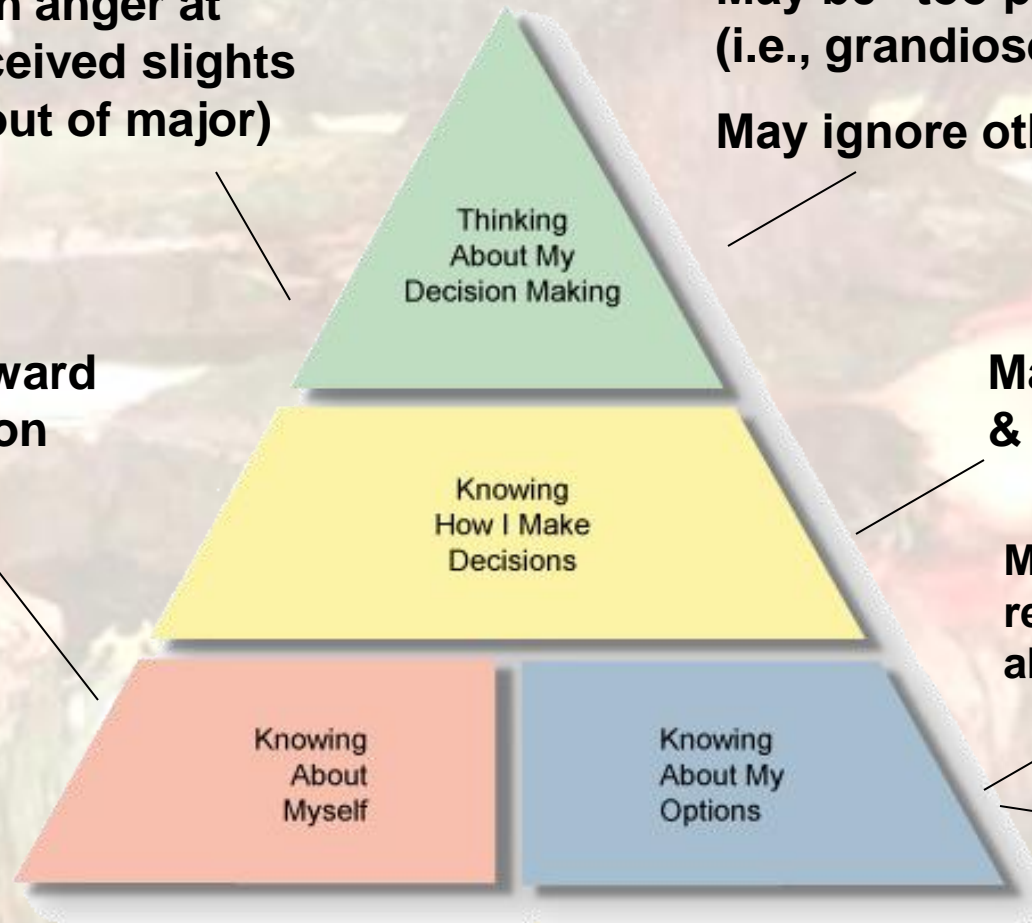
May be "too positive" (i.e., grandiose) in self-talk  
May ignore others' feedback

Gravitates toward self-exploration

May be impulsive & take risks

People vs. Things:  
Overt vs. Covert

May "know it all" & resist "learning" about options



Too many options?

The *Pyramid of Information Processing* (client version pictured) is a component of the Cognitive Information Processing Approach to Career Decision Making (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, & Reardon, 1992)

# Thank you!

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The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window displaying the website for the FSU Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development. The address bar shows the URL <http://www.career.fsu.edu/techcenter/>. The page features a navigation menu with links for 'first time user?', 'help', 'about us', 'site map', 'index', and a search box. The main heading reads 'Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development' with a sub-heading 'Welcome! What brings you here today?'. Below this, there is a section titled 'I am an:' with several user roles and their corresponding needs: 'Individual', 'Student', 'Instructor', 'Practitioner', 'Researcher or program evaluator', 'Policy maker or senior administrator', and 'Developer of computer applications'. To the right, a 'What's New' sidebar lists updates for July 2007, including 'NCDA 2007', 'SVP 2007 Holland Literature', 'CIP Based Career Decision Making Tool', 'New technical reports: Communication Apprehension and Career Thoughts', and 'Evaluation of a career course using student grades'.