Self and Identity
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/psai20

Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Adolescent Narcissism
Jessica D. Pickard, Christopher T. Barry, Marion T. Wallace & Virgil Zeigler-Hill

a Department of Psychology, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, USA
b Department of Psychology, Oakland University, Rochester, NY, USA
Published online: 21 Jun 2012.

To cite this article: Jessica D. Pickard, Christopher T. Barry, Marion T. Wallace & Virgil Zeigler-Hill (2013) Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Adolescent Narcissism, Self and Identity, 12:5, 489-503, DOI: 10.1080/15298868.2012.693258
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2012.693258

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions
Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Adolescent Narcissism

Jessica D. Pickard¹, Christopher T. Barry¹, Marion T. Wallace¹, and Virgil Zeigler-Hill²

¹Department of Psychology, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, USA
²Department of Psychology, Oakland University, Rochester, NY, USA

The present study explored the influence of ethnicity and ethnic identity on adolescent narcissism, as well as the role of these variables in the link between narcissism and adolescent aggression. Participants were 348 at-risk adolescents (278 males, 70 females), ranging in age from 16 to 18 (M = 16.7 years; SD = 0.69 years) who were enrolled in a community-based residential program. Results revealed significant ethnic differences on narcissism, such that Black participants scored higher than White participants. Ethnic identity partially explained why ethnicity was associated with narcissism. Overall, the findings of this study speak to the importance of considering cultural context in narcissism, as well as other forms of self-perception. However, the limitations, particularly regarding the generalizability of these findings, are also discussed.

Keywords: Narcissism; Ethnic identity; Adolescence.

Previous studies have linked narcissistic personality characteristics to several indicators of maladaptive functioning in adolescents such as delinquency and aggression (Barry, Grafeman, Adler, & Pickard, 2007; Barry, Pickard, & Ansel, 2009), depression (Washburn, McMahon, King, Reinecke, & Silver, 2004), and perceived invulnerability to danger (Barry et al., 2009). Several potential protective factors have also been identified that might prevent some of the negative outcomes tied to narcissism. Interestingly, ethnicity (i.e., one’s cultural background or group membership based on common heritage and shared beliefs, values, traditions) and ethnic identity (i.e., the extent to which one identifies with a particular ethnic or cultural group) may be considered as protective factors. Both have been linked to a positive sense of self (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and psychological well-being (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & L’Heureux Lewis, 2006). Specifically, ethnic identity may partially explain why social support reduces risk for anxiety and depression (Gaylord-Harden, Ragsdale, Mandara, Richards, & Petersen, 2007) as well as the link between low self-worth and aggression in young at-risk samples (Holmes & Lochman, 2009).

Preliminary data show possible ethnic differences on narcissism (e.g., Barry, Frick, & Killian, 2003; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Zeigler-Hill & Wallace, 2011), but few studies have investigated such differences in adolescents. The present
study sought to identify the differences that may exist between White and Black at-risk adolescents with regard to narcissism based on the existing literature on ethnic differences in self-perception. As evidence continues to emerge establishing a connection between adolescent narcissism and aggression, we considered, as a secondary aim, the potential role of ethnicity in this relation as well.

Ethnic/Cultural Factors and Self-perception

Social psychology research has shown that feeling part of a particular social group is an important aspect of individuals’ sense of self (Tajfel, 1981). Having a secure social identity (i.e., the part of an individual’s identity that relates to his or her membership in a certain social group) has been linked to feelings of positive self-worth and psychological stability (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). This sense of identity has been shown to be particularly beneficial for minority groups such as Black Americans in the USA (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Crocker et al., 1994). Traditionally, many theorists (e.g., Cartwright, 1950; Gerth & Mills, 1953; Graham, 1994) believed that Black individuals would demonstrate lower global self-esteem because of their membership in a less valued group in society. Thus, ethnic minority groups, governed by the cultural views of the leading or majority group, presumably may come to internalize a sense of worthlessness or inferiority (i.e., stigmatization) because they are members of a group that deviates from the mainstream standards that are supposedly most valued.

These beliefs stemmed, in part, from the work of Clark and Clark (1947), whose classic experiment found that Black children, given a choice between playing with White or Black dolls preferred White dolls, as did White children. However, contrary to Clark and Clark’s (1947) original findings, more recent research has shown that Black individuals demonstrate a self-esteem (i.e., global or personal self-esteem) advantage compared to White individuals in both adult and adolescent samples (e.g., Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). For instance, Greene and Way (2005) found that starting at age 16, Black adolescents reported higher levels of self-esteem than White, Latino or Asian individuals. An examination of the literature suggests that ethnic identity may explain, at least in part, the high levels of self-esteem reported by Black adolescents. Several studies (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Mossakowski, 2003; Phinney, 1992; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997) have demonstrated a positive association between ethnic identity (or group identity) and positive well-being particularly for minority-group members, as they have been shown to have higher self-esteem, fewer depressive symptoms, and lower psychological distress. Greater ethnic identity scores have been associated with more non-fighting attitudes in Black and Latino preadolescents (Arbona, Jackson, McCoy, & Blakely, 1999), whereas lower scores have been more predictive of aggressive behavior and more dominating/revengeful social attitudes (Holmes & Lochman, 2008) in Black youths.

Although culture plays a significant role in the development of self-perception and personality in children and adolescents (Heine & Lehman, 1997), less is known about the influence of ethnicity on narcissism. Preliminary results suggest that, even across age groups, differences in narcissistic tendencies may exist between Black and White individuals. First, a large epidemiological study noted ethnic differences in DSM-IV narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) in adults, with Black men and women tending to have higher rates of NPD than White or Hispanic individuals (Stinson et al., 2008). In terms of non-pathological narcissism, Barry et al. (2003) found a
significant correlation between ethnicity and adaptive narcissism (i.e., sense of authority, self-sufficiency) in children, with ethnic minorities scoring higher than non-minorities. Furthermore, ethnic differences have been found on various dimensions of narcissism. Foster et al. (2003) found, in a sample of adults, that the scores of Black and Latino individuals were significantly higher than White and Asian individuals' scores on the Authority, Superiority, Entitlement, Self-sufficiency, and Vanity subscales from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979) but that scores on the Exhibitionism and Exploitativeness subscales did not differ. In essence, notions of what is “normal” or “adaptive” regarding self-perception may differ based on cultural or ethnic considerations, as different cultures may emphasize different personality traits or value certain personality types over others (Scott, 2003; Stewart & Bennett, 1991).

Possible Explanations for Ethnic Differences in Narcissism

Phinney (1990) proposed a developmentally-sensitive model to explain ethnic identity formation. Individuals' attitudes toward, and identification with, their ethnic group are thought to develop over time through exposure to beliefs about the group (e.g., stereotypes) and to positive or negative experiences with others within and outside the group. Thus, ethnic identity relates to the degree to which individuals identify with, and accept or commit to, the beliefs, customs, or values of their cultural groups (Phinney, 1992). French, Seidman, Allen, and Aber (2006) tested Phinney's model by tracking the same adolescents over a three-year period. They found that aspects of ethnic identity (i.e., group esteem) rose for all racial and ethnic groups over time, but they were more likely to increase for Black and Latino adolescents compared to White adolescents. Previous literature suggests that minority group members need a secure, or higher, level of ethnic identity to mature as healthy individuals (Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997). Therefore, ethnic minorities who adopt a strong ethnic identity may further feel a sense of self-confidence, assertiveness, and self-esteem that, in turn, translates to the display of narcissistic characteristics. This possibility was examined in the present study.

According to social identity theory (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which incorporates several aspects of the stigmatization as self-protection hypothesis (Crocker & Major, 1989), individuals’ ethnic identity may act as a buffer against threats to one’s self-worth such as stigmatization, stereotyping, and racism (Crocker et al., 1994). Stigmatized individuals protect against such threats by: (1) attributing the causes of negative outcomes to plausible external (e.g., racism) rather than internal factors (e.g., personal inadequacy); (2) making in-group comparisons that are more proximal and proportionate or more similar for accurate self-evaluation; and (3) not basing their self-esteem upon the domains in which the negative feedback is delivered. Accordingly, Black Americans are perhaps more likely than White Americans to make within-group comparisons resulting in more positive group distinctions and to develop a positive overall group image (i.e., a strong ethnic identity) by emphasizing the positive qualities of the group that distinguish group members from non-members or out-groups.

Therefore, Black Americans' scores, compared to those of White Americans, on self-report measures of narcissism may be higher, similar to data on other forms of self-perception, such as self-esteem (e.g., Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002) and ethnic identity (e.g., French et al., 2006; Phinney, 1990). Definitions of high self-esteem or “having a favorable opinion or evaluation of
oneself” (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998, p. 227) and narcissism or having “excessive
self-love” obviously overlap in some respects, although self-esteem and narcissism
can be considered different forms of self-perception. More specifically, narcissism
has been associated with positive self-evaluations on characteristics thought of as
agentic (e.g., intelligence, extraversion), whereas high self-esteem is linked to positive
self-views on characteristics that are more other-oriented or communal (e.g.,
agreeableness; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). Thus, having a favorable
opinion of one’s ethnic group may help explain ethnic differences in self-esteem, but
it could also explain potential relations between ethnicity and narcissism insofar as
feeling supported by one’s community or group may bolster confidence in displaying
narcissistic tendencies regarding one’s abilities or worth. Furthermore, self-report
measures of narcissism may assess aspects of self-perception related to, or that
seemingly overlap with, characteristics that are highly valued for Black Americans
(e.g., leadership and self-reliance; Boykin, 1983; Scott, 2003; Stewart & Bennett,

Taken together, these findings speak to the importance of considering ethnicity, as
well as other cultural factors (e.g., ethnic identity) in the manifestation of self-esteem
and other self-perception constructs in adolescence. Moreover, narcissism, as well as
both high and low self-esteem, has been linked with problem behaviors (e.g., Barry
et al., 2007; Harter, 2003; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistiainen, & Lagerspetz, 1999).
Therefore, exploring narcissism and ethnic identity as they relate to self-perception
may be particularly important considering the association between self-perception
variables (i.e., self-esteem and narcissism) and maladaptive consequences such as
aggression. As noted above, some evidence has linked narcissism to aggression in
adolescents (e.g., Barry et al., 2007; Washburn et al., 2004), but the current study
expanded on this research by examining whether this association is equally
applicable to White and Black adolescents, an issue not previous investigated.

Hypotheses
Consistent with the ethnic differences revealed in the self-esteem literature, Black at-
risk adolescents were expected to report higher levels of global self-esteem compared
to White at-risk adolescents (Hypothesis 1). Based on preliminary findings of Barry
et al. (2003) as well as Foster and colleagues (2003), Black participants were
hypothesized to report higher narcissism scores than White participants (Hypothesis
2). Black individuals are members of a stigmatized or devalued group in society;
therefore, having a strong ethnic identity may act as a buffer against threats to self-
esteeem. Thus, it was hypothesized that Black participants would have higher ethnic
identity scores than White participants (Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000; Hypothesis
3). Furthermore, ethnic identity was hypothesized to mediate the
expected relation between ethnicity and narcissism (Hypothesis 4). In addition,
ethnicity was predicted to moderate the relation between narcissism and aggression
such that narcissism would be associated with higher levels of aggression for White
adolescents in particular (Hypothesis 5). This pattern was predicted because Black
participants were expected to score higher on narcissism and because aspects of
Black culture overlap with definitions of self-reported narcissism (Boykin, 1983;
Scott, 2003; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Thus, in a cultural context in which
characteristics of narcissism are deemed more adaptive or normative, narcissism may
not be associated with negative behaviors to the extent that has been discussed in the
literature.
Method

Participants

Participants were 348 at-risk adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 years \((M = 16.7\) years; \(SD = 0.69\) years) who were recruited from a military-style residential program located in a rural location in the southern United States. This program aims to help students pass the General Education Development (GED) exam, as well as identify and build job skills through training and volunteerism. Eligible youths must be high-school dropouts or expellees, drug free, and not currently on parole or probation for reasons other than juvenile status offenses (i.e., offenses that are only illegal below a certain age such as possession of alcohol). Participants in this study were of both sexes (79.9% male) and of White (69.8%) and Black (30.2%) origin. Sixty-five individuals of other ethnic backgrounds (i.e., 1.9% Asian, 1% Hispanic, 3.8% Native Indian, and 8.9% “other” ethnic groups) were excluded from all analyses, due to their extremely low representation in the sample and in the residential program as a whole.

Materials

Demographic information. Participants were asked to report general background information (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, parents’ occupation). Information on parents/guardians’ occupation was used to calculate a socioeconomic index score (SEI) using the Duncan SEI method (Hauser & Featherman, 1977).

Narcissistic Personality Inventory for Children (NPIC; Barry et al., 2003). The NPIC is a 40-item measure adapted for child and adolescent samples from the NPI, which has been used extensively with adult samples. The NPIC has been previously used in samples similar to the one used in the present study (Barry et al., 2007, 2009). Responses were made in a forced-choice format. More specifically, participants were presented with a pair of statements (e.g., “I try not to show off” or “I usually show off when I get the chance”) and were asked to select the statement with which they most agreed. Next, participants were asked to rate the statement they chose as being “Sort of true” or “Really true” of them. This procedure resulted in a 4-point response scale (0–3) for each item. A total NPIC score was generated for each participant by summing the total score for each item, resulting in total score with an internal consistency of \(z = .83\).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). The RSE is a 10-item measure of global self-esteem wherein participants are asked to respond on a scale ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 3 (Strongly agree). A total RSE score was calculated as a measure of global self-esteem for each participant, with greater scores reflecting higher self-esteem. The RSE has been used widely in adolescent and adult samples and has repeatedly demonstrated good reliability and validity in adolescent samples (e.g., Lockett & Harrell, 2003; Scheier, Botvin, Griffin, & Diaz, 2000). An internal consistency coefficient alpha of .79 was found for the current sample.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). The MEIM is a 14-item measure that assesses ethnic identity on a scale ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 3 (Strongly agree). A total MEIM score was computed to assess individuals’ ethnic identity, with higher scores reflecting a stronger sense of ethnic
identity. The present study revealed an internal consistency coefficient alpha of .91 for the total MEIM score.

**Peer Conflict Scale (PCS; Marsee, Kimonis, & Frick, 2004).** The PCS is a 40-item measure that assesses aggression in interactions with peers. Participants were presented with statements (e.g., “I have hurt others to win a game or contest”) and were asked to rate the extent to which the statement is true for them on a scale ranging from 0 (Not at all true) to 3 (Definitely true). The PCS has demonstrated good reliability and has been validated for use with community, residential, and detained samples of adolescents with items devoted to assessing various forms of aggression (see Marsee et al., 2011). The internal consistency coefficient of the total PCS score was good (i.e., \( \alpha = .92 \)) for the current sample.

**Procedure**

The director of the intervention program, who serves as guardian *ad litem* for the youth in the program during their enrollment, was fully informed of the study purpose and procedures. The director gave informed consent for the youth to be notified of the study, with the adolescents then providing written consent/assent for their participation. Questionnaire data were collected in a classroom setting in groups of approximately 12 to 18 participants. All questionnaires were administered orally to assist participants with reading difficulties, with the items also being provided on paper. Data for this study—and the larger project of which it was a part—were collected in three to four 45-minute sessions over approximately seven to ten days.

**Results**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Involving Demographic Variables*

Descriptive statistics for the main variables of interest are displayed in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, there was ample variability in adolescents’ scores to detect associations among the variables. Correlational analyses were conducted to examine the relations among the variables of interest and demographic characteristics in this sample (see Table 2). Narcissism, \( r = .12, p = .03 \), was significantly positively correlated with SEI, such that higher SEI was associated with greater narcissistic personality traits.

Independent samples *t*-tests were used to explore whether any differences existed between male and female participants on self-esteem, narcissism, or ethnic identity. These analyses demonstrated a significant gender difference for self-esteem (SE), \( t(344) = 5.46, p < .001 \), narcissism (Narc), \( t(344) = 2.17, p = .03 \), and ethnic identity (EI), \( t(344) = 2.04, p = .04 \). Specifically, young at-risk men scored higher on these variables than young at-risk women.

*Ethnic Group Differences and Correlations within Groups Involving the Variables of Interest*

Differences between the means of each ethnic group are summarized in Table 3. Cohen’s *d* is also reported to provide an index of the magnitude of each mean
difference. Hypothesis 1 predicted that Black at-risk adolescents would report higher levels of global self-esteem compared to White at-risk adolescents. An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference between the group means, $t(249) = 2.00, p = .02$. Specifically, Black participants ($M = 19.93, SD = 4.08$), on average, had higher levels of self-esteem compared to White participants ($M = 18.89, SD = 5.21$).

### TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (possible range)</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEI (0 to 96)</td>
<td>37.97</td>
<td>22.48</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>96.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGG (0 to 120)</td>
<td>19.88</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE (0 to 30)</td>
<td>19.21</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narc (0 to 120)</td>
<td>19.21</td>
<td>14.99</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>106.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI (0 to 36)</td>
<td>22.09</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** With the exception of SEI, all total scores were pro-rated, by multiplying the average score for all items by the number of items, to correct for any missing data on that variable/measure. The actual range of scores is reported for the SEI. SEI = Socioeconomic index; AGG = Aggression; SE = Self-esteem; Narc = Narcissism; EI = Ethnic identity.

### TABLE 2 Correlations Among the Variables of Interest for the Entire Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.28***</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Gender was coded 0 = male, 1 = female; Ethnicity was coded 0 = Black, 1 = White; SEI = Socioeconomic index; Ethnic = Ethnicity; AGG = Aggression; SE = Self-esteem; Narc = Narcissism; EI = Ethnic identity. *$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

### TABLE 3 Ethnic Differences on Variables of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$d$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>19.93 (4.08)</td>
<td>18.89 (5.21)</td>
<td>2.00*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcissism</td>
<td>58.84 (13.28)</td>
<td>54.78 (15.53)</td>
<td>2.34*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>25.48 (6.73)</td>
<td>20.62 (7.58)</td>
<td>5.68***</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>20.95 (16.89)</td>
<td>19.93 (13.66)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** $M_1 =$ Overall mean on variable of interest for Black participants; $M_2 =$ Overall mean score on variable of interest for White participants. *$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$. 

Downloaded by [Oakland University] at 06:56 03 February 2014
Hypothesis 2 predicted that Black adolescents would report higher narcissism scores than White adolescents. An independent samples $t$-test demonstrated a significant difference between ethnic group means for narcissism, $t(346) = 2.34$. Thus, on average, Black at-risk individuals ($M = 58.84, SD = 13.28$) had higher levels of narcissism than White at-risk individuals ($M = 54.70, SD = 15.53$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that Black participants would have a stronger sense of ethnic identity than would White participants. This hypothesis was supported, as an independent samples $t$-test, $t(346) = 5.68$, $p < .001$, revealed that Black participants ($M = 25.48, SD = 6.73$), on average, reported a stronger sense of ethnic identity than White participants ($M = 20.62, SD = 7.58$). The size of this effect was moderate, $d = 0.68$, whereas the effects of ethnic group on self-esteem and narcissism were relatively small, $d = 0.22$ and 0.28, respectively. In addition, the ethnic difference on narcissism was no longer statistically significant when controlling for self-esteem, $F(1, 345) = 3.28$, $p = .07$, indicating that part of the relation between narcissism and ethnicity is connected to the shared variance between narcissism and self-esteem.

Mediation of the Ethnicity–Narcissism Relation

Hypothesis 4 predicted that ethnic identity would mediate the expected relation between ethnicity and narcissism. In the first regression, ethnicity was entered in the prediction of narcissism. Ethnicity explained a significant portion of variance in narcissism, $\beta = -0.12$, $p < .05$. The overall $R^2$ for the model was .02, $F(1, 346) = 5.46$, $p < .05$. In the second regression, ethnic identity was entered in the prediction of ethnic identity. Ethnicity explained a significant portion of variance in ethnic identity, $\beta = -0.29$, $p < .01$. The overall $R^2$ for the model was .09, $F(1, 346) = 32.22$, $p < .01$. In the third regression, ethnicity and ethnic identity were entered in the prediction of narcissism. Results revealed that ethnic identity explained a significant portion of the variance in narcissism, $\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$. However, ethnicity no longer explained a significant portion of the variance in narcissism after ethnic identity was entered into the model. The overall $R^2$ for the model was .03, $F(2, 345) = 5.81$, $p < .01$. Results from a Sobel (1988) test revealed that ethnic identity partially mediated the relation between ethnicity and narcissism, $z = -2.25$, $p < .05$. A higher level of ethnic identity partially explained the relation between ethnicity and narcissism (see Figure 1). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

FIGURE 1 Ethnic identity partially mediates the ethnicity–narcissism relation. Note: Ethnicity was coded as 1 = White, 0 = Black. $\beta =$ standardized regression weight, with the $\beta$ in parentheses reflecting the model with both ethnicity and ethnic identity as predictors; $z =$ standard score calculated using the Sobel test. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. 
The steps of this mediation were repeated with control variables entered into the model as a follow-up procedure. Gender and SEI were entered simultaneously with gender and SEI in the prediction of narcissism based on their significant associations with narcissism (see Table 2). Ethnicity explained a significant portion of variance in narcissism, $\beta = -0.13$, $p < .01$. The overall $R^2$ for the model was .05, $F(5, 290) = 5.10, p < .01$. In the second regression, ethnicity was entered simultaneously with gender and SEI in the prediction of ethnic identity. Ethnicity explained a significant portion of variance in ethnic identity, $\beta = -0.28$, $p < .01$. The overall $R^2$ for the model was .09, $F(3, 290) = 9.01, p < .01$. In the third regression, ethnicity and ethnic identity were entered simultaneously with gender and SEI in the prediction of narcissism. Results revealed that ethnic identity explained a significant portion of the variance in narcissism, $\beta = 0.17$, $p < .01$. However, ethnicity no longer explained a significant portion of the variance in narcissism after ethnic identity was entered into the model. The overall $R^2$ for the model was .08, $F(4, 289) = 5.99, p < .01$. Results from a Sobel test revealed that ethnic identity partially mediated the relation between ethnicity and narcissism, $z = -2.56, p < .01$. As before, a higher level of ethnic identity partially explained the relation between ethnicity and narcissism.

The Role of Ethnicity in the Relation between Narcissism and Aggression

Correlational analyses for White and Black participants are summarized in Table 4 for the variables of interest. For Black participants, narcissism was significantly positively correlated with aggression, $r = .36$, $p < .001$. Similarly, for White individuals, narcissism was significantly positively correlated with aggression, $r = .27$, $p < .001$. Therefore, based on simple correlations, the relation between narcissism and aggression held across both groups.

Interaction of Ethnicity and Narcissism in the Prediction of Aggression

Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test for a potential interaction between ethnicity and narcissism in the prediction of aggression scores. Ethnicity was explored as a possible moderator on this relation such that narcissism was expected to be associated with higher levels of aggression for White adolescents but not for Black adolescents. There were no control variables in the regression models because aggression was not significantly related to any demographic variables (see Table 2). Predictor variables (e.g., ethnicity and

| TABLE 4 Correlations among the Variables of Interest for Each Ethnic Group |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. SEI | – | –.10 | .07 | .10 | –.09 |
| 2. AGG | .22* | – | –.02 | .27** | .06 |
| 3. SE | .09 | .15 | – | .34** | .20** |
| 4. Narc | .21 | .36** | .49** | – | .15* |
| 5. EI | .05 | .10 | .13 | .06 | – |

Notes: Correlations for White participants are above the diagonal, and correlations for Black participants are below the diagonal. SEI = Socioeconomic index; AGG = Aggression; SE = Self-esteem; Narc = Narcissism; EI = Ethnic identity. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. 

Ethnicity and Adolescent Narcissism
narcissism) were centered and entered on the first step to test the unique main effects of these variables. Last, the product of the centered predictors was entered on the second step to determine if the interaction between ethnicity (0 = Black adolescents; 1 = White adolescents) and the narcissism predictor contributed unique variance to aggression. These analyses revealed a significant main effect for narcissism, $\beta = 0.30$, $p < .01$, indicating a positive association between narcissism and aggression. The addition of the interaction term into the regression model did not account for a significant portion variance in aggression. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

**Discussion**

The present study extends previous research on the relation between ethnicity and self-perception in adolescents by focusing on narcissism. As was hypothesized, Black at-risk adolescents reported higher scores on narcissism compared to White at-risk adolescents, although as shown in Table 3, the effect was small in magnitude. The ethnic differences on narcissism are especially relevant to the central questions of this study in that specific aspects of Black culture may at least partially explain relatively higher narcissism scores on self-report measures in Black at-risk adolescents.

Some research on self-reported narcissism has linked narcissism to more positive variables (e.g., high levels of self-esteem, assertiveness, and independence; Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Watson & Biderman, 1993) as well as maladjustment (e.g., aggression, delinquency, anxiety; Barry et al. 2007; Barry & Malkin, 2010). It should be noted, in fact, that the ethnic differences on narcissism were only marginally significant when controlling for the shared variance between narcissism and self-esteem in this sample. Thus, the differences noted may be partly explained by the shared variance between some characteristics of NPI narcissism and high self-esteem (see Barry et al., 2003; Miller & Campbell, 2008).

Furthermore, aspects of narcissism that are defined by self-report measures such as the NPI may overlap with values or positive attributes of particular cultural groups. For example, the adult NPI defines narcissism, in part, in terms of Authority (e.g., “I see myself as a good leader”) and Self-sufficiency (e.g., “I am more capable than other people”). Such characteristics may be viewed positively and encouraged in some cultural contexts, particularly in individualistic societies, the defining features of which include both leadership and self-reliance (Boykin, 1983; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). However, at the same time, these same characteristics could be viewed negatively by others, such as peers (Golmaryami & Barry, 2010). Nevertheless, research investigating the cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors of Black individuals suggest that such qualities are favorable or valued personality characteristics in Black culture (Scott, 2003). According to social identity theory, emphasis on such characteristics by Black individuals, in particular, makes sense because ethnic minorities often absorb the brunt of racism and discrimination as well as stigmatization, and seeing oneself as a leader or as self-sufficient may be useful in the face of racial discrimination (Scott, 2003).

Another unique contribution of the present study is that, in addition to assessing possible ethnic differences in narcissism, it investigated the possible influences of ethnicity and ethnic identity on narcissism in at-risk adolescents. Of note, the present study found a significant mediation effect for ethnic identity in the relation between ethnicity and narcissism. Although the magnitude of this effect was also relatively small, it is potentially important, as it may help explain, at least in part, the ethnic differences discussed previously. Although ethnic identity was not correlated with
narcissism for Black participants, a stronger identification with their ethnic group may have translated to higher levels of narcissism for some Black participants. It is possible that the personality characteristics assessed by such measures as the NPIC overlap with certain characteristics valued by different cultures or ethnic minority groups. An individual who identifies strongly as Black is also likely to identify strongly with qualities considered favorably by Black culture (e.g., leadership and self-reliance; Boykin, 1983; Scott, 2003; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Subsequently, such an individual is likely to have a higher score on measures of ethnic identity as well as measures of self-perception like narcissism as defined in the present study. Future studies should consider the potential impact of culture when interpreting results on self-report measures with diverse populations. In essence, favorable or unfavorable self-perceptions may be linked to ethnicity through broader cultural characteristics that are relevant to one’s self-perception and may not be uniformly healthy or pejorative.

The present study also provides further replication of previous research (Barry et al., 2003, 2007; Washburn et al., 2004) demonstrating that narcissism is associated with problematic behaviors, such as aggression, in adolescents. In the current study, narcissism was associated with aggression for both Black and White at-risk individuals (see Table 4). This study also replicated previous findings of ethnic differences in self-esteem as well as ethnic identity. As was hypothesized, Black at-risk adolescents demonstrated higher levels of global self-esteem compared to White at-risk adolescents, which is consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Along these lines, as was expected, Black adolescents demonstrated a stronger sense of ethnic identity overall compared to White participants, which is also consistent with previous research in this area (e.g., Phinney, 1990).

The findings of this study appear to be consistent with social identity theory (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Sellers et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the “stigmatization as self-protection” hypothesis (Crocker & Major, 1989), and may help explain Black adolescents’ higher self-esteem scores as well as their higher narcissism scores. These ideas propose that ethnic minority group members’ self-esteem may act as a buffer against the stigmatization or negative feedback/outcomes that result from being members of their ethnic group. Members of such groups are able to cope by selectively devaluing those attributes considered negative and instead emphasize or value the positive attributes of their culture (Crocker & Major, 1989). As discussed above, these attributes may include relatively adaptive aspects of narcissism (i.e., authority/leadership, self-sufficiency/self-reliance), which may be considered important personality characteristics of Black culture especially insofar as they may be protective factors against hardships faced because of racism or discrimination.

The present study was limited by the size and characteristics of the sample. The unequal ethnic group sizes in this study may have limited the power of the analyses for detecting some effects based on ethnicity. Relatively few ethnic minorities are enrolled in the residential program used for this study; thus, the availability of Black participants was limited. In addition, as the adolescents who participated in this study were in a residential intervention program, the generalizability of the findings may be limited to at-risk adolescents or to those in similar settings. Further, findings in this study may be limited to White and Black adolescents in areas that are more rural or in the Southern region of the United States. Therefore, more work is needed to determine if the present findings are truly representative of the larger population.
of adolescents in terms of geography, cultural background, and general psychosocial functioning. Importantly, the present study also relied solely upon self-report data, which could be affected by impression management concerns and may have inflated some of the relations examined, although it is difficult to determine how or why such concerns might have systematically affected the results. We felt that self-informants were critical for evaluating self-perception and ethnic identity; however, consideration of others’ perceptions of these variables would enhance our knowledge regarding how or why ethnicity may influence ethnic identity and self-perception.

Future studies should address some of the limitations of the present study such as obtaining data from sources other than self-report (e.g., other sources for aggression, family reports of customs/ethnic identity, peer reports of narcissism). Future research should also attempt to replicate the findings of the present study with a non-risk sample of adolescents. Despite these limitations, the present study extends previous research and provides possible directions for future research, as it is one of the first known studies to consider the importance of ethnicity or culture on narcissism in adolescents. Further investigations of the possible influences of ethnicity on narcissism in other ethnic groups are needed, as the results of this study suggest some potentially important ethnic differences on narcissism and its relation to behavioral problems among at-risk adolescents. Additionally, it would be advantageous for future studies to assess ethnic differences on different forms of narcissism (i.e., normal and pathological). Such future work may be important because Pincus and colleagues (2009) suggest that the NPI, upon which the NPIC was based, may not capture pathological forms of narcissism.

This study supports the need for future exploration into the connections between cultural context, adolescents’ self-perceptions, and behavioral problems for the development of ethnically-appropriate and effective intervention/prevention programs for at-risk youth. Therefore, further research should consider the influence of culture or contextual factors to explain any differences that may be revealed, as interpretations of empirical findings—particularly interpretations of the connections between culture and problem behaviors in adolescents—are likely to be influenced by such contextual variables.

References


