

McAdams (2015)

## **Chapter 5      *The Age 5-7 Shift***

Harvard psychologist, Sheldon White (1965): “The Age 5-7 Shift”

- multiple changes occur in a child’s cognitive and social experiences leading to a new sense of maturity and rationality.
- The [APA Dictionary of Psychology](#) defines it as: “the striking progress in children’s cognitive development between the ages of 5 and 7, when very significant advances in such areas as reasoning and logic, linguistic ability, memory, and problem solving occur.”

Examples of new social experiences include babysitting for younger siblings, performing household chores, learning basic aspects of the local economy (of the farm, hunting, etc.). Formal schooling usually starts by age 6. Thus, this shift is “a fundamental transformation in the human life course” (p. 140).

Society expects us to “incorporate values and beliefs regarding ultimate life concerns – what is good, what is true, what is God – and to begin to take responsibility for the moral choices we make. We begin to take ownership of our daily lives and to make decisions about what we value” (p. 141)

“To be an “agent” in the fullest sense is to ***take ownership of personal experience*** and to ***organize behavior for the future in the service of future goals***” (p. 141, emphasis added)

### *Agency and Personality*

- To be an agent is to make choices...to move forward in life in a self-determined and goal-directed manner (p. 142).

- However, events in our lives can lead us to feel that we do not have control, we can't make the choices we want.

### *A Portrait of the Agent as a Young Child*

Agency = self-conscious striving, will, choice, deliberate planning, and purpose...which takes years to achieve (p. 145).

- Children as young as one- to two-years-old are “primed to detect agency in the world” (p. 146)
- Children between two and four years of age develop an explicit “theory of mind” = people do things because they want to do them (desire) and in light of what they understand to be true (belief) (p. 146)
- Children with autism often have difficulty with theory of mind tasks
- “By age 5 or 6, [most children come] into a full understanding that human beings are fundamentally intentional, purposeful, goal-directed agents” (p. 146)
- Many children extend that sense to inanimate or imaginary objects = **animism** (everything in the environment is the result of a purposeful action of an agent)

**TABLE 5.1. Developmental Steps in Becoming a Motivated Agent**

Age (years)	Developmental emergence
0	<i>Goal directedness.</i> Even newborn infants respond to the world in a goal-directed manner. For example, the baby moves its head toward the nipple in order to suck. Human behavior is rarely random.
1	<i>Intentionality.</i> Toward the end of the first year, infants show a preference for observing and imitating the intentional, rather than unintentional, behaviors of others. They show a rudimentary understanding of the fact that people intend to do things.  <i>Joint attention.</i> When attending to an object, an infant may check back with the caregiver to determine if the caregiver is also attending to the same thing as a way of gaining information on the caregiver's intentions and point of view.
2	<i>Agency projection.</i> In the second year of life, toddlers attribute intentionality to other people and to many objects in the world, such as toys and dolls. They may reveal an implicit assumption that these objects possess their own agency (e.g., desires, beliefs). Some researchers argue that children as young as 18 months therefore show a primitive, implicit "theory of mind."
3–4	<i>Theory of mind.</i> Children develop an explicit theory of mind: They come to understand that people are motivated agents in the sense that they have desires and beliefs in their minds upon which they act. Goal-directed behavior is motivated by what an agent wants (desire) and what an agent believes to be true. Children apply this understanding to themselves.
5–7	<i>Schooling and socialization.</i> In most societies, children leave home to begin school around age 5 and/or they begin systematic training in social and technical practices that contribute to the economic and moral well-being of the group. Children take on increased responsibilities, such as minding younger siblings and helping out with domestic tasks.
7–8	<i>Concrete operations.</i> Thinking about the concrete world becomes more systematic, rational, and logical. Children become experts in classifying and organizing the material world; they are able to apply rational cognitive operations to make sense of reality. The powers of concrete operations enable an understanding of moral and social conventions while enhancing skills in planning and goal-setting.
8–9	<i>Self-esteem.</i> Children begin to evaluate themselves in terms of how well they are doing with respect to achieving valued personal goals, often linked to concerns about peer acceptance and status. When goal attainment is high, they experience high levels of self-esteem; failure in goal pursuit leads to low self-esteem.

Note that there is some overlap across the different age groups

### ***Narcissism: A Problem of Unmitigated Agency***

“In the ancient Greek tale of Narcissus, a young hunter, admired for his unmatched beauty, spurns many who love and pursue him. Among them is Echo, an unfortunate nymph—who, after pulling a trick on one of the gods, has lost her ability to speak except for words already spoken by another. Though initially entranced by a voice that mirrored his own, Narcissus ultimately rejects Echo's embrace. The god Nemesis then curses Narcissus, causing him to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. Narcissus becomes hopelessly infatuated with his own image, which he believes to be another beautiful being, and becomes distraught when he finds it cannot reciprocate his affection. In some versions of the story, he wastes away before his own likeness, dying of thirst and starvation” (Kwon, 2023)



- Grandiosity
- Self-entitlement

Possibly caused by the failure of parents to affirm their child and build up a sense of a core self” (p. 161)

Most narcissists “eventually wear out their welcome” but “some highly narcissistic people attain positions of high esteem in the arts, sports, politics, and other domains” (p. 162)

Examples of narcissistic individuals may include US presidents, corporation CEOs, etc.

Research more recently has argued that there are **two forms** of this personality type (Kwon, 2023).

- *Grandiose narcissism*: highly assertive, attention seeking. Often vindictive and domineering toward other.
- *Vulnerable narcissism*: strongly neurotic, anxious, depressed, self-conscious; tendency to self-harm and risk of suicide; often more withdrawn and exploitable by others.

Common thread to both forms appears to be an underlying attitude of “antagonism,” which includes selfishness, deceitfulness and callousness” (see table on next page from Miller et al., 2016)

Miller et al, 2016: ABSTRACT. The Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI) is a self-report measure of the traits linked to grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, as well as narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), from a five-factor model perspective (FFM). In the current studies, the factor structure of the FFNI was explored and the results supported the extraction of three factors: Antagonism (e.g., Arrogance), Neuroticism (e.g., Need for Admiration), and Agentic Extraversion (e.g., Authoritativeness). In Study 2, the FFNI factors manifested convergent validity with their corresponding Big Five domains and diverging relations with measures of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, NPD, and self-esteem. Ultimately, the FFNI factors help explicate the differences between various expressions of narcissism such that all are related to Antagonism but differ with regard to Neuroticism (relevant to vulnerable narcissism and NPD) and Agentic Extraversion (relevant to grandiose narcissism and NPD). The results also highlight the complex relation between self-esteem and the traits that comprise narcissism measures.

**TABLE 3. Factor Analysis of the FFNI Scales in Two Studies**

	Factor 1: Antagonism		Factor 2: Neuroticism		Factor 3: Extraversion	
	S1	S2	S1	S2	S1	S2
Exploitativeness	<b>.88</b>	<b>.84</b>	-.03	.01	.02	.04
Lack of Empathy	<b>.87</b>	<b>.82</b>	-.18	-.08	-.29	-.29
Entitlement	<b>.84</b>	<b>.83</b>	.02	.03	-.05	.06
Arrogance	<b>.81</b>	<b>.76</b>	-.04	.01	.13	.23
Manipulativeness	<b>.73</b>	<b>.68</b>	.00	-.08	.22	.23
Reactive Anger	<b>.50</b>	<b>.61</b>	<u>.47</u>	.34	.11	.12
Distrust	<b>.41</b>	<b>.46</b>	.30	.20	-.07	-.18
Thrill Seeking	<b>.40</b>	<b>.37</b>	-.02	-.10	.14	.12
Shame	-.05	.00	<b>.88</b>	<b>.90</b>	-.08	.06
Indifference	.30	.16	<b>-.85</b>	<b>-.84</b>	-.04	-.03
Need for Admiration	.21	.21	<b>.70</b>	<b>.74</b>	-.18	-.02
Acclaim Seeking	-.15	-.15	.00	.09	<b>.80</b>	<b>.66</b>
Authoritativeness	.04	.15	-.14	-.22	<b>.68</b>	<b>.63</b>
Grandiose Fantasies	.24	.20	.03	.08	<b>.65</b>	<b>.69</b>
Exhibitionism	.03	.06	-.01	.03	<b>.60</b>	<b>.61</b>

Note. Primary factor loadings of .35 or higher are bolded. Secondary factor loadings of .35 or higher are underlined. FFNI = Five Factor Narcissism Inventory; S1 = Study 1; S2 = Study 2.

As McAdams argues near the end of this chapter, narcissistic personality (at least in its grandiose form) represents too much agency.

#### References

Kwon, D. (2023, September). What is narcissism? Science confronts a widely misunderstood phenomenon. *Scientific American*.

Miller, J. D., Lynam, D. R., McCain, J. L., et al. (2016). Thinking structurally about narcissism: An examination of the Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory and its components. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 30, 1-18. [https://doi.org/10.1521/pedi\\_2015\\_29\\_177](https://doi.org/10.1521/pedi_2015_29_177)