

Between Imposing One's Will and Protecting Oneself. Narcissism and the Meaning of Life among Dutch Pastors

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ABSTRACT: In contemporary culture, narcissism is an important and common personality trait. This trait is very significant for the meaning people experience in their lives. This article deals with an inquiry into the relationship between narcissism and the meaning of life among pastors. Narcissism is further specified into several dimensions (centripetal narcissism, centrifugal narcissism, isolation and self-satisfaction) and the significance of these dimensions is examined for two central dimensions of the attribution of meaning (frame of reference and fulfilment). The article discusses the significance of the relationship between narcissism and meaning for the professional performance of pastors.

KEY WORDS: meaning of life; narcissism; pastoral performance; pastoral psychology.

Introduction

“I have set a couple of objectives that mark my life’s path like lighthouses. And, really, I am convinced that I’ll succeed in covering that distance along the beacons. In any case, I believe I’ll go a long way, and that truly feels good.” This is part of a conversation that I once heard in a café.

Everything points to the fact that the man who said this feels his life has meaning. He is positively committed to goals that give his life direction. Moreover, he has every confidence that he will at least partly achieve these goals and this is a prospect that gives him satisfaction. The way in which this

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man talked about the meaning of his life corresponds almost seamlessly with the characteristics of a meaningful life as distinguished by Battista and Almond (1973). A person who claims to feel his life is meaningful has a more or less thought-out idea of what makes life meaningful (1); sets objectives based on this idea that he wants to achieve in his life (2); has the feeling that he has achieved some of these objectives or that they are within reach (3); and attributes great importance to the realisation of these objectives (4).

Can we not expect most pastors to feel their life is meaningful? Surely, they generally work for an institution – the church for instance – and/or within a tradition – religion – from which they can derive life goals and perspectives and which, moreover, provide them with the means to achieve their goals. Hence, pastors would appear to have every opportunity to realise their goals, and consequently to experience meaning in their lives. However, this assumption is perhaps not so self-evident as it appears. There are good reasons to assume that pastors' sense of meaning in life is no less under pressure nowadays than that of ordinary people. I shall elaborate on this later.

This article is structured as follows. I will begin by discussing the pursuit of meaning and the role of religion. Next, I will deal with the role of the "self" in the pursuit of meaning and introduce the concept of narcissism. I will conclude the theoretical part with a section on pastors' experience of meaning. I will then discuss an empirical study conducted among pastors on the relationship between meaning and narcissism. The article will conclude with a discussion of the research results.

The pursuit of meaning and religion

The pursuit of meaning fulfils four important and closely interrelated human needs (Baumeister, 1991). First of all, it provides people with a sense of purpose in life, directing their actions towards goals which they think they can achieve in the short or long run. Engaging in activities that have meaning amounts to more than simply being busy. A second function is the legitimation of action. The pursuit of meaning affirms people's sense that what they do is justified, good and right. Thirdly, having a sense of meaning makes people feel they make a difference. It fills them with a sense of having some control over the world rather than being completely at its mercy. This feeling of having a grip on life is closely related to the fourth function, namely that the pursuit of meaning gives people self-esteem. It gives people the feeling that they occupy a meaningful place in a meaningful universe (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997).

Religion counts as one of the best sources of meaning in life (Baumeister, 1991). Religion provides people with goals to pursue, it legitimates human conduct, gives people the feeling that they have some control over life and thus contributes towards their self-esteem. Although religion has been a strong

source of meaning in life since time immemorial, it has been under pressure in Western Europe since the Middle Ages. Religion has lost much of its credibility. With the decline in credibility of religion as a source of meaning, the meaning of life became problematic to many. For many people in Western society, there no longer exists a self-evident and indisputable system of meaning and as a result they are increasingly left to their own resources. Yalom (1980) asserts that there is no meaning in life but that which people themselves ascribe to it. The solution, in his view, lies in people's creative capacities.

Many research reports point to a clear link between having a sense of meaning in one's life and well-being, showing that achieving such a link is not within everybody's reach and the pursuit of meaning in life can also be a burden. Debats (1996, 1998) established a connection between general psychological well-being, happiness and self-esteem on the one hand, and having a sense of meaning in life on the other. Wong and Fry (1998) and Scannell, Allen and Burton (2002) came to the same conclusion. Ganellen and Blaney (1984) as well as Newcomb and Harlow (1986) found a positive connection between the experience of meaning in life and the ability to deal with existential problems. These studies all indicate that the pursuit of meaning in life can be a burden. People nowadays have to look for meaning inside themselves, finding out what their goals in life are and what means they can use best to realise them. These are tasks and responsibilities which can apparently be quite burdensome. It should be pointed out that the established relationships are in fact correlations. This means that experiencing a lack of meaning may affect people's well-being but the inverse relationship, i.e. that a lack of well-being may have a negative effect on people's sense of meaning in life, can by no means be ruled out.

The pursuit of meaning and the self

Baumeister (1991) points out that as traditions and institutions become less influential as bearers of meaning, the self becomes more important as a vehicle of meaning. This view of the self can be taken to mean two different things. In the first variant, the self is the agent responsible for the construction of meaning. The individual is faced with the task of assembling a fitting system of meaning using all kinds of cultural elements whether religious or not. In doing so, the person seeks to attune personal elements with elements present in his or her culture. The aim is to relate a more subjective element (the self) with a more objective element (culture). In the second variant, the self as such becomes the source of meaning. This position is much more radical, for it involves a much more inward-looking approach. The self and its development become goals to live for; the self and its actualisation as such have become the meaning of life.

The difference between the two positions may be primarily theoretical and in reality they will not be found in their pure form all that often. In fact, it is more interesting to look at what the two positions have in common, namely that in the absence of self-evident and established criteria, the self and its experiences become important beacons for one's orientation in life. In order to explain and legitimate their actions, people increasingly refer to inner criteria, to what is best for them: "it feels good to do things this way." The good life is a life by which one can express oneself (Bellah, 1985). Personal experience becomes the standard measure of meaning.

Narcissism

The psychological counterpart of this cultural revaluation of the self is the rise of narcissism. Following Bursten (1982) and Westen (1990), I understand narcissism to be a strong psychologically tinted interest in oneself. It can also be defined as "mental care for oneself." Little is accomplished by automatically linking narcissism with pathology or by simply condemning it from a moral perspective, as authors such as Lasch (1978) and Sennett (1974) have done, even if their insights have contributed significantly to knowledge about the dysfunctional aspects of the phenomenon. A certain degree of narcissism is necessary for a person to have a positive self-image, stability and a perception of their person as a whole (Kohut, 1966; Stolorow, 1975). So understood, everyone is to some extent narcissistic. Narcissism is a continuous personality variable rather than a personality disorder (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1979; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). It is only at the extreme end of the narcissistic spectrum, in cases where this trait is associated with antisocial behaviour for instance, that it becomes meaningful to speak of dysfunctionality or pathology.

The most important characteristics of narcissism are: a strong orientation towards oneself; fantasies about oneself as important, powerful and successful; and little regard for other people's concerns (Kernberg, 1975, 1986; Kohut, 1971). These traits are paradoxically coupled with a strong dependency upon others, since narcissistically oriented personalities are constantly looking for recognition from others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

The self, with its narcissistic colouring, becomes increasingly important in the pursuit of meaning. Actually, quite a few authors argue that the construction of meaning is difficult precisely because of this narcissistic colouring. They point out that narcissism results in inner emptiness (Capps, 1993; Kernberg, 1975, 1986; Kohut, 1971). In other words, narcissism thwarts the attempts to make the self the constructor or even the source of meaning. This gives rise to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the self becomes increasingly more responsible for creating meaning, while on the other hand

the emphasis on the self produces narcissistic traits which obstruct the creation of meaning.

To resolve this paradox, it is perhaps useful to distinguish between two dimensions in narcissism: centripetal and centrifugal narcissism (Ettema & Zondag, 2002; Wink, 1991, 1996; Zondag, 2003, 2004a). In English-language literature, the centrifugal variant is generally termed “overt” and the centripetal variant “covert” narcissism. The terms “overt” and “covert” have been introduced by Wink (1991, 1996). Centrifugal narcissism is an outwardly directed comparison with others in which one sees oneself as having influence and power over others. It manifests itself as the appropriation of executive skills, the ability to influence others, and the gratification derived from being the centre of attention. Centripetal narcissism has the other as its starting point; it is an inward-directed comparison with others. The individual has the experience of being ruled by others, is sensitive to the opinions of others and easily hurt. When interacting with others, the individual is – always – on the lookout for possible criticism and easily embarrassed.

The centrifugal dimension generally appears to coincide with the sense of leading a meaningful life and the absence of emptiness, whereas the occurrence of centripetal narcissism is often coupled with an absence of meaning in life, emptiness and boredom (Ettema & Zondag, 2002; Rose, 2002; Wink & Donahue, 1997). Accordingly, there is a link between narcissism and the experience of meaning, although the direction depends upon the narcissistic dimension at play. Emptiness mainly coincides with centripetal narcissism. What is most important to us, however, is the fact that the experience of the self and the meaning of life appear to be connected.

Meaning of life among pastors

Now what is the case with the experience of meaning among pastors? On the one hand, pastors are part of an institution and a tradition in which meaning has always been readily available; on the other hand, pastors live in a culture in which religious meaning has lost a great deal of its strength. There is no reason to assume that this cultural process has bypassed pastors (Zondag, 2004b) or that they have been able to withdraw from a self-oriented culture. This prompts the question of whether and how their experience of meaning in life is affected by their sense of self, hence by narcissism.

This brings me to two research questions. The first question is how much meaning pastors experience in their lives. The second is in which way narcissistic tendencies play a role in their experience of meaning in life.

Nothing is known about these subjects. A literature search in the data banks of PsycInfo and Sociological Abstracts, for example, did not yield a single result. That is surprising since these topics would seem to be highly relevant to pastors personally as well as to their professional performance.

In the first place, the experience of meaning in life will have repercussions for the personal well-being of pastors. This assumption is borne out by the literature on meaning in life in relation to well-being that was discussed above.

In the second place, the experience of meaning in life will affect the pastors' professional performance. After all, pastoral work has a great deal to do with the parishioners' sense of meaning in life and the pastors' own sense of meaning is bound to play a role in the way they discuss such issues with them. Two extremes can be envisaged here. One extreme is that pastors experience no meaning in their lives. Should they then fail to come to grips with their own problems in a professional manner, that will have a negative effect on the pastoral relationship. Pastors may side-step discussions about such topics because they find them embarrassing. Again, they may take the contrary position, identifying with their parishioners' problems to such an extent that they focus on their own problems and lose sight of those of their clientele. The other extreme, in which pastors are brimming with meaning, is apparently more attractive. However, this too can have detrimental effects. Are pastors who are brimming with meaning still able to understand and empathise with their parishioners; do they not become estranged from them? Alternatively, pastors can be so convinced of their own sense of meaning that they want to persuade their parishioners, leaving them no room to find their own answers to the question of a meaningful life.

Two extremes can also be distinguished in the relationship between meaning in life and narcissism. In the one extreme, the pastor's sense of meaning in life is predicated solely on his narcissism. That would hardly seem consonant with one of the basic premises of the pastoral profession, i.e. the awareness of being dependent upon a dimension that transcends mankind, an order not created by mankind. One may wonder whether such a discrepancy between the personal way of life of the pastor and the premises of the pastoral profession is tenable. The question is also whether parishioners will entrust themselves to pastors whose own pursuit of meaning in life does not rely upon a dimension that transcends the human. In the other extreme, pastors leave their personal sense of meaning out of account and take their bearings solely from a transcendent dimension. It would seem that such pastors fail to relate to modern culture. As a result they are likely to be accessible only to parishioners who have not been in contact with the modern situation in any way, if they exist at all.

A survey of meaning among pastors

Instruments

I have investigated the meaning of life with the aid of the Life Regard Index (LRI) designed by Battista and Almond (1973). The basis of their index is a

formal interpretation of the meaning of life (Debats, 1996, 1998). They posit no “true” or “ultimate” meaning which holds or should hold for everybody, but proceed on the assumption that meaning can have many forms. In this regard, they subscribe to the present situation in which a great diversity of outlooks on life can be found, religious or otherwise. People have many ways of ascribing meaning to life, theistic and atheistic, and each can take on many forms. There are systems of meaning which encompass life in its entirety and systems of meaning which cover only parts of life. Battista and Almond’s approach is tolerant with regard to the ways in which people give meaning to their lives. There is room for individual elaboration and respondents are not tested on whether or not they comply with a pre-established system of meaning (normally the one the researcher subscribes to). With the LRI one can study and compare various forms of meaning which differ in content.

The LRI consists of two subscales: the Framework scale and the Fulfilment scale. The Framework scale indicates whether people have a meaningful perspective which they use to organise their lives and whether they have goals which they want to achieve in life. This subscale maps the cognitive aspect of giving meaning to one’s life. An example of an item from this scale is, “I have the feeling that I have found an important value worth striving for.” The Fulfilment scale measures whether people succeed in realising their various goals and projects, or else, whether they believe they can realise them in future. This subscale indicates the affective component of meaning in life. “Life gives me a great deal of satisfaction” is an example of an item from the Fulfilment scale. Answering options for the LRI vary from 1 (certainly not the case) to 7 (certainly the case). High scores indicate the presence of a frame of reference and life satisfaction. The validity of the LRI was apparent from links with (among other things) life satisfaction, fear of dying, general psychological distress and self-esteem (Debats, 1996, 1998). The LRI proved to be a measuring instrument with good reliabilities (Debats, 1998). The reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) of the LRI in this study were 0.76 for the Framework scale and 0.70 for the Fulfilment scale. Both the Framework scale and the Fulfilment scale consist of six items.

In order to investigate the prevalence of narcissism, I used the *Nederlandstalige Narcisme Schaal* (NNS, Dutch-language narcissism scale). The NNS is a written questionnaire that measures normal non-pathological narcissism (Ettéma & Zondag, 2002). The NNS is based on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) developed by Raskin and Hall (1979, 1981) and Hendin and Cheek’s hypersensitive narcissism scale (1997). In this study, four dimensions were distinguished using the NNS: centripetal narcissism, centrifugal narcissism, isolation and self-satisfaction (Zondag 2003, 2004a).

Centripetal narcissism is an inwardly directed comparison with others in which an individual feels strongly dependent upon others. Centrifugal narcissism is an outwardly directed comparison with others in which the

individual has the feeling that he or she determines others. Isolation indicates whether one experiences a separation between oneself and others and whether one feels understood by others. Lastly, self-satisfaction indicates whether a person has the feeling that they achieve more in life than others do. Examples of items from the different dimensions are: "I can easily get others to do what I feel is necessary" (centrifugal); "When I enter a room I am often painfully aware of the way others look at me" (centripetal); "I often have the feeling that there is a shield separating me from others" (isolation); "Compared to others I am not doing too badly in life" (self-satisfied). Answering options vary from 1 (certainly not the case) to 7 (certainly the case). High scores on one of these scales indicate the presence of a dimension. The NNS turned out to provide a valid measurement of narcissism in its various dimensions (Ettema & Zondag, 2002). For example, there were links between narcissism on the one hand and self-esteem, empathy, meaning of life and burn-out on the other. The reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha) of the scales for centripetal narcissism, centrifugal narcissism, isolation and self-satisfaction are 0.77, 0.73, 0.72 and 0.60, respectively. The scales consist of 11, eight, seven and two items, respectively.

Participants and procedure

The survey was conducted in the autumn of 2001, among Roman Catholic pastors in the dioceses of Groningen and Utrecht, and pastors of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the provinces of Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe. The respondents were selected at random from these churches' address books. Four-hundred and seventy-five questionnaires were sent out by mail. Three weeks after the questionnaires had been sent, all pastors received a reminder. This resulted in a 41% response rate, with 196 pastors returning a questionnaire. The denominational response rates were: Roman Catholic, 41%, Dutch Reformed, 44% and Reformed, 34%. Among the respondents, 33% belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, 40% to the Dutch Reformed Church and 27% to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Of the research subjects, 4% were deacons, 21% church or pastoral workers, 57% Protestant ministers and 16% Catholic priests; 89% worked in a parish or community and 11% in an institution such as a hospital or prison. The mean age of the pastors is 50 years (SD = 10.9), with a mean of 15 years (SD = 11.7) spent working in the pastorate. 69% of the sample are men, 31% women. With regard to age and type of work within the church, the data were representative of the population nationwide. Women were slightly overrepresented.

All the data were analysed using SPSS for Windows. To ensure that as much information as possible was used, a partial deletion method was applied in cases where data were missing.

Results

Meaning of life

Pastors score high on both Framework and Fulfilment (Table 1). The mean score on the Framework scale is 5.7 (SD = 0.6), on the Fulfilment scale 5.3 (SD = 0.7); in both cases far above the mean of the scale of 4. On the Framework scale, 88% has a high score, on the Fulfilment scale 60% (score >5). The Pearson correlation between Framework and Fulfilment is 0.50 ($p < 0.01$). Pastors who have a frame of reference for organising their life usually succeed in realising their goals.

Female pastors scored somewhat higher on both scales than their male colleagues. The mean score of women on the Framework scale was 5.9, that of men 5.6 ($p < 0.05$); and women scored a mean of 5.5 on the Fulfilment scale, as against men 5.3 ($p < 0.05$). With regard to church association (Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed Church, Reformed Church) or form of pastorate (a parish or an institution such as a hospital or a prison) there were no differences. Nor did the age of the pastors or the number of years spent working in the pastorate make any difference. Only a brief summary of the data for narcissism is provided here. Readers seeking more details are referred to other publications (Zondag 2003, 2004a). The average scores for centripetal narcissism, centrifugal narcissism, isolation and self-satisfaction were 3.4 (SD = 0.8), 4.9 (SD = 0.7), 3.4 (SD = 0.9) and 4.4 (SD = 1.2), respectively.

Meaning of life and narcissism

Does being self-oriented have any effect on pastors' sense of meaning in life? In other words, does pastors' narcissism make a difference, and if so, which dimension of narcissism is involved? In this section, I shall try to answer these questions using the results of stepwise regression analysis. In this analysis, I predicted the scores on Framework and Fulfilment on the basis of the pastors'

TABLE 1

Meaning among Pastors

	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage low score	Percentage medium score	Percentage high score
Framework	5.7	0.6	0	12	88
Fulfilment	5.3	0.7	0	40	60

Means, standard deviations and percentages of low, medium and high scores ($n = 196$).

Scale breadth: 1 (minimum)–7 (maximum). Percentage low score: mean scale score 1–3; medium score: mean scale score 3.01–5; high score: mean scale score 5.01–7.

scores in the four dimensions of narcissism (centripetal narcissism, centrifugal narcissism, isolation and self-satisfaction). Table 2 summarises the results of the analysis.

Whether or not one has a frame of reference depends, in the first place, upon centrifugal narcissism. Pastors who can hold their own in the company of others also succeed in creating a set of values and goals which serve as a frame of reference in their lives. Pastors who are determined by others are less likely to succeed in doing that. This is evident from the negative beta value which expresses the relationship between having a Framework and centripetal narcissism. Pastors characterised by an overriding sense of self-satisfaction are also more successful than others in creating a frame of reference for their lives, as is evident from the positive relation between self-satisfaction and having a Framework.

With regard to Fulfilment, all four dimensions of narcissism are important. Pastors in whom centrifugal narcissism and self-satisfaction are dominant traits experience relatively more fulfilment in life. Their colleagues in whom centripetal narcissism and isolation predominate experience relatively less fulfilment in life.

Comparing the relations between narcissism on the one hand and having a frame of reference and experiencing fulfilment on the other, two things stand out. In the first place, narcissism is more significant for fulfilment in life than

TABLE 2

Stepwise Regression Analysis

Standardised beta values	
<i>Framework</i>	
Centrifugal	0.33
Centripetal	-0.24
Self-satisfaction	0.14
Adjusted R^2	0.21
<i>Fulfilment</i>	
Centripetal	-0.39
Centrifugal	0.23
Isolation	-0.18
Self-satisfaction	0.15
Adjusted R^2	0.36

Meaning of life predicted on basis of narcissism.

Note: Only beta weights significant at least at $p < 0.05$ are included.

for having a framework. The explained variance for the prediction of Fulfilment scores based on narcissism is considerably higher than that for the prediction of Framework scores. Secondly, the more outwardly directed components of narcissism (centrifugal narcissism and self-satisfaction) are particularly significant for explaining Framework scores, whereas the inwardly directed aspects of narcissism (centripetal narcissism and isolation) are more determinative of life fulfilment. I shall return to both findings in the conclusion.

Discussion

Pastors experience meaning in their lives; most of them have a frame of reference which gives their lives direction, and succeed in realising the goals they have set for themselves or have hope that they will still be realised. Despite the fact that the pastoral profession is under pressure (Nauta, 1995), the pastorate still appears to be a good place to work. This already became evident from research into pastors' job satisfaction which proved to be high (Zondag, 2004b). The pastorate appears to be a profession with a high potential for meaning. This meaning will contribute to involvement in and dedication to the pastoral profession.

A question that arises in this regard is whether or not there is any evidence of a selection effect. Is it especially those who experience meaning in life who continue working in the pastorate and do those who do not manage to secure this experience leave the pastoral profession? The data indicates that a selection effect is improbable. For a selection effect to exist there would have to be a relation with the number of years a respondent has worked in the pastorate. Those with relatively little work experience would have to experience less meaning than those working in the pastorate longer. However, there appears to be no connection at all between the experience of meaning (both with regard to the setting of goals and their realisation) and the number of years spent working in the pastorate.

Earlier on in the article, I sketched the risks associated with a lack of meaning and with an abundance of meaning. The data indicates that the latter risk is greater than the former, since pastors in fact experience a great deal of meaning. That is why it seems relevant to me to be alert in training and supervision of risks such as wanting to convince others of one's own experience of meaning, and not being able to empathise with those who experience no meaning.

There are more pastors who have a frame of reference than pastors who experience fulfilment. This can mean that for a few pastors, albeit a minority, their well-being is at stake. Those who have a frame of reference but do not have much hope of the future realisation of the goals they have set themselves seem to be generally worse-off, in terms of well-being, than those who have no goals to achieve – and therefore do not feel the pressure of having to achieve them (Debats, 1996, 1998). It remains a burden to have a framework setting

goals for one's life and see no way of achieving them. The person has the feeling that he or she has to do something, but feels powerless to act on it. A situation like this is generally experienced as stressful (Holahan, Moos, & Schaeffer, 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and prolonged exposure to such a situation often leads to diminished well-being.

Narcissism appears to play a role in pastors' sense of meaning in life. Technically formulated, narcissism explains 21% and 36% of the variance for the setting of goals and fulfilment, respectively. However, these figures also indicate that a substantial part of the variance can be explained by other sources. Part of the meaning experienced by pastors may be derived from sources of meaning contained in the pastoral profession and religion itself. I do not have the data to be able to answer this question. This brings me to a recommendation for new research: what else, apart from narcissism or mental care of the self, contributes to the meaning experienced by those working in the pastoral profession? More specifically formulated, what is the function, for example, of religion or the church in the experience of meaning by pastors?

The evidence suggests that in order to find meaning, pastors orient themselves both towards that which lies beyond them and that which comes from inside. If they oriented themselves entirely towards what is beyond oneself, narcissism would not explain anything; if they were entirely self-directed, narcissism would have to explain much more variance. Thus, pastors seem to be midway between orienting themselves towards established goals – a transcendent religious dimension – and towards modern culture which accords a central position to the self, and narcissism. Such an attitude seems to be a good basis for mediating between religious tradition and modernity, and for bridging the gap between the two for their parishioners. The dangers pointed out earlier – that pastors might either operate exclusively from within or orient themselves entirely towards a religious transcendent dimension – seem to be absent.

There is greater coherence between narcissism and Fulfilment than between narcissism and Framework. This indicates that narcissism is more determinative for the realisation of meaning than for finding goals in life. Looking for meaning inside oneself plays a greater role for fulfilment than for one's orientation towards that which gives life direction. The data indicates that fulfilment is primarily determined by the absence of centripetal aspects of the narcissistic spectrum and that having a framework to live by is influenced by the centrifugal narcissistic dimension. Accordingly, fulfilment especially coincides with not feeling vulnerable to others. Perhaps a broader formulation is in order here: fulfilment is especially dependent upon not feeling determined by the world in an undesirable or painful way. Having a frame of reference is coupled with the idea that one can influence others. This too can be formulated more generally: having goals with which to organise life coincides above all with the idea that one has a grip on the world. If narcissism is understood as a way in which to dictate one's own conditions to the world, then

having an organising framework coincides mainly with imposing one's will on the world, whereas fulfilment is chiefly determined by protecting oneself from being too painfully affected by the world.

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