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Narcissism normalisation: tourism influences and sustainability implications

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ABSTRACT

The concept of narcissism normalisation suggests that individuals and societies are becoming more narcissistic due to various cultural influences. Tourism is reviewed here as one such possible influence. Exploitative, entitled and exhibitionistic tendencies associated with narcissism are well-established in tourism. Yet tourism is also an intimate, communal and satisfying activity which may counteract narcissism. Increases in narcissism have significant implications from a sustainable tourism perspective. Narcissism is associated with exploitative and entitled behaviours that over time cause significant harm to those people and landscapes that come into contact with. Narcissism appears to be incompatible with principles of sustainability and the challenges this poses for the industry are reviewed, while the opportunities are also explored. There are signs that narcissism, particularly those aspects relating to exhibitionism, can be co-opted to benefit sustainable development.

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Introduction

This article is interested in increases in narcissism amongst individuals and societies, the role of tourism within this, and implications for sustainability of the industry. As such it focuses not on clinical or pathological narcissism, a recognised personality disorder, but rather on culturally informed narcissistic attitudes and traits (Ackerman et al., 2010). Narcissism, involving exploitative tendencies, heightened sense of entitlement and exhibitionism, is a personality dimension for all humans heritable like any other (Golomb, 1995; Walters & Horton, 2015). However, individuals may be pushed towards lesser or greater levels of narcissism by various environmental factors also (Walters & Horton, 2015).

One environmental factor may be tourism. Discussion of the tourist self and tourism act within the literature has touched upon the inherent narcissism therein, alongside the problematic consequences of this (i.e. Cohen, 1982; MacCannell, 2002; Wheeler, 1991). Tourism has always contained exploitative, entitled and exhibitionist elements (i.e. Dann, 1977, 1981; Fennell, 2008; Wheeler, 2004). Narcissistic exploitation, entitlement and exhibitionism may henceforth be readily indulged through tourism. Yet tourism is also a source of intimacy, community and contentment (see Brown, 2013; Canavan, 2016; Cohen, 2011) which can act as counter-balances to these components of narcissism (Golomb, 1995; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). As such tourism may both contribute to and counteract narcissism normalisation.

Longstanding debate has suggested that gradually there has been a shift in what is considered a normal level of narcissism towards that which is increasingly narcissistic (MacDonald, 2014; Twenge

& Campbell, 2009; Tyler, 2007; Wolfe, 1976). There is some evidence to suggest that tourism is likewise becoming more narcissistic. We are arguably witnessing a growth of tourist self-objectification (see Dinhopf & Gretzel, 2016), such as travel being undertaken for purposes of self-presentation via social media (i.e. Lo & McKercher, 2015; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). Simultaneously noted however is the expansion of conservation, green, eco and simple tourism movements, as well as growing demand for deeper, more meaningful, involved and co-created experiences (i.e. Davis, 2016; MacCannell, 2002; Richards, 2011). These types of tourism may not be ego-free (Wheeller, 2005), but they in some forms at least suggest a less self-centric, superficial or narcissistic focus.

Shifts in cultural narcissism are significant because while less markedly unhealthy than full-blown narcissistic personality disorder, overly high (and too low) levels of narcissism do share the serious negative implications associated with the pathological condition over time (Fox & Rooney, 2015; MacDonald, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Weiser, 2015). In particular, there are potentially severe consequences from a sustainability perspective in terms of the harmful effects of narcissistic exploitation and entitlement on host communities and landscapes. Reductions in empathy (Golomb, 1995), collaboration and society building (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010), disassociation from cultural and natural landscapes (Holifield, 2010), and increases in selfish behaviours (MacCannell, 2002), challenge sustainable development principles. Narcissism seems to be incompatible with these, yet opportunities may also arise from increases, relating to the co-opting of narcissistic exhibitionism as a means of promoting green products (Naderi & Strutton, 2014).

Recent research studies and media coverage have picked up on narcissism as a lens for analysing various social, such as increasing plastic surgery consumption (i.e. Shakespeare, 2016), and business, such as leadership styles of chief executives (i.e. Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007), issues. A similar positioning of narcissism within tourism studies or consideration of the implications for sustainability is lacking however, and has been absent from recent theoretical calls (i.e. Cohen & Cohen, 2012). There has until recently been a dearth of attention paid to the emotional sides of tourism more generally (Tucker, 2016). The contribution of this article is accordingly a threefold attempt to address this gap. First, a review of the literature relating to cultural narcissism and its normalisation. Second, placing tourism in this context as a potential environmental factor influencing both for and against this normalisation. Third, considering the potential impacts of narcissism normalisation on tourism industry sustainability in terms of the challenges and opportunities that might result. Such research may contribute to the enrichment of sustainable tourism theory (see Bramwell, 2015; Buckley, 2012) and narcissism might be more overtly positioned within tourism studies as a result.

Narcissism

Narcissism may be described as a continuum between extremes of healthy and unhealthy, with a range of narcissistic responses from the mild and transient to the fixed personality disorder (MacDonald, 2014, p. 145). A degree of narcissism can be healthy, as with a steady sense of self-worth and ability to recover from disappointments (Horwitz, 2000). Self-confidence, esteem and pro-social behaviours such as leadership qualities may be associated with (Carpenter, 2012). At the extreme however, narcissistic personality disorder is a diagnosable pathological state; one which involves seriously disproportionate preoccupation with personal competence, power and superiority, and the potential for various anti-social behaviours and unhealthy associations such as alienation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Various constituents of narcissism have been reported (i.e. Ackerman et al., 2010; Weiser, 2015). It is perhaps useful to think of narcissism as containing three components however: entitlement which relates to the self, exploitation regards interpersonal relationships and exhibitionism in terms of self-promoting and regulating strategies (see also Campbell, Campbell, Hoffman, & Marchisio, 2011).

First, entitlement relates to the sense of self, which is in the case of the narcissist over-inflated and absorbing (Duchon & Burns, 2008). Reality as the narcissist sees it revolves around them to the exclusion of all others (Roberts, 2014). Narcissism can additionally work at a group level, whereby unrealistic and grandiose beliefs may be about the significance and status of a group (Duchon & Burns,

2008). A strong sense of being special, unique and superior accompanies the narcissist individual or group, with implications for moral decision-making regarding and behaviour towards others.

Second is exploitation. Noted is the narcissist's inability to connect with or maintain loving relationships with others. The central symptom of the disorder is the narcissist's failure to achieve intimacy with anyone. This is the result of them seeing other people like items in a vending machine, using them to service their own needs and never being able to acknowledge that others might have needs of their own still less guess what they might be (Golomb, 1995). Relationships to people and to brands are more or less the same, with both treated instrumentally as objects for superficial admiration, enjoyment and self-aggrandisement until they outlive their usefulness and are discarded (Lambert & Desmond, 2013). Narcissists tend to be highly manipulative, coercive, deceitful, cold, uncaring and aggressive towards others (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Fox & Rooney, 2015).

Third, narcissists develop exhibitionistic behaviours and narratives to prioritise and protect the self. Narcissists need to be the centre of attention and will take any opportunity to fulfil this craving, even to the extent of being deliberately shocking, provoking or over-sharing (Carpenter, 2012; Hawk, Ter Bogt, Van Den Eijnden, & Nelemans, 2015). They tend to be attention seeking and highly concerned with physical appearance (Sorokowski et al., 2015). Self-obsession and vanity intersect within narcissism and physical beauty is often seen as the only way to define the self (MacDonald, 2014). This has consequences for those who do not fit into beauty norms such as the physically different (Shakespeare, 2016), as it does for attitudes towards ageing and mortality (MacDonald, 2014). This exhibitionism is moreover often defensive and used to deflect from, build up or compensate for a poor sense of self. Grandiosity can be summarised as a defence against deep feelings of inferiority, neither constant nor consistent, which leave the individual torn between feeling wonderful and worthless (MacDonald, 2014). Narcissists unconsciously deny an unstated and intolerably poor self-image through inflation, turning themselves into figures of grandeur. The goal of this self-deception is to be impervious to greatly feared external criticism and to their own rolling sea of doubts (Golomb, 1995). Behind facades such as social media profiles or acquisition of possessions, feelings of worthlessness, lack of confidence, fragility, shame, insecurity and anxiety can lurk (Bergman, Westerman, Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2013; Duchon & Burns, 2008; MacDonald, 2014). The belief in one's own extraordinariness will sooner or later abut the world and the result will be disillusionment in the best case scenario or ever greater fake grandeur in the worst (Williams, 2016).

Narcissism normalisation

Although narcissistic personality disorder remains rare, narcissistic traits involving vanity, arrogance, feeling special, lacking empathy and having little regard for others are arguably becoming increasingly common (Young & Pinsky, 2006). Twenge and Campbell (2009) use the term "age of entitlement" to describe the attention-seeking and narcissistic traits prioritised in modern culture and society. MacDonald (2014, p. 144) summarises:

While Narcissistic Personality Disorder remains a severe and fairly rare clinically diagnosed condition, sub-clinical narcissism or narcissistic traits have reached epidemic proportions with serious consequences. Ever increasing levels of greed, self-obsession, superficial relationships, arrogance and vanity are everywhere apparent and not making us any happier, with common mental health problems on the increase, especially among the young.

There are various studies which point to this increasing narcissism. Research applying the narcissistic personality inventory (NPI), the most widely recognised and adopted measurement tool, has identified progressively higher scores amongst participants (Rosen, Whaling, Rab, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013). Albeit the NPI is limited in its scope (Gentile, Twenge, Freeman, & Campbell, 2012). Research has also looked at cultural changes. In one interesting study, American song lyrics from 1980 to 2007 were analysed, with self-references found to be increasingly common (DeWall, Pond, Campbell, & Twenge, 2011). Meanwhile studies concerning generation Y have highlighted their strong sense of being unique and special (Howe & Strauss, 2009). The term "entitlement generation" has been coined

by Debevec, Schewe, Madden, and Diamond (2013) when researching young millennials' consumption practices which demonstrate a high sense of self and expectation. Increasing narcissistic traits are said to be particularly prevalent amongst the young, who tend to score more highly on the NPI for example (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Rosen et al., 2013). As such this may be an emergent issue which could influence individuals and societies into the future.

Nonetheless caution needs to be applied to claims for increasing narcissism. Vanity, self-absorption, grandiosity and group superiority are of course not new. Ovid's telling of the classical Greek myth of Narcissus is over 2000 years old after all. Criticisms of increasing narcissism have historically often come from a patriarchal perspective and have been used to denigrate identity politics and forms of sexual behaviour deemed to be counter-normative (Tyler, 2007). It is also easy to overestimate or too readily identify increasing narcissism (Pearce & Moscardo, 2015). Social media for example, one possible environmental factor much discussed in the literature, perhaps makes more visible timeless human desires to look good, interconnect, gain attention or approval. Its contents may not be as narcissistic as can initially appear. The pouting "duckface" seen so often in selfies for instance, is arguably often a self-conscious, ironic and self-parodying pose appropriate to the medium (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Selfies are arguably not considered portraits, but rather portraits of the self in the act of portrayal (Levin, 2014). Motivations for taking and posting selfies meanwhile are suggested to include engaging in communication with significant others (Kwon & Kwon, 2015), building and maintaining social relationships (Peek, 2014), and sharing in group bonding and identity building (Opel, 2014). Thus, the evidence emerging from research challenges the simplistic view that selfies are a result of narcissism and offers instead insights into a communicative and transformative practice reflecting various social connections and self-expression needs of individuals (Pearce & Moscardo, 2015).

Narcissism environmental factors

Various environmental factors have been proposed as influencing increasing prevalence of narcissistic traits (Fox & Rooney, 2015). Seemingly, irreversible alterations to family life, technological development including social media, attitudes to death and dying and celebrity worship; all feature in the rise of our narcissistic society and are interconnected trends (MacDonald, 2014). The change has been associated with western cultures and their greater emphasis on individuality (i.e. Twenge & Campbell, 2009) and their predominance of political-economic systems which prioritise individualism (i.e. Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). However, the phenomena have been noted in diverse locations. In China for example, where it is associated with rapid economic, social and cultural transformation (Cai, Kwan, & Sedikides, 2012).

Consumer culture appears as significant. Freud (1975) alerts us to the narcissistic strand running through consumption whereby purchases are made to satisfy desires and add to idealised images of selves (Cluley & Dunne, 2012). Consumer culture in general may be linked to the mobilisation of a narcissistic self-identity (Wearing, McDonald, & Wearing, 2013) as selves are increasingly fashioned and differentiated through aesthetic consumption practices (Shields, 2003). Meanwhile lifestyle practises including leisure become decisions about who to be (Giddens, 1991). Consumption can be linked to the pursuit and display of external appearances and outward signs of success and power (Freud, 1975) and hence may be relied upon by the narcissist as a means of self-affirmation (Lasch, 1979; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Likewise narratives of success and power, often wealth related, may be important to the narcissist's self-definition (Lasch, 1979).

Social changes related to new technologies are a particular area of study. Online communities have been described as particularly fertile ground for narcissists to self-regulate, as this setting offers a gateway to many shallow and detached relationships and also materials for self-presentations (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010). Findings have shown that narcissism, exhibitionism and superiority may be displayed using social media, albeit with differences therein according to particular sites or user demographics (Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013; Rosen et al., 2013). Similarly,

findings suggest that spending time on social media profiles causes young people to endorse more positive self-views, although the specific form this takes depends on the site (Gentile et al., 2012). Whilst narcissists in the millennial generation do not appear to use social media more often than non-narcissists their reasons for doing so are different, including seeking as many online friends as possible and using profiles to project a positive image (Bergman et al., 2011). Some reports moreover find a (not always strong) link between narcissism and the number of selfies¹ posted to social media (i.e. Chan & Tsang, 2014; Fox & Rooney, 2015; Weiser, 2015). Others however have found no link between selfie behaviour and narcissism (i.e. Banjanin, Banjanin, Dimitrijevic, & Pantic, 2015).

Relating to tourism, technological changes such as the development of internet enabled camera smartphones which facilitate selfie taking, have pushed focus onto the tourist as the background has simultaneously been cropped and emphasised away (Lo & McKercher, 2015; Lyu, 2016). Selfies are a way of touristic looking directed at the self and are an increasingly important part of tourism for many tourists (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). With such developments the relative importance of the self versus the tourist attraction reverses and tourists become more central than the tourist attraction in the photograph (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Where tourist's once went on holiday to see and photograph sites, they now go to photograph themselves with sites as backdrops (Lyu, 2016). "Rather than the camera extending outward to capture a destination, the camera is now not only more often pointed at the self than before, but often pointed at the self by the self" (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016, p. 131). Thus, the extraordinary nature of tourist destinations that tourists seek to visually consume and photograph is now in large part provided by tourists themselves (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016).

Also highlighted is growing celebrity culture which emphasises fame, success and beauty. Longing to enter such circles individuals, particularly those with narcissistic tendencies, many may think they are entitled to fame and will do anything to achieve it (Young & Pinsky, 2006). Lasch (1979) argued that the narcissist divides society into two groups: the rich, great and the famous on the one hand and the common herd on the other. This is something which celebrity culture nurtures and promotes. Celebrities, many of whom are more narcissistic than the general population, have become role models with negative consequences (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). The growing appeal of celebrity in tourism may be noticeable (i.e. Lee, Scott, & Kim, 2008). The influence of media and pop-culture may promote more passive and superficial forms of tourist consumption (Mansson, 2011).

Narcissism and tourism

The prospective influence of tourism as an environmental factor which might contribute to or counteract narcissism normalisation is an interesting one, heretofore overlooked. Tourism is a potentially useful means for indulging the exploitative, entitled and exhibitionist traits which characterise the narcissist. Alternatively, tourism is noted for providing intimacy, community and contentment. The following will briefly outline these considerations before moving on to look at the sustainability implications.

Exploitation – intimacy

The exploitative nature of tourism may be observed through criticisms of parts of the industry as short-term and transitory; moving on once local resources and host goodwill are exhausted (Aramberri, 2010; Poon, 1993). Many tourist experiences and relationships can also be characterised as shallow and transient (Boorstin, 1964). Tourists may reside within a bubble to protect the ego, avoiding deep and enduring relationships because of the risks of these to fragile underlying self (MacCannell, 2002). The transience of tourism means that tourist relationships are frequently of the fleetingly narcissistic type (MacCannell, 2002). Some tourists may build few relationships at all amongst themselves or with locals (narcissistic young tourists in Thailand for example; Cohen, 1982). Similarly, tourism can be a source of transient and tourist-dominant relationships of the sort that support and flatter the ego (MacCannell, 2002). As such tourism may be attractive to narcissists reluctant

to risk depth in terms of experiences or relationships due to the threat these potentially pose to the ego.

Nevertheless, various authors have challenged the conceptualisation of tourism social exchanges as shallow and contrived, highlighting instead depth, authenticity and meaning (i.e. Mura & Tavakoli, 2014). Research has illustrated the many positive economic partnerships, friendships and romantic relationships that tourism can facilitate between hosts (i.e. Mundet & Coenders, 2010), tourists (i.e. Cohen, 2003; Komppula, Ilves, & Airey, 2016), and between hosts and tourists (i.e. Canavan, 2013). These pleasurable and mutually rewarding experiences illustrate the potential for tourism to bring people together; at times in profound and long-lasting ways (Canavan, 2016). Such intimacy is important to countering narcissism. The person who loves has so to speak forfeited a part of his or her narcissism (Freud, 1975).

Many tourists do furthermore get deeply involved in local landscapes; choosing to a greater or lesser extent to acculturate and become closely involved with host cultures for example (Rasmi, Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2014). Evidence is that tourists frequently and increasingly seek to get closely involved in local lifestyles (i.e. Ateljevic, 2000; Richards, 2011). Increasing creative collaboration by and co-creativity of hosts involved deeply in the co-production of experiences is recognised (Richards, 2011; Suntikul & Jachna, 2016). Deep and meaningful experiences are said to be what modern tourists prioritise, particularly those within the generation Y cohort, and co-creation is an expected means of obtaining (Valentine & Powers, 2013; Vaux Halliday & Astafyeva, 2014). Alternative forms of less narcissistic holiday-making are suggested to emphasise this involvement and depth (see MacCannell, 2002). Likewise, those alternative and ethical forms which promote reciprocal altruism; providing deep and meaningful experiences in return for tourist involvement, commitment and creativity (i.e. Chen & Chen, 2011; Pan, 2012). The well-documented growth of special-interest niche tourists engaged with and concerned for particular sites, landscapes and experiences (i.e. McKercher, 2002; Robinson & Novelli, 2005) illustrates the widespread desire for more intimate travel.

Entitlement – community

Tourism is an activity where the emphasis on self is well established throughout (Sin, 2009). Self-obsession, isolation and grandiosity may all be observed in tourist behaviour and motivations preoccupied with hedonism and relaxation, often in solitude (Cohen, 1982). Tourism can be depicted as a self-focussed pursuit prone to selfish behaviour which prioritises the individual over surrounding landscapes and peoples (Wheeller, 1991, 1993). Tourism is essentially a pleasure-seeking activity (Gnoth, 1997). Although hedonism is not incompatible with ethical forms of tourism, themselves pleasure-seeking activities (Malone, McCabe, & Smith, 2014), life spent in the pursuit of enjoyment alone is devoid of any deep meaning or commitment to anything beyond self (Rohde, 1968). Consumer entitlement, in tourists' case towards hedonistic pleasure, may outweigh moral norms with negative consequences for host communities and landscapes (i.e. Diken & Laustsen, 2004).

Hence, MacCannell (2002) suggests that tourists can be described as egomaniacs. He sees tourism in certain forms as supplying the energy for: "autoeroticism, narcissism, economic conservatism, egoism, and absolute group unity or fascism" (MacCannell, 2002, p. 66). The tourist self in this view remains rigid or static and turned in on oneself, shrinking rather than expanding. In such cases, tourism may be a pastime which reinforces and protects the ego, furthering the narcissistic traits and problems associated with (MacCannell, 2002).

Alongside the individual however, tourism is a highly interconnected pursuit. Social, cultural and economic exchange is a characteristic of the service-intensive tourism industry which essentially engenders large scale interactions between people and between people and landscapes (Dieke, 2003). Making friends, interacting with others who share common interests and mutual learning motivate and enhance many tourism experiences (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Ooi & Laing, 2010). Social dimensions take precedence during holiday planning (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). What is perhaps really

being purchased is not a place but rather time for togetherness with significant others (Trauer & Ryan, 2005).

Tourism additionally offers opportunities to become part of particular travel communities, such as those of backpackers, who frequently share close bonds, codes and cultural practises (Cohen, 2003, 2011; Sørensen, 2003). Tourism is an experience that creates and strengthens social relationships among family members, friends and acquaintances (Mura & Tavakoli, 2014). Holidays provide opportunities for relationship reaffirmation and social bond building (Edensor, 2000). For Obrador (2012, p. 412): “coastal mass tourism was for the majority of participants an intensely family time, largely devoted to the cultivation of togetherness and the strengthening of family bonds”. It is worth noting the role that social media may play as a vehicle for forming and strengthening such relationships and communities (i.e. Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015).

There is significance in tourism stimulating community because interpersonal and human-environmental interactions facilitated by tourism may counter narcissistic detachment (Holifield, 2010). Conversely as traditional communal bonds decline place-bound communities, place-based ties and connectivity are also weakened (Shim & Santos, 2014). A loss of diversity and singularity may lead to psychological or physical displacement (Fullilove, 1996). In a subsequent attempt to wrest back some level of control, the individual retreats into personal preoccupations such as psychic and bodily improvement (Giddens, 1991). The narcissistic sufferer often experiences a deep-seated loneliness and a narcissistic society where self-promotion and individuality seem to be essential may not be what people actually want in terms of community, support and a sense of belonging (MacDonald, 2014).

Exhibitionism – contentment

As with other forms of consumption tourism may be just another stage for exhibiting the ego and source of materials for building grandiose narratives. However, due to tourism’s considerable conspicuous consumption potential it is perhaps an especially significant way to gain the attention the narcissist so craves and feels is deserved (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Travel originally intended for trade and conquest has shifted over time to focus on pleasure and to serve as a symbol of social status and improved social standings among family and peers (Chen & Chen, 2011; Vogt, 1976). Cultural capital can be gained through travel to be flaunted amongst other travellers or upon return home (Dann, 1977).

This is something perhaps heightened by the social media-friendly materials tourism produces. Just as early the twentieth century, tourism was linked to and shaped by emergence of tourist photography as a means to own, collect and display consumer prowess (Snow, 2008), so social media may be being used in the early twenty-first century. There has been significant uptake of social media by tourists to curate and share vacations, present and manage certain desirable self-narratives and images (Bosangit et al., 2015; Lo et al., 2011; Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu, & Zhu, 2015). There is evidence that people posting selfies are aware of their audience and adjust behaviour in order to gain positive reaction and avoid censure (Hogan, 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Social media is used for image management as photographs fit into narratives of the self and the quest for identity management (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). These are kept in mind by the tourist throughout a trip with satisfactory photographs deliberately posted on social media in order to convey desirable impressions to others (Lo & McKercher, 2015). Many tourists strategically adjust photographic images to manage their impressions (Lyu, 2016).

If tourism can be a source of exhibitionist materials utilised to prop-up and hide underlying weaknesses, then it can also be a source of personal reflexivity, development, growth and actualisation that could contribute to a stronger sense of self and contentment. Although tourism can be self-orientated, this may be in terms of reflexive self-analysis and personal growth of the sort likely to challenge the lack of introspection narcissists are associated with (Golomb, 1995; MacDonald, 2014). Tourism is noted as an important source of deep self-exploration, expression and search for the

authentic self (i.e. Bosangit et al., 2015). Tourists expose themselves to new and challenging situations, foreign cultures and people, in a quest for personal growth and understanding (Cohen, 2003; Vogt, 1976). Challenging life experiences can offer stimulation to one's thoughts and promote self-learning (Wang, 1999). It has been suggested that tourists may reappraise own and community attitudes, values and perceptions as a result of travel experiences. Tourism provides opportunities for intense cross-cultural interactions that may lead to an increased awareness of global issues and inequalities (Lepp, 2008), sense of increased tolerance (Noy, 2004), reduced ethnocentrism (Wei, Crompton, & Reid, 1989), more cosmopolitan attitudes (Cohen, 2011) or greater global consciousness (Yasothornsrikul & Bowen, 2015). Tourism may act as a catalyst for existential authenticity (Brown, 2013), whereby authenticity may be interpreted as an ideal state of fulfilment in which people can be true to themselves (Wang, 1999). "The unique and central function of tourism in offering not an occasional chance to be truly oneself, but a reflective space that is conducive to self-insight and to the examination of life priorities, and that could be a stimulus for the choice of a life of good faith" (Brown, 2013, p. 179).

Narcissism, tourism and sustainability challenges

The implications of narcissism are especially significant from a sustainability perspective. As noted narcissism can have severe negative consequences for the individual. Ultimately however, although it causes significant harm to and unhappiness for the sufferer, narcissism causes most damage over time to those surrounding and who come into contact with the narcissist (Golomb, 1995). Unhealthy narcissism has potentially damaging implications for societies, cultures and the planet as a whole (MacDonald, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

The strongly anti-social aspects of narcissism relating to exploitation and entitlement (see Ackerman et al., 2010) are particularly relevant in this context. Exploitation challenges concepts central to the achievement of sustainable tourism in terms of fairly distributing and conserving natural and cultural resources into the future. Narcissists are interested only in short-term gain, using brands and people and discarding once no longer useful (Lambert & Desmond, 2013). In an interesting simulation looking at usage of a common resource (a renewable forest in this case), Campbell et al. (2005) found that those with higher narcissism scores were more likely to select short-term personal gain even at the expense of long-term depletion. Such inferences suggest that the social and environmental costs of narcissism may be high (Bergman et al., 2013).

Moreover the superficiality inherent in such exploitive interactions with peoples and landscapes appears incompatible with the awareness of natural and cultural landscapes that is arguably a prerequisite to their protection (i.e. Almeyda, Broadbent, Wyman, & Durham, 2010; Reimer & Walter, 2013). Tourists who make commitments to giving back to host communities and landscapes have been described as those with a genuine interest in experiencing and learning about nature and with a personal commitment to protection and conservation of environments (Perkins & Brown, 2012). Yet Holifield (2010) links narcissism with disassociation from cultural and natural landscapes and loss of connection to and concern for the natural world and its conservation. Without opportunities for deeper involvement in cultural and natural landscapes or more meaningful exchanges between stakeholders, the commitment to and co-creation of sustainability initiatives (i.e. Canavan, 2016; Suntikul & Jachna, 2016) may be lost.

The self-absorbed narcissist is less likely to be concerned for the well-being of others (Brummelman et al., 2015), or environments (Naderi & Strutton, 2014). Gaining an interest in and commitment to sustainable principles may therefore be less likely (Holifield, 2010). Indeed pro-environmental motives seem incompatible with narcissists' dearth of concern for others as findings have illustrated inverse relationships between narcissism and altruistic behaviours including pro-environmental consumption (Naderi & Strutton, 2014). Bergman et al. (2013, p. 494) explain: "at the level of the individual, empathy and altruism are often considered central to environmental concern. The capacity to feel an emotional response based on the perceived welfare of another, and the desire to help others and act in the

interest of others, should be directly related to the concern one has for the natural environment... Such egoistic concerns make it unlikely those high in narcissism will worry much about the consequences of their behaviour on the environment”.

What is more, negative, inconsiderate and unsustainable behaviours which undermine quality of landscapes and goodwill of hosts may be increased amongst more selfish tourists (i.e. Wheeler, 1991, 1993). The state of tourism suspends morality by its nature which is to emphasise the value of one over the value of others (Fennell, 2008). The new narcissists care only about self-gratification now rather than future thinking altruism (Tyler, 2007). Perkins and Brown (2012, p. 800) summarise: “Tourists with stronger egoistic values were significantly less interested in ecotourism-related experiences and more interested in hedonistic pursuits... Egoistic values were also associated with less environmentally sensitive attitudes including a greater sense of personal entitlement in using resources for enjoyment purposes during tourism experiences and less willingness to curb personal freedoms or to consider personal impact on nature and cultures when making travel decisions”. Thus, MacDonald (2014) concludes that most troubling consequence overall of narcissism normalisation is our selfish attitude to the planet that supports us as we play a part in the destruction of much of the environment and many of the species that share the earth with us.

Entitlement also poses challenges to sustainable development. A narcissist individual or group displays a sense of self-importance, fantasises obsessively about success and power, assumes a strong sense of uniqueness, lacks empathy and often exploits or takes advantage of others (Campbell et al., 2011; Golomb, 1995). Consequences of the narcissistic sense of superiority over others may include a unique sense of purpose which allows for no debate or tolerance (Navarro, 2013). Narcissism supports individuals and their in-groups in a worldview of their being special, distinctive and entitled (Navarro, 2013). Sensitivity to criticism and lack of empathy can become entrenched problems (Campbell et al., 2011). Narcissists may act aggressively towards those who block their goals (Lambert & Desmond, 2013) and exhibit disproportionate anger towards those with different opinions (Navarro, 2013).

In addition, self-aggrandisement, entitlement and denial can replace rational, reality-based decision-making, leading to selfish, unethical or bad decisions with ramifications (Duchon & Burns, 2008). Group greed and grandiosity have led to wide-scale corruption and cover-ups (MacDonald, 2014). To illustrate, Duchon and Burns (2008) highlight the ill-effects of extreme narcissism by discussing how this was a central and enduring trait at Enron; one which informed commonly shared assumptions about what constituted acceptable, appropriate, even necessary behaviour. Here, institutionalised narcissism enabled unethical and illegal practices which ultimately destroyed the firm and caused severe hardships for its many stakeholders. These characteristics are clear obstacles to the processes of stakeholder collaboration and planning closely associated with developing and implementing sustainable development (Almeyda et al., 2010; Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Marcouiller, 1997; Reimer & Walter, 2013).

Narcissism, tourism and sustainability opportunities

Alongside sustainability challenges there may be opportunities to use narcissism to advantageous effect. Not all ego-enhancement is a bad thing. Tourism may be able to contribute positively to a sense of individual and group identity through the fulfilment of motivations and by contributing to an increased sense of quality of life, well-being and happiness (see Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012). People may also travel as a means of escape after encountering personal troubles or failures, with the gained travel experience also helping to improve damaged intra and inter-personal esteem and social status (Dann, 1977, 1981; Iso-Ahola, 1982). Thus, the role tourism can play in (re)building healthy ego.

Narcissistic exhibitionism (noted as the least anti-social of narcissistic characteristics by Ackerman et al., 2010) offers particular opportunities from a sustainable tourism perspective. Ego-enhancement and altruism are not mutually exclusive (Ooi & Laing, 2010). Volunteering for example usually

contains both altruistic and self-interested motives (Grimm & Needham, 2011). Volunteers offer something back to the social and natural environments of their host destinations, something perceived as altruism, and in doing so are engaged in processes of self-discovery and development which may be interpreted as an act of egoism (Pan, 2012). In some cases, the narcissists' need for praise and admiration is covert and manifests as apparently self-sacrificing devotion (Rodin & Izenberg, 1996). Even ostensibly ethical forms such as eco-tourism, voluntourism or backpacking, have been established as being driven to a great extent by individual's desire for ego-enhancement. Seemingly, selfless contributions to local communities and environments may in fact be self-serving attempts to boost own image (Ooi & Laing, 2010). "Ego-tourists" have for instance been described as occasional consumers of ecotourism more interested in acquiring social status (Wheeller, 2005).

Various authors have suggested this tendency could be exploited for sustainable advantage (i.e. Bergman et al., 2013). Naderi and Strutton (2014, p. 387) conclude with the proposal that environmentalists should view the struggle to persuade, cajole or seduce inherently and deeply self-interested consumers through new marketing lenses which can manipulate narcissists' self-absorbed tendencies in ways that ultimately benefit the environment and society. One interesting industry response is the increasing number of sites, attractions and service providers offering designated selfie locations where the tourist is encouraged to photograph the self and upload on social media (see Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). This technique may be used to publicise sustainable products. It additionally gives development opportunities to less spectacular or well-known destinations; something that might help to distribute positive tourism impacts more broadly, and lessen concentration of negative impacts in fragile locations.

Similarly, consumers' desire for attention might be utilised to sell sustainable tourism products. Rao and Schaefer (2013) highlight how because niche products are clearly distinguished from other products, they can thus be used to achieve social visibility, serving the desire for conspicuous consumption and satisfying social needs. Consumer demand for differentiation from the mainstream is growing (Vesanen, 2007). It is plausible that green products can meet this demand with local, small scale and tailored offerings. The act of green consumption might also be positioned as high-status consumption (Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman, 2006) with opportunities to flaunt the ability to afford costs associated with going green (Naderi & Strutton, 2014). Care would need to be taken however that sustainable tourism targeted towards exhibitionists does not simply use the "cheater strategies" popular amongst narcissists (Fox & Rooney, 2015). Green-washing for instance is a well acknowledged limitation of many sustainable tourism products (i.e. Stronza and Gordillo, 2008) and may appeal to the narcissistic consumer interested in image rather than genuine commitment.

Conclusion

Although there may be a tendency to overdramatise (Pearce & Moscardo, 2015), it appears that narcissistic traits are becoming more prevalent amongst individuals and groups in modern society. Inter-related social and technological factors have facilitated the normalisation of narcissistic traits (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). As individuals and groups become more narcissistic traits that would once have been deemed as such are no longer, but rather become accepted and widespread. Celebrities, societies, organisations and individuals reflect off each other and are indulged in doing so by the latest technology (MacDonald, 2014).

Tourism seems to be one such environmental factor intertwined with these. It may be especially appealing to narcissists looking to enhance, project and protect fragile egos. Tourism can be a source of superficial and transitory exploitative exchanges, of entitled consumption which selfishly prioritises the individual ego and hedonistic pleasure over surroundings, and conspicuous consumption suited to exhibitionistic self-presentations. There is some evidence to suggest that tourism, long noted as potentially narcissistic (MacCannell, 2002; Wheeler, 2005), might be becoming increasingly so. Research proposes for example that the tourist gaze is progressively being directed literally at the tourist's navel (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Trends in tourism being used for exhibitionist purposes of

producing, curating and sharing identities online (Lo et al., 2011; Lyu, 2016) somewhat mirrors those regarding the use and influence of social media on cultural narcissism more broadly (i.e. Rosen et al., 2013; Weiser, 2015). Nevertheless, tourism can also be a means of gaining quite the opposite. Intimacy, community and self-exploration related contentment, have been much associated with (i.e. Brown, 2013; Cohen, 2003; Wang, 1999). Such values stand in stark contrast to narcissism and thus its pursuit may counteract.

Hence, the role of tourism in contributing to or countering narcissism normalisation is debateable. This is a debate worth having however, because narcissistic entitlement and exploitation appear to have the potential to significantly undermine industry sustainability. Sustainability from a consumption and production perspective typically requires greater investment (Tao & Wall, 2009). Narcissism may undermine the impetus to make this. The effects of individual perceptions of responsibility towards sustainability issues are important to driving forward market demand for ethical alternatives; demand which has often been lacking, leaving sustainability to be pushed forward through a regulatory approach (Buckley, 2012). People have intrinsic reasons for not behaving in a responsible manner related to habits, convenience and personal preferences (Budeanu, 2007). Narcissists may be more likely to feel such reasons. Lack of empathy, awareness of or care for others might mean that amongst narcissistic tourists ethical investments have limited appeal, at the same time that harmful selfish behaviours are more likely. Sustainability also requires creative solutions to the challenges therein (Tao & Wall, 2009), and sophisticated planning processes to implement and manage (Marcouiller, 1997). Stemming as these do from proximity and collaboration (Canavan, 2016; Go & Govers, 2000; Hardy & Beeton, 2001), narcissism risks undermining these processes because entitlement and exploitation will likely contribute to anti-social actions, superficial, detached, transitory and even hostile relationships.

Consideration therefore needs to be given to the challenges narcissism normalisation might bring. Given the threat unhealthy narcissism poses to sustainability it is arguably in the long-term interests of the tourism industry to prioritise forms of tourism which counteract. Confronting and changing narcissistic traits is difficult (Horwitz, 2000). Embedded in narcissistic cultures it is hard to step outside of these, but there are ways of countering narcissistic tendencies (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Tourism can provide intimacy, strengthen community and provoke reflections that provide the mindfulness, gratitude, modesty, compassion and contentment which can counter narcissistic traits (MacDonald, 2014). Forms of tourism which promote these may be an important source therefore of rebalancing what is accepted as a normal level of narcissism. In addition, there may be opportunities associated with increasing narcissism, particularly that relating to exhibitionism. Sustainable tourism practitioners may be able to take advantage of the tourist ego by offering reciprocal exchanges of ego enhancement in return for particular inputs. For example, materials for self-presentations as a global good citizen could be provided by tourism practitioners in exchange for purchasing sustainable alternatives.

Limitations and further research

The narcissisation of society and tourism may imply opportunities and challenges for the sustainability of tourism. This paper takes a first step in drawing attention to narcissism and developing discussion surrounding. Nevertheless, this is a theoretical article only and as such its contribution is limited to the seeding of debate. There is now a need for original research to develop, modify or reject the ideas proposed here. In particular, research may look into whether narcissism is indeed increasing amongst tourists specifically, perhaps replicating studies seeking to do similar amongst other research groups (e.g. Campbell et al., 2002; Carpenter, 2012; Qiu et al., 2015). Moreover to look at the implications, this might have for sustainability in terms of entitled or exploitative tourist behaviours (as per Campbell et al., 2005). Research might also explore industry responses to narcissism, as authors such as Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016) have indirectly done, and begin to evaluate the sustainability of these. Links between narcissism and terrorism (Navarro, 2013) could be one particularly

important area for elaboration from a tourism perspective given the increased targeting of tourists and destinations by terrorists. Research in these areas would help to turn a somewhat speculative argument into something more concrete and actionable.

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Note

1. Selfies are a type of self-portrait photograph taken by oneself of oneself. The individual has control as both subject and photographer.

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