



Review Article

Understanding creative processes through narcissism and sexuality: A systematic review of psychological and psychodynamic theories[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines the intricate intersection of narcissism, sexuality, and creativity by synthesizing theoretical frameworks, empirical data, and clinical observations. The primary objective is to elucidate how narcissistic personality structures and psychosexual dynamics influence the creative process. While these factors may facilitate originality and self-expression, unresolved conflicts between them can result in creative inhibition or maladaptive functioning. Furthermore, the review explores how early relational experiences and identity formation underpin creative development throughout the lifespan, positioning creativity as a psychological function deeply embedded in emotional life and interpersonal dynamics. The article concludes by proposing an integrative framework to guide future research and clinical practice.

1. Introduction

The psychological study of narcissism has evolved significantly since the early 20th century, particularly regarding its relationship with self-concept, sexuality, and creative output. Early theorists, such as Freud (1914) and Kohut (1971), conceptualized narcissism not merely as a pathology, but as a fundamental developmental stage essential for self-understanding and motivation. Within this framework, creativity serves as a vital mechanism for negotiating internal tensions, fostering psychological integration, and contributing to broader cultural advancement.

However, despite the historical depth of these theories, contemporary research often lacks a unified perspective on how these constructs intersect. Existing studies frequently examine narcissism, sexuality, and creativity in isolation, failing to account for their reciprocal influence. This fragmentation obscures the nuances of creative processes in narcissistic individuals, particularly regarding the dual role of sexuality as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. Moreover, a clear theoretical framework is required to distinguish between creativity that promotes psychological health and creativity that serves as a defensive mechanism to avoid internal conflicts.

The present study addresses these theoretical gaps by integrating cross-disciplinary perspectives from psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology. Specifically, the review aims to: i) identify the prevailing psychological and psychoanalytic conceptualizations of narcissism, sexuality, and creativity, ii) analyze the impact of narcissistic traits on the creative process to determine whether they facilitate or hinder output, and iii) differentiate between empirically validated findings and theoretical hypotheses regarding these interrelations. By synthesizing a diverse body of literature, this review seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the creative process, offering valuable insights for both clinical practitioners and researchers in the medical and social sciences.

2. Method

2.1. Review design and conceptual framework

The present study employs a systematic literature review methodology designed to synthesize diverse theoretical paradigms and empirical findings. The review process was guided by the PRISMA framework, with necessary adaptations to accommodate the specific epistemological

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Table 1
Summary description of studies.

Study	Main Objective	Main Results and Conclusions
Katona (2023)	Comprehensive analysis of the psychological aspects, character development, behaviors, and transformation throughout the narrative, shedding light on the complex interplay of positive and negative traits that define the persona. and the role of color psychology within the film Cruella.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narcissism and Self-Image: Cruella's character subtly exhibits narcissistic traits, illustrated through her obsession with extravagant fashion, her relentless pursuit of external validation, and her strategic manipulation of media attention. These behaviors are indicative of compensatory narcissism, which may be understood as a defensive mechanism rooted in deep-seated insecurities and an underlying need for affirmation. • Creative Expression as Psychological Catharsis: Cruella's artistic pursuits function as a form of psychological catharsis, allowing her to channel emotional distress and assert a coherent sense of identity. Her fashion creations and public performances serve not only as expressions of aesthetic innovation but also as vehicles for emotional processing and self-representation. • Resolution and Psychological Development: The integration of Estella and Cruella within the narrative arc reflects a psychologically meaningful resolution, aligning with the Jungian concept of individuation. This synthesis symbolizes a process of self-acceptance and internal cohesion, marking a significant step in her psychodynamic development and the attainment of psychological balance.
Blum (2022)	This paper affords a central place to musical experience in psychoanalytic understanding of identification (how and what we attend to in listening and living musically is elaborated).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This identification does not emerge as a reaction to differentiation or loss, but is instead formed through experiences of sameness and sustained by a homoerotic dynamic of likeness – distinct from difficulties in identification that may give rise to narcissistic pathology.
Vonk & Visser (2021)	The present study examines how Mann's novella "Abdankung" concerns the nexus of adolescence, power, and desire. Questions the foundation of domination, only then to demonstrate its implacability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambivalence inherent in same-sex desire – oscillating between its utopian promise of equality and the threat of narcissistic exclusion of difference – offers a conceptual framework through which Mann examines the limits of both social and aesthetic transgression. • By portraying the isolation of the tyrant, the narcissism of the homosexual, and the solipsism of the aesthete, "Abdankung" illustrates how the convergence of power, desire, and imagination contributed to the ideological conditions that preceded the catastrophe of World War I.
Sriskandarajah (2018)	This qualitative study examine the lived experience of recovering from an eating disorder and becoming a therapist/counsellor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amid the gaze of others and the ambivalent cultural messages surrounding narcissism and the role of women in society, the author reflects on her personal journey as a recovered anorexic, a newly qualified therapist, and an autoethnographic researcher. • She interrogates the paradox at the heart of the anorexic experience – the simultaneous desire to be seen and to remain invisible.
Vonk & Visser (2021)	Spiritual training is assumed to reduce self-enhancement but may have the paradoxical effect of boosting superiority feelings. It can thus operate like other self-enhancement tools and contribute to a contingent self-worth that depends on one's spiritual accomplishments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The self-enhancement motive is a deeply rooted and pervasive psychological drive, capable of co-opting practices originally designed to transcend the ego, ultimately redirecting them to serve egoic purposes instead.
Steinberg (2022)	This essay asks whether the road to the Nazi genocide can be understood in terms of a displacement onto the Jews of intra-Christian, Protestant-Catholic enmity and anxiety, and thus as a narcissism of major differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essay identifies traces of political libido that ultimately fueled the cultural animosity capable of culminating in genocide.
Ray (2018)	This paper describes two years' intensive psychotherapy with an 11 year old boy I shall call Lou, who as a result of traumatic experiences in his early life, struggled to integrate a robust sense of self and in particular to find accord with a sense of himself as male.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lou's creation of 'Frank' – a figure assembled from dead, lost, and reanimated objects – is explored in terms of its actual and symbolic functions within the therapeutic process. This constructed object serves as a vehicle for Lou's internal development, reflecting both psychic integration and therapeutic progress. The case is paralleled with Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein", in which the creature's struggle for psychological birth and self-understanding mirrors Lou's own journey. • Throughout the therapeutic work, both Lou and the author navigated the paradoxes embedded in his narrative: the male/female father figure, themes of potency and castration, corruption and repair, and the complexities of becoming a boy. These were held and metabolized, in part, through the maternal enactment of the paternal function by a female therapist.
Riker (2022)	In this article the author inquire why humans have such devastatingly difficult problems relating to difference by elaborating Hegel's claim that the structure of self-consciousness leads toward domination/submission interactions and showing how Kohut's articulation of narcissistic needs reveals a fundamental desire for locating oneself in communities of sameness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By demonstrating that self-psychology's emphasis on empathy as a fundamental disposition for relational engagement is essential to addressing the challenge of alterity, this perspective underscores the necessity of encountering difference as a means of sustaining the vitality and coherence of the self.
Lo Bosco (2021)	The article informs that human beings are actively engaged in a Continuous process of self-construction due to socialization, acculturation, and deliberate practices of body modifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of social media platforms, such as Instagram, is highlighted as instrumental in disseminating hegemonic ideals of beauty, success, competitiveness, and high-performance standards. • Individualism, narcissism, and perfectionism are interpreted as contemporary expressions of loneliness.
Botella & Thomas (2024)	These studies have highlighted distinct conative and cognitive traits associated with each of these different domains including architecture, art, and science, for instance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biological males reported higher levels of academic narcissism, consistent with findings from previous studies. • The results indicate that more experienced magicians scored higher on openness compared to less experienced magicians. Additionally, when predicting creative self across the entire sample, which included both magicians and non-magicians, openness emerged as the sole significant predictor. • This study underscores the importance of openness within the domain of magic.

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Table 1 (continued)

Study	Main Objective	Main Results and Conclusions
Seach (2024)	This paper aims to find a point of convergence between existentialism and the grotesque.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The findings may have practical implications, particularly for the design and implementation of magic-based interventions aimed at fostering personality traits such as openness. Three grotesque elements – specifically Bakhtin's carnivalesque, Thomson's exaggeration, and Kohut's narcissism – will be examined in conjunction with the two existential concerns of death and meaninglessness. By focusing on these grotesque and existential elements, the paper will demonstrate how the male protagonist uses the grotesque to mitigate the fear and terror elicited by existential concerns, thereby justifying his sense of existence.
Lewkowich (2012)	In this article the author looks at a particular episode of the television show, Breaking Bad, to explore the pedagogical implications of the Kristevan notion of abjection, and its relation to the emotions of love and hate, and the emergence of teacher narcissism as an inevitable offshoot of the antagonisms in learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By acknowledging the implications of teacher narcissism, we can cultivate the ability to move beyond projecting our own desires as inherently natural, and refrain from imposing on others the lives we wish for them, rather than respecting the lives they may wish to lead themselves.
Sharples & Brian (2015)	This paper examines the prospects for real/actual love as viewed from a classical psychoanalytic framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The perseverations of the infantile, together with obstacles stemming from the beloved, society, and the self, present challenges for the prospective lover. Despite these internal and external hindrances, genuine love is indeed possible within Freud's framework; however, it is hard-earned and seems to demand the dispelling of illusions, emancipation through acknowledgment of one's determinism, acceptance, introspection, and ongoing personal growth.
Virtanen (2013)	The paper discusses negative individuation and the hero myth as developmental concepts. It is suggested that in negative individuation healthy psychological development is hindered and goes astray.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author explores concepts such as the shadow and the death drive, linking them to psychopathology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy through the lens of contemporary affect theory as proposed by Kernberg. Additionally, the author investigates how ideology is connected to extreme violence and examines how narcissistic personality structures can result in vastly different outcomes, as exemplified by the lives of Anders Behring Breivik and Steve Jobs.
Hirsch (2014)	Is it not uncommon for analysts to feel envy toward patients who have achieved significant rewards or acclaim for their work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly successful individuals across various fields frequently exhibit both narcissistic and manic traits. Analysts often respond to these traits by excessively pathologizing them, as a defensive reaction to underlying envy.
Schmidt (2019)	This paper begins by exploring how Jung's gnostic approach, with its goal of individuation, is deeply informed by Buddhist and Taoist principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our early experience of the feminine/maternal plays a central role in the development of aesthetic capacity. The experience of the sublime in analysis is explored and depicted as a mechanism through which aesthetic development can be rekindled and narcissistic isolation disrupted.
Jahanzeb & Raja (2024)	Using the tenets of learned helplessness theory the authors propose and test a model suggesting how the perception of supervisor narcissism impacts acquiescent silence and employee creativity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The paper examines how the perception of beauty, connected to both truth and meaning, serves as an indicator and facilitator of individuation within the clinical encounter. This study identifies acquiescent silence as a key mechanism through which supervisor narcissism hinders employee creativity, and it further reveals how this effect may be mitigated by a strong ethical climate grounded in law and codes of conduct. The authors discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.
Zimerman (2022)	Besides the traditional conception that the same drives take different paths in female and male psychological structures, the present work underscores the fact that the pioneer psychoanalysts' ideas point to the recognition of the existence of specific feminine drives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through re-reading the Medusa myth, the author discusses the Thanatic fate of the primitive maternal figure. The persistent desire, along with the corresponding aversion and claustrophobic panic associated with the fantasy of (re)union with the maternal object, underpins the hypothesis posed in this paper – that matricide functions as a protofantasy within the human psyche, carrying direct unconscious implications for culture and misogyny.
Van Zanten (2015)	This article surveys and critiques the most powerful and persistent accounts in the current contest of narratives within the field of global education. These are national security, economic success, missionary or humanitarian impact, and cultural appreciation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The article proposes four approaches to foster Christian cosmopolitanism through faculty development: sharing narratives of cross-cultural encounters that inspire new learning; facilitating fresh experiences through travel seminars; organizing reading groups focused on cosmopolitan identity, global Christianity, and human connection; and developing campus events and liturgies that embody a commitment to Christian cosmopolitanism.
Meredith-Owen (2011)	Jung's disturbed, displaced contact with his mother led to a struggle in establishing an integrated sense of T; instead to create a sense of Self he brilliantly contrived to illuminate the darkness around that blank impress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is argued that the psychoanalytic mainstream has undervalued the subtlety and creativity of Jung's own intuitive response to his shadow and that a sympathetic appreciation of this can still valuably inform our contemporary approaches to narcissistic disorders, especially dissociation.
Savitz & Savitz (1986)	Explores the “unhealing wound” that belongs to the clinical problem of narcissism through both an archetypal and a developmental perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing on Jungian and Kleinian theory, the narrative is interpreted as a reflection of Wendy's psyche undergoing transformation, charting her progression into puberty and the shift from omnipotent narcissism to depressive concern that accompanies her separation from an idealized identification with her mother.
Smith (2012)	This essay is a study of J. M. Barrie's 1911 Peter and Wendy based on his 1904 work Peter Pan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Particular emphasis is placed on the resulting changes in Wendy's parental imagos, especially the movement toward integrating her split paternal imago, symbolized by Peter Pan and Captain Hook.
Jonason et al. (2015)	The authors provided an exploratory study of how the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) correlated with two measures of creativity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authors found that self-reported success in humor was positively correlated with narcissism and psychopathy scores. Individuals with higher psychopathy also reported superior mechanical skills but

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Table 1 (continued)

Study	Main Objective	Main Results and Conclusions
Wink (1992)	Three observer-based narcissism scales were developed from factor scores based on a California Q-set (CAQ) narcissism prototype.	<p>lower scholarly abilities, which may reflect their vocational preference for practical and realistic work. Machiavellianism explained little variance in creativity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual differences in Dark Triad traits mediated sex differences across various aspects of creativity, suggesting that some observed sex differences in creativity may be partially influenced by underlying sex differences in these traits. The correlates of the Hypersensitivity scale included depression and introversion along with rebelliousness and hostility, indicative of covert narcissism. The Autonomy scale was correlated positively with creativity, empathy, achievement-orientation, and individualism, and thus assessed a healthy variant of narcissism.
Santarpia (2024)	This article examines the dynamics of narcissistic relationships from humanistic – existential and transdiagnostic approaches and highlights the impact of an “abyssal void” or chronic sense of emptiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artistic practices, such as cinematic storytelling in a psychotherapeutic environment, have the potential to influence emotional healing and personal growth after dehumanizing experiences in narcissistic relationships. Individuals can integrate both light and dark aspects of the self to recover from narcissistic dehumanization and reclaim their sense of self within an existential framework and a posttraumatic growth horizon.
Dissanayake (2006)	Four important themes in self-psychology as developed by Heinz Kohut are remarkably congruent with current theoretical constructs in the field of evolutionary (Darwinian) psychology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By recasting Kohut's themes in a Darwinian framework and interpreting them with personal views of the phylogenetic origin and nature of the arts (Dissanayake, 2000), the author describe and make clear the central importance of art experience to the developing self-object relationship as well as to the evolution of the human species.
Simon & Goldberg (1984)	Discusses the concept of the double as it relates to various psychiatric syndromes and theories and as it relates to artists. It is suggested that the development of the double results from a failure to develop the bonds of intimacy between mother and child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The childhoods of creative people seem to be burdened by the awareness of being different. These children's intensity of response and greater vulnerability to frustration put an added burden on the relationship with the mother, accounting for the dominance of narcissism as a primary defense among artists.
Kavaler-Adler (2009)	This study of the modern film version of “Phantom of the Opera” employs a mythic theme to illustrate how women can involve themselves with charismatic and eroticized narcissistic men, who are unavailable for true relationship within the conscious world of societal connection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar to the mythic vampire who entrances women to suck their blood, the male muse haunts the female artist to possess her talents. The “demon lover” creates himself to woo the unsuspecting female with potential but yet unrealized creative talents. He works through entrancement, like so many psychologically wounded narcissistic characters who require mirroring to have any sense of existence!
Morhain & Morhain (2011)	Answers to the questions: the act of creation would return to the process of adolescence as a paradigm of creative crisis? Is it specific portion adolescent to bring the concerns and distractions of this period of life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergence of originality, intense expression, the pursuit of ideals, exploring systems of thought, production of new cultural objects, care for staging, are characteristic lines of the artistic creation which meet in the process of creation of one that is the adolescence.
Pereira & Werneck (1999)	Presents a metapsychological approach to the concept of sublimation in Freud's work: the theory of the libido, duality of instincts, the theory of sexuality, the link between artistic creativity and the artist's sexual life, the domination instinct, and narcissism are discussed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noting that the death drive manifests not only in its destructive aspect but also in the creative aspect.
Fernández et al. (2009)	The authors discuss the concept of love based on psychoanalytic metapsychology. The latter considers it closely related to sexual drive, libidinal energy and life drive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture demands the renunciation of sexuality and aggression. The lingering presence of unrestrained aggression constitutes the most significant barrier to human social relationships. In intimate partnerships, objects of love are selected based on narcissistic and anaclitic patterns, which shift dynamically over time. Similarly, one can develop love for a profession, an artistic calling, or a social, cultural, or religious ideal.

requirements of the social sciences and humanities. The primary objective of this design was to integrate psychodynamic theory, clinical case studies, and empirical research concerning the intersection of narcissism, sexuality, and creativity. Given the heterogeneity of the included studies, a formal meta-analysis was deemed inappropriate; instead, an integrative synthesis was utilized to compare findings across different disciplines while preserving the unique conceptual details of each paradigm.

2.2. Search strategy and selection criteria

The identification of relevant literature involved a comprehensive search of four primary electronic databases: PsycINFO ($n = 4$), PubMed ($n = 6$), Scopus ($n = 29$), and Web of Science ($n = 378$). These platforms were selected for their extensive coverage of psychological, clinical, and interdisciplinary research. The search period spanned from 1981 to 2025, including publications in English, Portuguese, Spanish, and French.

The following search string was applied: AB (narcissism OR narcissistic OR narcissist OR narcissistic personality disorder OR narcissistic trait) AND TX (creativity OR innovation OR creative thinking OR creative cognition OR creative process) AND TX (sexuality OR sexual health OR sex OR intimacy).

Specific details regarding the search strings and the corresponding modifications for each database are documented in [Table 1](#). This table provides a comprehensive overview of the research expressions utilized and the specific technical adaptations required to optimize results across the various platforms.

2.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The eligibility criteria for the selection of literature were established *a priori* to ensure a rigorous and systematic screening process. These parameters are summarized in [Table 1](#). Studies were eligible for inclusion if they addressed the interrelation between narcissism and either sexuality or creativity. Furthermore, the review considered both qualitative and empirical research published in reputable academic journals or peer-reviewed books. Specific exclusion criteria were applied to maintain the scholarly integrity of the synthesis: i) non-academic sources, such as opinion pieces or non-scholarly essays, were excluded, ii) research focusing exclusively on narcissism or creativity in isolation, without exploring their conceptual or empirical connections, was omitted, and iii) studies characterized by insufficient methodological transparency or poorly defined research objectives were disqualified from the final analysis.

2.4. Study screening and selection

Titles and abstracts were screened by two independent reviewers, MPR and DM, to assess eligibility. Discrepancies during the selection process were resolved through internal consensus or consultation with a third reviewer. Data extraction was performed using a standardized form to capture key variables, including publication year, disciplinary field, theoretical orientation, and primary findings regarding narcissistic regulation, sexual dynamics, and creative output.

The analysis followed an interpretative approach, mapping convergences and divergences across the literature to identify thematic linkages. Quality assessment was conducted contextually: empirical studies were evaluated for methodological clarity and result validity, while theoretical contributions were assessed for conceptual consistency and interdisciplinary relevance.

The whole process of checking and choosing what to include is shown in a picture called a PRISMA flow diagram, which you can see in [Fig. 1](#).

3. Results

The following section details the results of the integrative analysis, organized around the primary thematic convergences identified during the literature review. Rather than presenting findings in a strictly chronological or study-by-study format, this section synthesizes empirical data and theoretical perspectives to highlight patterns, contradictions, and conceptual links across diverse fields of study. The findings are categorized into three central themes: narcissistic regulation and creativity; sexuality, libido, and sublimation; and the distinction between defensive *versus* integrative creativity. This thematic approach facilitates a clearer understanding of how these constructs interact to influence both adaptive and maladaptive creative functioning.

3.1. Narcissistic regulation and creativity

The synthesis of the available literature suggests that creativity functions as a critical regulatory mechanism for individuals with narcissistic tendencies. Comparative analysis indicates that creative engagement facilitates psychological integration, affects regulation, and identity formation, particularly when supported by a stable self-concept and robust interpersonal relationships. Research demonstrates that individuals characterized by autonomous narcissistic traits and high levels of self-directedness are more likely to exhibit sustained creative output and goal achievement. Conversely, those with fragile narcissistic structures often experience significant volatility in their creative processes, marked by heightened sensitivity to external evaluation and fluctuating self-esteem. Thus, creativity plays a pivotal role in narcissistic functioning, potentially serving as a constructive medium for self-development and positive self-expression.

The creative process is often conceptualized as a strategy for managing negative self-affect. In instances where an individual experiences internal conflict between grandiose self-perceptions and underlying feelings of inadequacy, creative production may serve to restore psychological equilibrium. Empirical evidence further suggests a correlation between creative achievement and personalities characterized by extraversion and a desire for social recognition. Theoretically, the act of creation can mitigate self-concept deficits and alleviate feelings of shame. Ultimately, the functional value of creativity, whether adaptive or maladaptive, is contingent upon the individual's underlying motivations, self-regulatory capacity, and the ability to utilize symbolic transformation for self-expression.

The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) offers a theoretical framework for understanding how individuals process information through interaction with various art media. This model hypothesizes that the selection of specific media and methods can facilitate experiences that either expand or constrain aspects of the self. Recent applications of the ETC model suggest that individualized art therapy is particularly efficacious for clients presenting significant traits of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Dimaggio, 2024; Dimaggio et al., 2014; Hinz, 2024). Variations in narcissistic presentation include hypersensitive forms characterized by profound feelings of inadequacy (Miller et al., 2011). Furthermore, research indicates that individuals with higher narcissistic traits exhibit a greater tendency toward the objectification of others (Lachowicz-Tabaczek et al., 2021). This behavioral pattern correlates with an increased risk of social media addiction (e.g., Facebook and Instagram) and a heightened reliance on social networking for the validation of body image and self-esteem (Brailovskaia et al., 2020).

3.2. Sexuality, libido, and sublimation

Sexuality constitutes a fundamental component of the creative process. Prevailing theoretical perspectives suggest that sexuality represents a potent psychological force capable of both destabilizing cognitive functions and facilitating profound creative expression.

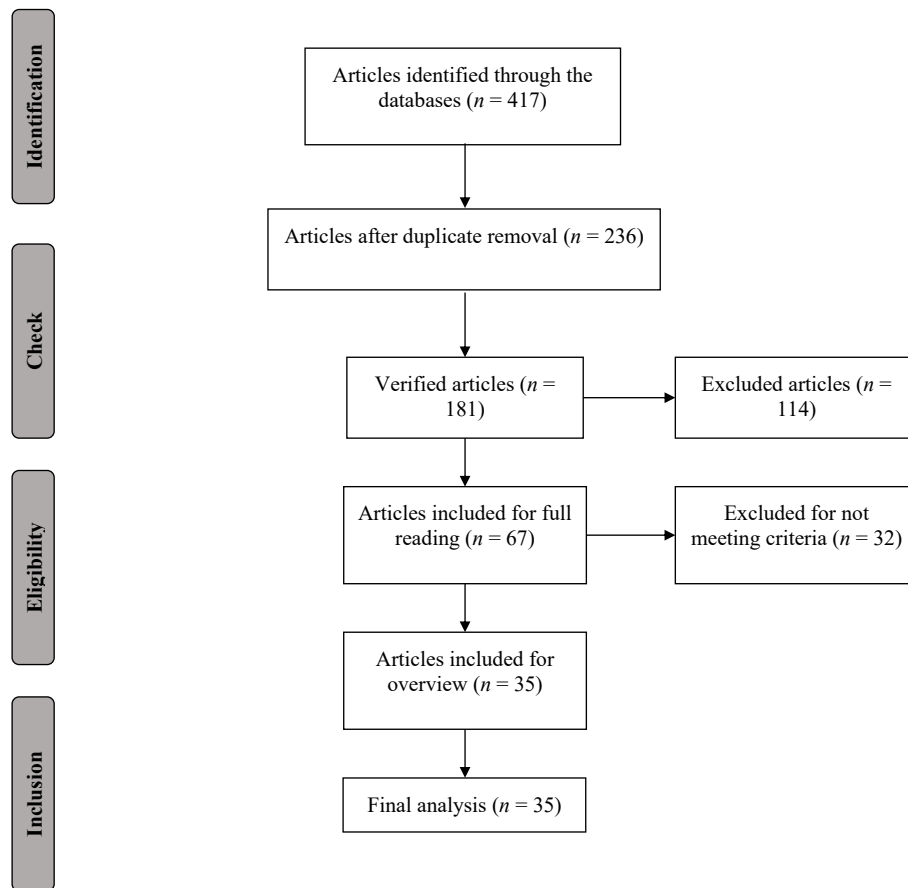


Fig. 1. Flow diagram.

Classical psychodynamic theories posited that sexual and aggressive drives are sublimated – transformed from primitive impulses into culturally valued achievements such as art and music. Conversely, contemporary frameworks suggest that creativity is less about the direct redirection of drives and more about maintaining an equilibrium between somatic experiences and their representation through language and symbolism. A significant divergence exists between empirical research and clinical observation regarding the role of sexuality in creative output. While many researchers in the field of creativity overlook psychosexual variables, clinicians and theorists consistently assert that sexual feelings are central to creative motivation. This discrepancy underscores the utility of a psychodynamic perspective, which provides a framework for understanding complex motivations, the resolution of internal conflicts, and the construction of meaning within creative endeavors. The objective association between personality traits and social outcomes further complicates these dynamics. Research involving samples from China, Greece, and the United Kingdom conducted by Lu et al. (2023) replicated findings from Jonason et al. (2018), Paleczek et al. (2018), and Spurk et al. (2016), indicating that individuals with higher scores in subclinical grandiose narcissism often achieve higher levels of income. These traits, alongside psychopathy, have deep historical roots in the works of Freud (2014). The “Dark Triad” – a construct comprising machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy – was formalized by Paulhus et al. (2002) to describe these moderately intercorrelated traits. The intersection of personality, popular culture, and politics, influenced by the scholarship of Christie and Geis (1970), Raskin and Hall (1979), and Hare (1985, 1991), raises critical questions regarding

the potential utility of these traits beyond personal gain. Fictional archetypes often embody “Dark Triad” characteristics (Boman, 2020; Jonason et al., 2012); for instance, the character James Bond exhibits grandiose self-esteem, machiavellian cunning, and psychopathic callousness. However, within his specific professional context, these traits are utilized for a perceived social good, allowing him to operate outside conventional legal boundaries. Another cultural example is the novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), in which the character Christian Grey demonstrates controlled and consensual sadistic tendencies. Despite the inherent sexual asymmetry presented in the narrative, the popularity of such romances suggests a complex cultural reception. Much like Bond, Grey is depicted as an attractive, intelligent, and socioeconomically successful figure, illustrating how narcissistic and psychosexual traits can be integrated into high-functioning social personas (Jonason et al., 2012; Meston & Buss, 2009; Walter et al., 2020).

3.3. Defensive versus integrative creativity

Creativity serves diverse psychological functions, categorized primarily into defensive and integrative modes. Defensive creativity is characterized by repetitive patterns, a drive for perfectionism, and an emphasis on self-importance. This mode often functions as a compensatory mechanism, utilized by individuals to mitigate psychological pain or to bolster a fragile sense of superiority. When creative output is motivated by a desire for dominance or social recognition, it is frequently associated with maladaptive traits, such as selfishness or interpersonal antagonism. In these instances, the creative act is primarily an instrument for obtaining external

validation or asserting status. Conversely, integrative creativity is defined by a tolerance for ambiguity and an openness to the inherent meaning of symbolic representations. This mode involves genuine receptivity to others and a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives. Researchers and clinicians generally agree that integrative creativity facilitates personal growth, allowing individuals to align with their authentic selves and determine core values. Rather than merely addressing immediate psychological deficits, this form of creativity fosters profound transformation and is more likely to sustain creative engagement over the long term. The distinction between these two creative modes is essential for understanding individual personality structures and broader cultural dynamics. This differentiation clarifies that creativity can emerge both from states of psychological well-being and from significant internal struggle. Understanding the interplay between defensive and integrative processes explains why creative capacity persists across varied psychological conditions. These creative modes also align with specific narcissistic profiles. Individuals characterized by “Non-Compensatory Narcissism” maintain stable beliefs of superiority that are resistant to external criticism or contradictory evidence, suggesting their self-appraisal does not merely cover self-perception deficits. In contrast, “Compensatory Narcissism” is highly sensitive to evaluative events and exhibits instability over time. While narcissism is often linked to emotional vulnerability resulting from abandonment or a fear of intimacy, current research presents a more nuanced view. For instance, while [Vida et al. \(2024\)](#) hypothesized a link between the emotional deprivation schema and grandiose narcissism, their results found no such connection. This suggests that in non-pathological populations, grandiose narcissism – similar to the non-compensatory type – is frequently associated with adaptive and creative characteristics, including sufficient extraversion and effective self-promotion strategies.

3.4. Integrative synthesis of findings

The synthesis of available literature indicates that the functional utility of creativity is not universally adaptive. The efficacy of the creative process is contingent upon an individual's personality structure, their capacity for symbolic thought, and the surrounding interpersonal environment. While research confirms that individuals with narcissistic traits can demonstrate high levels of creativity, these outcomes are subject to significant variability. Theoretical frameworks and clinical observations from therapeutic practice provide essential context for understanding the complex relationship between creative output and narcissistic personality traits. Consequently, creativity emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be easily decoupled from the creator's narcissistic organization and their social context. By integrating empirical data with psychodynamic, developmental, and interdisciplinary perspectives, these results support a comprehensive understanding of creativity. It is established as a multidimensional process fundamentally shaped by self-regulation strategies, libidinal dynamics, and the capacity for symbolic transformation.

4. Conclusion

This review extends beyond descriptive analysis to propose an integrative framework connecting narcissistic structures, sexuality, and creative processes. The findings suggest that creativity functions as a regulatory system, mediating between libidinal impulses and the requirement for self-esteem maintenance. Critically, the review identifies that creativity is not inherently adaptive. Its psychological utility depends on the structural organization of narcissism and the individual's capacity for symbolic representation. This distinction reconciles existing theoretical contradictions and provides a lens through which to understand both high-functioning creative achievement and creative inhibition. By synthesizing psychoanalytic

theory with contemporary empirical research, this review offers a sophisticated understanding of how creative functions operate within narcissistic personality configurations.

5. Implications

5.1. Theoretical implications

This literature review supports a dimensional conceptualization of narcissism. It shows that creativity serves a complex regulatory role that transcends simple self-expression.

5.2. Clinical implications

From a clinical perspective, analyzing the function of a patient's creative endeavors may yield significant insights into their narcissistic organization, defensive structures, and treatment receptivity.

5.3. Societal and cultural implications

Reconceptualizing creativity as a mechanism for narcissistic management has significant implications for contemporary digital and performance-oriented cultures. These environments frequently conflate creative output with visibility and validation, which are central to modern identity construction.

6. Limitations

Several limitations in the current review must be acknowledged. The inclusion of diverse methodological approaches poses challenges for firm generalization. Furthermore, the review is influenced by the historical and stylistic nature of psychoanalytic literature and the specific selection criteria employed. Finally, the absence of a quantitative synthesis limits the ability to establish definitive causal relationships between the variables.

7. Future directions

Future research should prioritize the development of testable models to examine the intersection of narcissism and creativity across various domains. Longitudinal and interdisciplinary investigations are essential to further clarify these complex psychological dynamics.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Maria Patrícia Ribeiro: Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Diana Moreira:** Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Rui Coelho:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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