Narcissism and Social Harmony

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Abstract

In this study the authors wanted to see if people could be influenced by paragraph readings. The basis of the study was that if a person were to read a paragraph which was written from a narcissist perspective, that when finished the person doing the reading would be more likely to pick the narcissistic answers in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory -16 question (NPI-16) test providing that the test was taken shortly after completing the reading. The opposite was hypothesized to be true as well, meaning that when the individual who reads a paragraph written from the perspective of a person who was more altruistic, they would then be less likely to pick the narcissistic answers in the NPI-16 test when taken shortly after the reading. The measure is (1) point for each of the narcissistic answers given. The higher the score, the more likely that the individual portrays narcissistic personality traits. The conclusion of the test results showed that the individuals that read the narcissistic paragraph had more narcissistic answers.

Narcissism and Social Harmony

Narcissism is defined by the attitude and characteristics of a person that include an overwhelming need for admiration and grandiose views of themselves and their abilities. Narcissists tend to lack empathy for others and are typically only concerned with their own needs. Typically they expect to be the first and best at everything and truly believe in their heart they are always the most important person in the room. Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder often have a distorted image of themselves and their emotions are typically intense and unstable. Their ego and vanity are largely important and may be more important than many other things in the individual's life. Individuals focussed on social harmony are the polar opposites of narcissistic individuals. They are individuals who often care about others more than themselves. When one gives to society without thought of what they will gain from the gesture, they help to create social harmony, whereas narcissists are always concerned about one's self.

Causes of narcissism are currently unknown, but have been linked to different parenting styles and environments. For example, children who were heavily doted upon or had a high level of criticism, and were raised with rigid parenting styles are more likely to show narcissistic traits. Narcissism might be linked to genetic factors, affecting the way the brain is formed as a child (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). There is no known cure for narcissistic personality disorder, however, there are therapies used to reduce narcissistic tendencies, such as antidepressants, or mood stabilizers (Foster et al., 2003). Psychotherapy, in addition to cognitive behavioral therapy, may assist in building empathy as well as reframing negative thought patterns (Foster et al., 2003). Group therapy aids the individual in learning how to positively relate to other people (Foster et al., 2003).

Foster et al., (2003) examined narcissism across ethnicity, age, gender, and religion to see how these factors relate to narcissism. In Forster et al.'s study, participants completed a questionnaire online about how they viewed themselves as a person throughout their lives, such as their personality, demeanor and mannerisms. The presence and level of narcissism was measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), which consisted of 40 questions. Each question contained alternate statements and the participants chose which they agreed with more. An example of these statements would be, "Being the best in every aspect is extremely important to me" and "Being able to be involved in every aspect is important to me". The scores ranged on a scale from 0-40, with higher scores indicating greater narcissism.

Foster et al., (2003), confirmed that older participants were less narcissistic than their younger counterparts. The authors saw that the amount of income also affected narcissism, with more wealth associated with a higher level of narcissism. Research indicated that ethnicity played a part in narcissism with results showing that White and Asian participants were less narcissistic than Black and Hispanic participants. Gender was another factor which showed a significant difference between males and females, with the men's scores being higher on the NPI.   If a person is a narcissist, they tend to have other maladaptive social traits which could include machiavellianism and psychopathy (Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld & Baruffi, 2014). Machiavellianism is characterized by cynical attitudes and manipulative behavior, and psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity and insensitivity to others. In addition to being characterized by vanity and manipulativeness, narcissists often have compromised or dysfunctional morality (Jonason et al., 2014). Narcissists tend to value themselves more than they value others, and this self-serving behavior usually causes them to place themselves before

the group. Even though narcissists have an overwhelming desire for social acceptance that may

lead them to appear to be morally ethical, their intent is solely focused on self-enhancement and

how they are perceived by others (Jonason et al., 2014).

In Jonason et al., (2014), participants volunteered for an online experiment to assess

morality, values, and their connection to narcissism. Participants were involved in three separate

studies which involved morality and were each given questionnaires. All questionnaires used a

scale criteria to measure their values and ethics. The results of the experiment showed a positive

correlation between narcissistic traits, lower morals, and lower social values. The study also

revealed that having a socially desirable moral value system is part of a narcissistic trait, but the

value system is merely in place to gain social approval.

The Jonason et al., (2014) study also showed men were more likely to be narcissistic than

females. They display low empathy and often used social manipulation to get what they want. In

a group setting, a narcissistic individual garners ego-satisfaction from his/her social network and

thrives on this ego fulfilling attention (Jonason et al., 2014). An individual who is a narcissist

tends to desire a social group because of their constant need of attention, praise, and approval.

They are not necessarily engaged in group activities for the betterment of the group or to help

others who may be in need.

After much research into narcissism, there is still not a consensus as to the number of

dimensions that narcissism encompasses. Researchers have however, come to an agreement that

narcissism is considered adaptive or maladaptive in two of its higher order dimensions (Clarke,

Karlov, & Neale, 2015). A way to describe these two types of narcissism would be normal

(adaptive) versus pathological (maladaptive). Psychological health and resilience are

characteristics of adaptive narcissism. The ability to promote a positive image, along with the ability to dominate in the area of achievements would be classified as normal. In addition, a person within a normal range of narcissism will seek out situations that will enhance one's experiences and social standing. Pathological narcissism, however, often manifests as problematic self-regulation processes. Included in its description, pathological narcissism has an additional two dimensions: grandiose and vulnerable. As it sounds, the grandiose dimension includes elements of entitlement, aggression, and an unrealistic sense of superiority. While in contrast, the vulnerable dimension includes negative affect, feelings of incompetence and/or inadequacy, and is correlated with anxiety, depression, paranoia, interpersonal sensitivity, and hostility (Clarke et al., 2015).

The Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI) has been used as a dominant measure of narcissism over the years. However, in light of the dimensional approach to narcissism, the general consensus has been to criticize the NPI. At question was the reliability of the test's internal subscales and the frequency with which researchers summed up the subscales to create a global score, rather than the specific factor scores as designed, which had been criticized for its lack of a consistent factorial structure. (Clarke et al., 2015). "The Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI) was created to address the lack of measurement tools assessing pathological narcissism" (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 91). When the Five-Factor Model of personality dimensions and other personality variables are associated with the grandiose or vulnerable dimensions of pathological narcissism, they converge in areas of antagonistic interpersonal style, and diverge in their relationships with neuroticism and extraversion (Clarke et al., 2015).

In the study by Clarke et al. (2015) there were two main areas of interest. The first area of interest was to use the NPI and the PNI measurements to clarify the dimensionality of narcissism. "It was hypothesized that both the NPI and the PNI would contain a mix of adaptive and maladaptive content, and that this would be reflected in two higher-order latent factor structure" (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 91). The second area was to study the dimensions of narcissism in its collective environment, with interest in self-esteem, personality, stress, depression, and anxiety. The hypothesis in the study was that the dimensions would have variations in relationships, especially with self-esteem (Clarke et al., 2015). The hypothesis was that there would be a positive correlation between the adaptive narcissism and self-esteem, and that there would be a negative correlation between the maladaptive narcissism and self-esteem. The study did find that there were different levels of self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress that interacted with the narcissistic factors. And it is maintained that the study reflects the two higher order dimensions of adaptive and maladaptive narcissism, even though the higher-order factor structure did not have a satisfactory fit.

Despite intensive research in this area, important gaps remain. Areas that are important for future studies could be to target specific groups of people from different cultures or backgrounds. Foster et al. (2003) noted that the younger generations have not had as many studies done on them and that these younger individuals are in the prime age range for narcissistic behavior. Foster et al. (2003) included a wide range of participants in their study. However, it is important to also look at narcissism in certain environments, and one's place of education would be a potentially rich source of information. Narcissists are coercive and are likely to derogate others and be more predisposed to engage in behaviors that ultimately harm

the organization, thus making the school as well as the students at a disadvantage (Judge, LePine & Rich 2006)

This gap is important to close as it is important that the place of education is not threatening. Being aware of narcissists in classes and groups could potentially alleviate problems and concerns in the future as Judge, LePine and Rich (2006) found that narcissists were more at ease with ethically questionable behaviors, suggesting that narcissists are less likely to abide by rules and laws. Judge et al. (2006) stated that narcissism was positively related to deviant or counterproductive work behaviors, as well as being likely to engage in hostile behavior, especially when their self-concept is vulnerable as this could be dangerous if working in a group, and in secluded areas.

One way to measure the influence of narcissism would be to establish a survey on the internet with the help of Survey Monkey, where paragraphs describing different scenarios would be read that would elicit different levels of narcissism from the participants as revealed by their answers to questions from the NPI - 16.

In the current study, younger and older adults, who are currently students at Eastern Oregon University will be compared to one another in regards to the level of narcissistic traits manifested in response to the different paragraphs. It was hypothesized that those who read the narcissistic paragraph would score higher in narcissism and those who read the altruistic paragraph would score lower on the NPI-16 test.

Method

Participants

Forty undergraduate college students were recruited from Eastern Oregon University (EOU) to participate in this experiment. The undergraduate students volunteered to complete an online survey using the website Survey Monkey. Some participants were compensated with extra credit for the psychology classes they were enrolled in during the time they completed the survey.

Materials

The materials used for the experiment were a quiet area, free of distractions and a working computer for each individual. The participants accessed the web address by a link connecting them to http://www.surveymonkey.com which is an online survey generator. Two separate paragraphs were created for the participants(see Appendix A for the paragraphs). The paragraphs were used to manipulate the level of narcissism in the readers. In the narcissistic condition, the paragraph focused on narcissistic traits. In the social harmony condition, the paragraph focused on social harmony.

Procedure/Design

Participants were informed they would take a survey and that the results of this survey were to be used for a psychology senior capstone project at EOU. The participants were informed that the survey was voluntary and that their informed consent was needed in order to take the survey. Participants were instructed that the results of the survey were to be anonymous and that the purpose of the survey was to gain information and data for the experiment.

The participants were provided a link to the website Survey Monkey and were informed that the experiment would consist of three separate tasks. Participants were informed that it would take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. Participants would read one of two paragraphs which was assigned to them based on their birth year. The narcissistic group were those born on odd numbered years and the social harmony group were those born on even numbered years. As noted in appendix A, one paragraph contained narcissistic, self-serving type content and the other paragraph contained more altruistic, social harmony content. After the participants read the paragraphs, they completed five elementary math problems as a distractor. For the third task, the participant then completed the NPI-16 question survey in order to finish the experiment. After the experiment, participants were reminded that their answers would remain anonymous and they were debriefed at the end of the experiment.

The math questions were used as a buffer between the paragraph that was read and the testing that followed. The subjects then completed a 16-question survey (NPI-16). The survey was taken to determine the placement of participants on the narcissism scale.

Results

The scores of 40 total participants, 20 for each of the two groups, were averaged between the two groups and were compared to see if the group that read the narcissistic paragraph tested at higher levels of narcissism on the NPI-16 questionnaire as hypothesised. As hypothesized the group who read the narcissistic paragraph before answering the questionnaire did score higher on the NPI-16 than those in the control group who read the social harmony paragraph.

The results are that six out of the sixteen survey questions in the narcissistic group scored higher than in the social harmony group. In one circumstance, participants in the narcissistic group scored nearly three times that of their social harmony counterparts. Three of the sixteen questions were answered the same and the remaining seven responses showed that the social harmony group actually scored slightly higher than the narcissistic group. Overall, the results of this experiment show that the paragraph on narcissism did have an influence on narcissistic responding in the narcissistic control group.

Discussion

The current study was designed to examine the levels of narcissistic traits manifested in response to the two separate paragraphs that were read by each control group. The common component of each participant's being an undergraduate student was considered as narcissism traits can have a negative influence in schools, and amongst fellow students. Narcissism was tested in two separate categories; Narcissism and Social Harmony. Consistent with previous research with undergraduate students (Judge, LePine & Rich 2006), study findings indicated that in comparison with a sample of undergraduates, narcissists can have negative attitudes towards the student body, or school as a whole, thus making the school as well as the students at a disadvantage. Undergraduate students with narcissistic traits, in comparison showed a lower level of prosocial behaviors. Specifically, self-centered and egotistical attitudes were increase.

The hypothesis for this study stated that there would be an increase in narcissistic tendencies for the group that read the narcissistic paragraph, as opposed to the group who read the paragraph that emphasized social harmony. In this study those students who read the

narcissistic paragraph and completed the NPI-16 had higher scores. These finding suggest that the students reading the narcissistic paragraph were influenced as shown by their levels of narcissism.

There are several limitations of this study that should be noted. First, the sample collected for comparison was done so by the NPI-16, and although it has a background and history of being effective, the use of the NPI-16 unlike the NPI-40, the NPI-16 is unidimensional, that is there are no subscales. The NPI-40 has several different facets that the NPI-16 doesn't as it a shorter, condensed version. Second, there was a lacks of prior research in regards to social harmony. There is an abundance of prior research on narcissism, however social harmony and comparing the two was much more challenging.

Findings from the current study may be relevant for professors and students working with others in a normal setting. The finding of connections between narcissism, and social harmony raises the possibility that students could benefit from increasing their overall knowledge of social harmony as part of their education process. The results of the current study highlight narcissistic and social harmony facets as certain facets of which will appear in undergraduate education. Future studies may investigate the degree to which narcissism traits actually affect the grades and education of individuals.

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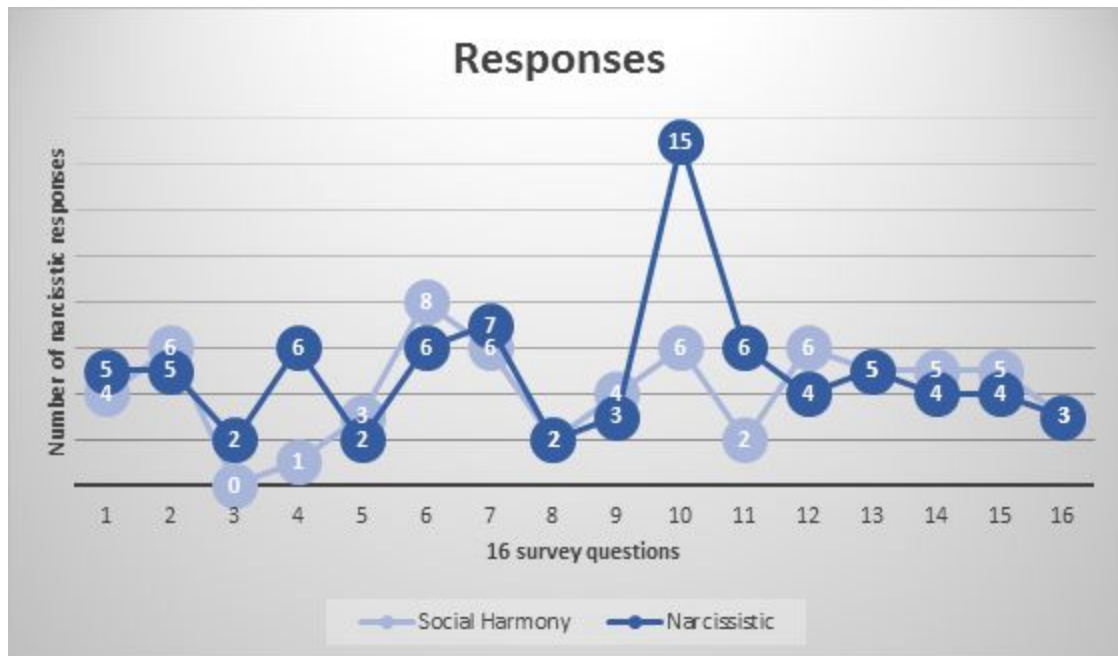762-776. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.91.4.762

Appendix A

Figure 1.

Figure 1. Marked in dark blue, the narcissistic responses for the narcissistic group. Marked in light blue, the social harmony group's narcissistic responses.

Appendix B

(A)   The world is a glorious place, as it has shown me that I am worth life and deserve the best

there is to offer. I have been blessed with a family that adores me, and a whole city that

thinks I am amazing. I enjoy being around others as compliments and smiles given to me

are my favorite things. People enjoy having me around them as I am a fun, attractive, and

well-dressed individual. I have a leadership role at my job, and was chosen for this as

upper management knew I was the right one for the job. I have always had a tendency to

be able to rise to the top in all things that I put my head to. I am definitely a go getter, and

typically don't stop until I get what I deserve and I deserve the best. My goal for life is to

have a family and settle down, however that hasn't been easy as I have not been able to

find anyone that deserves me yet. One day that will happen and it will be the best day of

their life.

(B)   The Universe is magnificent; it has given me and my loved one a beautiful home. The

world is kept together by the threads of each individual person, allowing us to uplift one

another without even knowing it. Today I get to help create a peaceful and fruitful future

for the children of tomorrow. I get to appreciate and be a part of all diversity that comes

from all creatures. I accept others as they are, and if I find something wrong in a situation

I look at myself, and know that only I can change unhappy situation. I am able to have a

job where I get to give back to others, as this is what gives me purpose. I work as a team

and push all of them to the top, and when my team wins, I win. My goal for life is leave

this universe a better place than I found it, to have a family to teach the meaning of love,

joy and happiness.