

NARCISSISM AND LIFE SATISFACTION

Narcissism and its relationship with life satisfaction

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Abstract

The relationship between narcissism and the outcomes on life has been thoroughly studied, though results have been mostly negative. The focus in research has been on narcissistic personality disorder, this study aims to give a balanced look into the correlation of narcissism on life satisfaction. Assumed was that narcissism would have a more positive role in the normal population than it would amongst those in the clinical area. In order to explore the relationship between narcissism and life satisfaction 109 participants from the normal population were used, correlations were used to find the relationship between both. Narcissism was further split off into the dimensions of Admiration and Rivalry, Admiration had more positively assumed outcomes than Rivalry did.

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Narcissism has many contradictions in how it is defined. In the general population the concept is defined more freely, meaning the definition might differ from layperson to layperson. However, health professionals and researchers have a more precise definition of narcissism. Narcissism can be distinguished into two separate types, vulnerable and grandiose narcissism. Vulnerable and grandiose narcissism both share a cognitive-affective preoccupation with the self, a tendency to give into one's own needs, and disregard for others (Lobbestael, et al., 2014). Grandiose narcissists are self-assured extraverts focused on getting attention and admiration from others. Feelings of such grandiosity are not as apparent in vulnerable narcissists, these narcissists are more insecure and lack self-confidence. The focus in this study is on grandiose narcissism, because they are self-assured extraverted individuals. The combination of these traits may end up positively affecting an individual. Grandiose narcissism also means these narcissists have an unrealistic sense of superiority, specifically our focus is on the aspects of admiration and rivalry. Admiration is considered as the tendency to put ourselves in the positive light of others, to seek admiration from other people. Rivalry can be considered as the tendency to defend one self in order to protect one's positive self-view. With more insight into this area of narcissism, better judgement can be made when dealing with levels of narcissism among grandiose narcissism. A meta-analytic review revealed that there was a consistent gender difference in narcissism, with men scoring a quarter of a standard deviation higher on narcissism than women. However, when looking at the extent to which narcissism is problematic or a maladaptive personality attribute, men have a more negative outcome. However overall gender differences were small ($d = .26$) (Grijalva et al., 2015).

Literature shows a narcissistic personality to come with a lot of known problems. Many of these articles focus on the amount of narcissism warranting a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder (Ronningstam & Elsa, 2011). However, there is evidence that

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a certain amount of narcissism may be adaptive. One study shows that students who have moderate levels of narcissism seem less worried about their body being looked at, while exercising in a group setting. Another study performed in the Netherlands among people between 18 and 78 years of age, showed that people higher in narcissism were more likely to end up engaging in physical activities such as sports and exercise (Akehursty & Thatcher, 2010). It is important to note that this positive relationship was only found among moderate levels of narcissism, as higher levels of narcissism gave different results. (Akehursty & Thatcher, 2010).

Narcissists seem to be apt at engaging in a relationship, meaning they are able at establishing a relationship. However, the terms on which they base their relationships are different than for non-narcissists, for example: narcissists see their lovers as a trophy, the opinion of their partner often quickly changes as the narcissist shows more of its personality over time.

Hence, narcissists function well in the context of shallow relationships, and as social media are based on superficial relationships the two of them are likely partners. Individuals also use social media to engage in serious relationships, more often, however social media are used to maintain a large quantity of people in the way of online friendships. Social media are a highly controlled environment, everything can be controlled by the user. One can solely promote themselves on their own page contrary to the low amount of control they have in daily life over self-promotion, one can choose the best-looking picture to upload and only write descriptions that are self-promoting (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008).

Campbell, Rudich, and Sedikides (2002) investigated the differences between high self-esteem and narcissism and discovered them to be distinctly different constructs, more specifically narcissism doesn't seem to reflect high self-esteem. Their research showed that high self-esteem puts an individual in an equally or more positive state than narcissism did.

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The differences found between the two groups were that narcissists viewed themselves as highly outgoing and competent in cognitive skills whereas high self-esteem individuals viewed themselves as more competent on nice, considerate and moral traits. This implies that a person with high self-esteem has more regard for others whereas the narcissist is all about positivity through the self. Lastly, high self-esteem individuals consider themselves more intelligent than others, just like narcissists do, but not to the same extent as a narcissist, a narcissist's view of their own intelligence may be disproportionate.

Narcissism may have many effects on the individual, this study looks into how narcissism relates with general life satisfaction. The term life satisfaction is a general term that encompasses many things, such as one's personal life and family life. It is important to have a balanced look at the way narcissism relates to life satisfaction. A scale such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale can be used to measure various terms that all sum up to one value we can consider the general life satisfaction of a person, this scale is specifically designed to assess the global life satisfaction (Diener et al. 1985). In previous research by Kopelman and Mullins (1992) two US samples were investigated, the first sample being adult female college students, the second being male alumni. It was predicted that narcissism was negatively related to life, self-, family and job satisfaction. Also, predicted was that negative associations were stronger for satisfaction with life than for satisfaction with family and job. In this research it was shown that both samples showed negative relationships between narcissism and life, self-, family and job satisfaction. Only in the sample of females was narcissism more negatively associated with life and self-satisfaction, among male alumni narcissism was more negatively correlated with family and job. Fugl-Meyer, Melin, and Fugl-Meyer (2002) found that gender only marginally influenced self-reported life satisfaction.

The current views are that narcissism is seen as a dynamic concept that has negative implications for an individual (Campbell, 2001). The view of the general population on

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narcissism might be impeded by this negative view on narcissism. It is clear that both clinical practitioners as well as researchers agree on narcissism. For example, they see narcissists as having high self-opinion, as being self-serving and lacking in intimate romantic relationships. There are however differences between clinical and personality descriptions, in that clinically narcissists often appear brittle, feel empty and depleted. However, narcissists are seen as happier, less socially anxious and more energetic than non-narcissists (Campbell, 2001).

Research in the normal population might improve by having a more balanced look on narcissism. Because narcissism is generally seen as a negative trait we are implicitly taught to think this way, such implications may lead to a mere one-sided view of the general concept. The NARQ makes a distinction between: Admiration and Rivalry. Because both dimensions have different cognitive reasoning they may differ in relation to life satisfaction. Another reason our views may be more one-sided is that the information acquired from clinical experience is skewed because narcissists in the clinical area decided to come for help. These individuals tend to be unsatisfied in life with troubles such as depression and feelings of emptiness. Narcissists in the general population tend to report being happy and self-satisfied. Narcissists in the clinical circuit may be narcissists who got overwhelmed with their functioning in normal life and needed help. As such narcissism deserves a balanced look. It is important to do more research in this area because most literature is based on the negative effects of narcissism. With the big amount of narcissism in the world it is good to get a clearer picture of the full ramifications of narcissism (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Researchers interested in narcissism amongst the normal population should approach narcissism with a balanced look on the data. A possibility is that narcissism is a functional and healthy strategy for dealing with problems in the modern world.

Research question and Hypotheses

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The research question being answered is how narcissistic behavior and life satisfaction are related to each other. Written were multiple hypotheses to explain the relationship between narcissism and life satisfaction.

H1: Narcissism correlates negatively with life satisfaction. As seen in previous research, narcissism has a negative relationship with life satisfaction.

For our following hypotheses we will compare results between the different dimensions of admiration and rivalry. H2: Expected is a negative correlation between the dimension of rivalry and life satisfaction. H3: Expected is a negative correlation between the dimension of admiration and life satisfaction. H4: We expect the correlation between admiration and life satisfaction to be bigger than between rivalry and life satisfaction.

Lastly an important factor to check for in research is gender differences, therefore the last few hypotheses are set up to evaluate this. H5: Men are expected to score higher on narcissistic admiration than women

H6: Men are expected to score higher on narcissistic rivalry than women. H7: Men are expected to have lower scores on life satisfaction than women.

Methods

Data drawn from the general population will be used where many differences between individuals may be found among narcissism and general life satisfaction. Information will be gathered using the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire and the Satisfaction With Life Scale. Differences in narcissism are expected to correlate with differences in life satisfaction.

Participants

The sample consisted of 109 Dutch speaking participants, 46 males and 62 females, one participant was excluded from the sample because they had not completed the SWLS. The mean age was 34.96 years (SD=15.86) with a range between 18-71 years. The significance

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criterion to test for significant gender differences used was $p < .05$. Written informed consent was obtained from each subject. These participants were sampled by convenience from the normal population, inclusion criterion was age older than 18. Demographic data about the sample were collected including: age, gender, marital status, education level and descent. Individuals were also asked about previous psychological treatment and infractions of the law, this was done because these variables might act as a confounder on the results.

Measures

One measure was used to assess two different dimensions of narcissism, and another to assess current satisfaction with life. To measure narcissism the NARQ (Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire) was applied (NARQ; Back et al., 2013). This measure consists of 18 items with a 6-point likert scale ranging from '1 = Do not agree at all' to '6 = Agree Completely', the scale overall has a Guttman's lambda $\lambda-2$ of .88. Rivalry and Admiration were calculated separately, for example a question on the dimension of Rivalry would be phrased like "I react annoyed if another person steals the show from me". The dimension of rivalry had a $\lambda-2$ of .823. An example of a question on the scale of Admiration would be "I show others how special I am". The scale of admiration had a $\lambda-2$ of .825. This indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale with this specific sample. The second measure applied is the SWLS (Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985) This measure consists of 5 items on a 7-point likert scale ranging from '1 = Strongly disagree' to '6 = Strongly agree'. The scale had a Guttman's lambda $\lambda-2$ of .80. The goal of the scale is to measure the general life satisfaction at the present time.

Procedure

Informed consent forms were used containing information about procedures, benefits and the purpose of the study. Subjects were told that the study investigated the validity and reliability of several questionnaires. They were explained what this means and the reasons for why their

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participation is important for future research. The procedure of taking the questionnaires was explained and subjects were ensured that their anonymity was upheld. Additional materials included a short demographic paper to have the possibility to contact the participant at a later date.

Analysis

SPSS 22 was used to analyze the data. The research design of this study was correlational as the focus was on comparing the relationships of several dimensions of narcissism on life satisfaction. An independent samples t-test was applied to compare results of men and women.

Results

In the following tables means and standard deviations will be displayed, followed by a table depicting the correlations between all scales used in our research.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations (between parentheses)

	Total sample (n = 108)	Men (n = 46)	Women (n = 62)
Narcissism	2,40 (.71)	2.71 (.72)	2.17 (.61)
Admiration	2.70 (.83)	3.03 (.84)	2.45 (.73)
Rivalry	2.11 (.77)	2.40 (.79)	1.89 (.68)
Life satisfaction	4.99 (1.43)	4.98 (1.42)	5.00 (1.45)

The mean score on the NARQ for both men and women together was 2.40 (SD = .71) the mean score on the SWLS for both men and women together was 5.00 (SD=1.43). The differences constituted by gender were significant. ($t=12.009$, $p = .000$)

Table 2. Correlations Between Scales in Total Sample.

	Narcissism	Admiration	Rivalry	Life Satisfaction
Narcissism	1	.89**	.88**	-.09
Admiration		1	.58**	.04
Rivalry			1	-.23*
Life Satisfaction				1

Large correlations were found between admiration on narcissism and rivalry and narcissism $r = > .50$. Narcissism seemed to have no relationship with life satisfaction. However, when separating the dimensions of admiration and rivalry, only rivalry showed to have a significant negative relationship with life satisfaction. We now turn to testing the hypotheses.

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H1: Expected was that narcissism had a negative relationship with life satisfaction, no significant negative correlation between narcissism and life satisfaction was found, $r = -.098$, $p = .31$, rejecting H1. We further analyzed the dimensions of the NARQ to answer the second and third hypothesis. H2: Expected was a negative correlation between dimension of rivalry and life satisfaction, a significant negative correlation between rivalry and life satisfaction indeed was found, $r = -.232$, $p = .016$, confirming H2. H3: Expected was a negative correlation between dimension of admiration and life satisfaction. However, a positive correlation between admiration and life satisfaction was found, $r = .897$, $p = .000$, rejecting H3.

H4: Correlation between admiration and life satisfaction expected to be bigger than the correlation between rivalry and life satisfaction. Fisher's Z was used to test the significance between correlations ($z = 13.04$, $p\text{-value} = .000$). Looking at the results of each of these correlations admiration shows to have a bigger correlation than rivalry. That is however not the only difference, as admiration shows to have a positive relationship with life satisfaction whereas rivalry has a negative relationship with life satisfaction. We can conclude that each dimension itself had an effect on life satisfaction, however when taking narcissism as a whole measured by the NARQ, narcissism did not seem to have a relation with life satisfaction. Furthermore, we wanted to analyze if gender played a role in changes in narcissism and life satisfaction. H5: Men were expected to score higher on narcissism than women did, when comparing the means of men and women, men have mean score of 2.71 on narcissism whereas women have a mean score of 2.17 ($t = 4.237$, $p = .000$). Men have a statistically significantly higher score on narcissism than women do H6: Men were expected to have lower scores on life satisfaction than women, yet men had a mean score of 4.98 ($SD = 1.42$) whereas women had a mean score of 5.00 ($SD = 1.45$). There was no statistically significant difference between men and women on life satisfaction. ($t = -0.63$, $p = .950$).

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Discussion

The goal of this study was to identify the relationship of narcissism on life satisfaction in a sample from the general population. The relationship between narcissism and life satisfaction has commonly been viewed as negative. We investigated the relationship of narcissism on life satisfaction with a balanced view, considering both positive and negative relations.

Narcissism was divided in the dimensions of Admiration and Rivalry under which several questions in the questionnaire were divided, this way narcissism among different factors could be perceived.

From all results found in the research done, we have seen the relationship between narcissism and life satisfaction, results showed no significant relationship between narcissism and lower life satisfaction. However, when the dimensions were considered separately, Rivalry did have a negative relationship with life satisfaction. Admiration correlated positively with life satisfaction.

Narcissism is considered a negative trait, often related to a narcissistic personality disorder. The dimension of admiration used in our research had an unexpected positive correlation with life satisfaction. This has implications for the way we view narcissistic behavior in the population, there seems to be adaptive value in some levels of narcissism.

Correlation differences between men and women shows that men have higher scores on narcissism however the differences on life satisfaction were not significant between gender.

It is important to note that the SWLS was based on a small amount of questions. The life satisfaction scale was based on a 5-item questionnaire to consider a participant's life satisfaction, research with more in-depth scales might provide different results.

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