

Personality Dimensions, Feeling of Loneliness and Self esteem as Correlates prevalent among Young Adults having Narcissistic traits in Personality

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This study investigates different psychological correlates of individuals high on narcissism by assessing their various personality dimensions, subjective feeling of loneliness and sense of self esteem. The study was conducted on 80 young adults (40 high on narcissistic traits and 40 low on narcissistic traits) with age range 18 – 21 years. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory, UCLA Loneliness Scale, Rosenberg Self Esteem scale and Neo Five-Factor Inventory-3 were used in collecting data. Results showed that feeling of loneliness is subjectively more among individuals high on narcissistic traits which is sharing a significant relationship with high explicit self esteem along with personality dimensions of high extraversion and low agreeableness and neuroticism..

Keywords: Narcissistic traits, Young Adults, Loneliness, Self-esteem, Personality Dimensions

Narcissism has a very rich and complex history in the literature of clinical psychoanalysis. The first psychologist to use the term “Narcissus-like” clinically was Havelock Ellis in the year 1898. Freud described a narcissist as someone who was primarily focused on self-preservation, who was independent, not easily intimidated, aggressive, extraverted, high in activity and unable to love or commit in relationships.

According to Kernberg, normal narcissism during infantile stage is in form of regressive tendencies present which during adult life translates to a healthy self esteem regulated by integrated super ego and normal self-structure. He further stated that pathological narcissism includes grandiose self-image, low self-esteem, and borderline organisation and in more severe cases also associated with aggression, paranoid traits and anti-social behaviour when it is termed as malignant narcissism.

Within psychoanalysis several schools have made contribution of which two most influential theoretical perspectives are Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut.

Kohut proposes that adult narcissistic psychopathology is due to the failure to provide appropriate empathic feedback during critical

times in a child’s development, the child does not develop the ability to regulate self-esteem and so the adult vacillates between an irrational overestimation of the self and feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, the adult relies on others to regulate his self-esteem and give him a sense of value essentially looking for empathic feedback not received during development.

According to Kernberg, self-hatred rather than self-love lies at the root of pathological narcissism. This pathology develops as a result of early pathological object relations, which results in negative and ambivalent internalized mental images of the self and other.

Secure high self esteem is regarded both implicitly and explicitly (Bosson et al. 2008). Implicit self-esteem is the individual’s nature to evaluate them positively or negatively in a spontaneous, automatic or unconscious manner. In contrast explicit self-esteem refers to global self-evaluations that individuals are conscious of and are able to report. Thus individuals are said to have high self-esteem when their explicit self-esteem match their implicit self-esteem.

Narcissism has often been associated with fragile high self esteem, the dependence of high self-esteem on desired outcomes, an

unwillingness to admit the possession of some negative self-feelings and the fluctuation of feelings of self worth.

Loneliness is a state of mind that causes individuals to feel empty, unwanted and alone. According to many experts loneliness is not essentially about being alone, rather it is the subjective perception of being alone and detached. Narcissists feel that they are separate from the others but the reality is that they are disconnected from their true selves. Narcissists find it extremely difficult to empathize or love, hence, they have very few friends. Often narcissists over-values people, uses them and devalues them. This pattern of behaviour tends to alienate them from others and this gradually makes their social circle fades away and ultimately vanishes. Externally narcissists would never complain to others about feeling lonely as they have to maintain their self-image.

Clinical theory and research has viewed narcissism as a personality trait existing at the sub-clinical level in normal populations. On the five factor model of personality, narcissists are high in extraversion, low in agreeableness and low in neuroticism (Trull & McCrae, 2002). A very widely held opinion about narcissists is that they secretly hate themselves and that narcissism is a defensive cover for low self-esteem (Baumeister, Bushman & Campbell, 2000). Research has also shown that personality traits (e.g. narcissism) and situations (e.g. being drunk) is associated with inflated self-esteem and is associated with aggression (Baumeister, Bushman & Campbell, 2000).

Objectives:

- To assess if there is a difference between the self esteem of individuals high on narcissism and individuals low on narcissism
- To assess if there is a difference between the level of loneliness suffered by individuals high on narcissism and individuals low on narcissism.
- To assess if there is a difference between the personality dimensions (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness)

of individuals high on narcissism and individuals low on narcissism.

Method

Sample

A group of 80 individuals were taken from in and around Kolkata of age range 18 – 21 years. All of them were Hindu and belonging to middle class socio-economic status and currently studying in college. Subjects with a previous history of any medical illness were excluded from this study.

Tools

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI): It was developed by Raskin and Terry (1988). It is a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 40 items (20 pairs) to measure individual differences in narcissism in non-clinical adult populations. For each paired statement, one represents narcissistic traits and the other non-narcissistic traits. Alpha coefficient ranged between 0.83 and 0.90.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale: It was developed by sociologist Dr. Morris Rosenberg (1965) to measure the respondent's global self-esteem. It is a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 10 items on a 4-point rating scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree Convergent validity ranging from 0.67 to 0.83 and a two-week test-retest reliability coefficient is 0.85.

UCLA Loneliness Scale: It was developed by Russell, D., Peplau, L.A., and Ferguson, M.L. (1978) to assess subjective feelings of loneliness or social isolation. It is a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 20 items. Alpha coefficient ranging from 0.89 to 0.94 and test-retest reliability over a one-year period was 0.73.

Neo-Five Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3) Form S: It is a 60 item inventory that provides a brief and comprehensive measure of the five domains of personality. It was developed by Paul T. Costa, Jr and Robert R Mc Crae (1992). It consists of 5 domains of personality dimensions namely Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C). Internal consistency coefficients of the factors range 0.68 to 0.86.

Procedure

After individual consents were taken, subjects were selected according to exclusion-inclusion criteria; appropriate instructions with all necessary instructions were given. All the questionnaires were scored according to scoring rules as given in the manual. Lastly, a statistical analysis of the data was conducted with the computation of mean, standard deviation and 't' test with the help of Statistical Package of Social Sciences 20 (SPSS 20).

Results & Discussion

Results indicate there is a significant difference between individuals with high narcissistic traits and low narcissistic traits in terms of feelings of loneliness and self-esteem. The findings are consistent with previous research findings (Jordan et al, 2003; Zeigler-Hull & Viril, 2006). These studies indicated that narcissists are high on explicit self-esteem and low on implicit self-esteem. In the present study the aim was to find out the explicit components of self-esteem. Individuals high on narcissism do not feel good about them deep down and wear a mask of self-confidence as if they have a very high self-opinion.

The above table also shows that there is a significant difference between the mean loneliness scores. This shows that subjective feeling of loneliness varies significantly when narcissism scores are high or low. This is also consistent with research findings that narcissistic individual are unable to remain emotionally available for others and being too engrossed in their grandiose sense of self-image cause them to be lonely. Research has also shown that loneliness does in fact lead to increased self-centeredness; however, the opposite is true as well. The more self-centred someone is, the lonelier they are likely to become in the future. Narcissists' partners report that their relationships are initially exciting, fun and full of energy but later on, their relationship starts lacking intimacy (Foster, et al. 2003). It may be suggested that people are usually attracted to narcissists because of their extraverted nature of enthusiasm, however, after a few interactions this attraction fades away when people notice how self-centred they are (Oltmanns et al, 2004). This may also be suggested due to the negative relationship between narcissism and empathy (Bushman et al. 2003).

Table showing comparison between individuals with high (N1) and low (N2) narcissistic traits with regard to feeling of loneliness, self-esteem and personality dimensions.

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Loneliness	N1	40	39.742	10.142	2.964**
	N2	40	32.413	8.914	
Self-esteem	N1	40	22.27	3.41	12.144*
	N2	40	12.47	3.80	
Neuroticism	N1	40	17.48	6.23	4.23*
	N2	40	23.73	6.97	
Extraversion	N1	40	32.73	5.34	5.88*
	N2	40	25.58	5.53	
Openness to Experience	N1	40	27.70	5.78	2.20
	N2	40	24.83	5.92	
Agreeableness	N1	40	24.45	4.61	2.01*
	N2	40	26.38	3.94	
Conscientiousness	N1	40	28.33	5.87	1.48
	N2	40	30.13	5.00	

*Significant at 0.05 level, **Significant at 0.01 level

There are some contradictory studies as well which states that there is an inverse relation between narcissism and loneliness (Sedikides et al. 2004).

In assessing the personality dimensions of the high and low narcissists it was found that there is a significant difference in dimensions related to Neuroticism, Extraversion and Agreeableness and no difference was found in the dimension of Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness.

Narcissists are lower on neuroticism and it was found to be consistent with previous research findings (Vincent & Cara, 2006) where it was found that narcissism was negatively associated with Neuroticism. Extraversion was found to be higher in the narcissists than the non-narcissists. This finding is supported by earlier research findings (Holtzman et al., 2010) which state that the need to seek admiration makes them outgoing and extroverted. This may also be due to their need to emerge as leaders and seek power. There is also a significant difference between the two groups with reference to the dimension of Agreeableness, with narcissists low on their Agreeableness score. This is consistent with earlier research findings (Vincent & Cara, 2007) which indicates that individuals with narcissistic traits are more egoists in nature with a narrow level of flexibility with may have led to low agreeableness. This is also in line with the findings of Miller et al. (2009) which suggested that extraversion and low agreeableness successfully mediated the entire narcissism-self-defeating behaviour (SDB) relation. Positive relations were also observed between narcissism and extraversion and strong negative relationship between narcissism and agreeableness in determining psychophysiological profile of career success among individuals with narcissistic traits (Kovacs, 2007). There is no significant difference between individuals high and low on narcissistic traits in terms of Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness. This may be due to the fact that both the groups are likely to focus on their own desires to the exclusion of social standards and prefer to act on their impulses.

Conclusions

On the basis of the present findings it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between individuals high and low in narcissistic traits in terms of self esteem, loneliness, extraversion, neuroticism and agreeableness.

Some of the unavoidable limitations of the study were small sample size and failure to measure the implicit self esteem of the subjects using indirect measures of cognitive processing which will help us to identify whether the inflated self-esteem which is explicit in nature is healthy or it is a defence to mask their low implicit self-esteem. Once this is found, through various therapeutic processes one can change the core values and prevent tendencies of developing pathological narcissism.

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