



Full Length Article

I'm merciful, am I not? Facets of narcissism and forgiveness revisited[☆]Ramzi Fatfouta^{a,*}, Virgil Zeigler-Hill^b, Michela Schröder-Abé^a^aUniversity of Potsdam, Germany^bOakland University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 April 2017

Revised 26 July 2017

Accepted 27 July 2017

Available online 1 August 2017

Keywords:

Narcissism

Forgiveness

Social relationships

Narcissistic entitlement

Conflict

ABSTRACT

Narcissists are said to be particularly unforgiving, yet previous research remains inconclusive. This is likely because most previous studies focused on narcissism as a unitary construct, thereby neglecting its multiple facets. The present study ($N = 1101$) thus aimed to clarify the nuanced associations between different facets of narcissism and forgiveness, the latter being assessed via self-report and non-self-report measures. The results of a structural equation model (SEM) showed that antagonistic aspects of narcissism were negatively correlated with explicit forgiveness. Importantly, agentic as well as communal aspects of narcissism were positively correlated with explicit forgiveness. Aspects of narcissistic personality were not correlated with implicit forgiveness. Results suggest that not all facets of narcissism are associated with an unforgiving stance.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

For many individuals, being labeled a “narcissist”¹ is not a compliment. Attached to this label are characteristics including inflated self-views, feelings of entitlement, and lack of empathy for others, as well as dominant, selfish, and hostile behaviors (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Rhodewalt & Peterson, 2009). Although narcissists are frequently perceived as charming, self-assured, and popular during initial encounters (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010), these positive evaluations often wane with time (Ackerman et al., 2011; Paulhus, 1998). Consistent with these divergent social consequences, narcissists have been described as “disagreeable extraverts” (Paulhus, 2001). That is, their social behavior is related to short-term appeal (e.g., dating success; Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013), but it is also related to long-term problems (e.g., interpersonal conflict; Peterson & DeHart, 2014).

One domain in which the social consequences of narcissism are particularly potent is forgiveness. Forgiveness describes the release of negative cognitions, behavior, and affect that often accompany a

transgression in favor of more positive ones (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998). To be forgiving is to transcend one's egocentric view and, instead, develop insight into the motives of the transgressor (Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, & Witvliet, 2008; Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001). A forgiving person is one who tends to experience empathy toward the transgressor (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998), relinquish claims on retribution (Fincham, 2010), and surrender one's grandiosity (Brandsma, 1982). In short, to be forgiving is to respond with conciliation and goodwill in the face of conflict (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006) which are qualities that seem to be antithetical to narcissism (Emmons, 2000).

Despite the theorized negative correlation between narcissism and forgiveness, empirical research has produced mixed results. Although some studies support the idea that narcissists have difficulty forgiving others (Besser & Zeigler-Hill, 2010; Eaton, Struthers, & Santelli, 2006; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004), others show a null relationship (Brown, 2004; Lannin, Guyll, Krizan, Madon, & Cornish, 2014; Strelan, 2007). For example, one study found narcissism (assessed with the Short Dark Triad; Jones & Paulhus, 2014) to be unrelated to forgiveness and, ironically, positively predicted forgiveness after controlling for the other two Dark Triad traits (i.e., Machiavellianism and psychopathy; Giammarco & Vernon, 2014). This muddled picture led researchers to conclude that “the link between general narcissism and forgiveness is not found in many studies” (Riek & Mania, 2012, p. 306, italics added). Indeed, one likely reason for this inconsistency is the conflation of various narcissistic characteristics into

[☆] Conceived and designed the study: RF. Collected and prepared the data: RF. Analyzed the data: RF VZH MSA. Wrote the paper: RF VZH MSA. The study was not preregistered.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Potsdam, Karl-Liebknecht Str. 24/25, 14476 OT Golm, Potsdam, Germany.

E-mail address: r.fatfouta@gmail.com (R. Fatfouta).

¹ In this paper, the term narcissism and its derivatives (i.e., narcissist or narcissistic) are used to refer to a continuous personality trait in the normal (i.e., subclinical) population.

a global score, thereby neglecting the heterogeneity of the construct. As we will argue below, a facet-level approach may reconcile the puzzling observations in the literature and, hence, be better suited for understanding how specific narcissistic traits relate to individual differences in forgiveness.

According to contemporary conceptualizations of narcissism, the breadth of narcissistic dynamics, correlates, and consequences is better explained by studying specific narcissism facets (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009; Miller et al., 2011). A review of the literature reveals three major dimensions of narcissistic personality: antagonistic narcissism, agentic narcissism, and communal narcissism. Antagonistic narcissism describes a self-protective tendency to avoid social failure via self-defense. Antagonistic narcissists strive for supremacy, derogate others, and engage in aggressive interpersonal behaviors (Back et al., 2013; Leckelt, Küfner, Nestler, & Back, 2015). Also, they feel entitled to special treatment and exploit others for personal gain (Ackerman et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2009). Agentic narcissism, in contrast, describes a self-enhancing tendency to approach social admiration via self-promotion. Agentic narcissists possess grandiose fantasies, strive for uniqueness, and engage in charming interpersonal behaviors (Back et al., 2013; Leckelt et al., 2015). Furthermore, they enjoy leadership and authority roles and display exhibitionist tendencies (Ackerman et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2009). A third form of narcissism – which has only been recently recognized – is communal narcissism (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012). Compared to the aforementioned constructs, communal narcissism possesses a unique nomological net and describes individuals who try to maintain an inflated self-view via communal means (Gebauer et al., 2012; Luo, Cai, Sedikides, & Song, 2014). A communal narcissist is someone who views him-/herself as “the best friend someone can have” (Gebauer et al., 2012). Correspondingly, communal narcissists view themselves as possessing “saint-like” characteristics of moral virtue and adherence to social norms (Paulhus & John, 1998).

Parsing narcissism into antagonistic, agentic, and communal facets is appealing, as it allows differentiated predictions about how narcissists navigate social life, especially when it comes to dealing with interpersonal conflict. Individuals high in antagonistic narcissism report destructive reactions in the wake of transgressions (Back et al., 2013; Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004; Fatfouta, Gerlach, Schröder-Abé, & Merkl, 2015; Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008). This converges with a recent meta-analysis suggesting that entitlement – an important antagonistic aspect of narcissism – accounts for vengeful reactions following provocations (Rasmussen, 2016). Hence, if antagonistic narcissists are hurt by other people, they may tend to continue to be hard on them, thereby eschewing the need for self-defense (e.g., avoiding social failure). In contrast, individuals high in agentic narcissism engage in constructive reactions following conflict (Back et al., 2013; Fatfouta et al., 2015). These findings align with a recent study showing that individuals high in agentic narcissism reported greater use of cooperative strategies to negotiate conflict (Keller et al., 2014). According to that study, agentic narcissists may cooperate in order to feel superior to the transgressor (cf. “superheroes”; Paulhus & John, 1998). Thus, if agentic narcissists are mistreated by other people, then they may tend to move past it, thereby preserving the possibility for external validation (e.g., gaining social admiration). Finally, individuals high in communal narcissism value social relationships and tend to be concerned with others' welfare (Gebauer et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2014). Hence, if communal narcissists are wronged by other people, then they may tend to get over it, thereby maintaining the possibility for communal self-enhancement (e.g., increasing social harmony). In sum, the notion that narcissists are generally unforgiving may require a reformulation, as certain types of narcissism may actually possess a forgiving stance.

2. Present study

The overarching focus of narcissism as a unitary construct may overlook important details about how different facets of narcissism relate to forgiveness. To address this gap in the literature, the present research aimed for a more nuanced examination of the relationship between the two constructs. We hypothesized that antagonistic, agentic, and communal narcissism would be differentially related to forgiveness. Specifically, antagonistic aspects of narcissistic personality should be negatively associated with forgiveness, whereas agentic and communal aspects of narcissistic personality should be positively associated with forgiveness.

To test our hypothesis, we assessed participants' levels of narcissism using three different narcissism inventories and their forgiveness levels using two direct (self-report) measures and one indirect (i.e., non-self-report) measure. Direct measures are assumed to mirror reflective self-presentations (e.g., I am forgiving) that result from controlled processing. In contrast, indirect measures are assumed to mirror associative self-representations (e.g., me-forgiving) that result from automatic processing (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2009). Given that automatic and controlled processes may either diverge or be consistent (Back et al., 2009; Perugini, 2005), the narcissism-forgiveness link may differ for direct versus indirect forgiveness measures. On the one hand, this relationship may be weaker for indirect forgiveness measures because self-reported narcissism and indirectly measured forgiveness do not share common method variance. On the other hand, this relationship may be strengthened because indirect measures are less susceptible to faking and social desirability (Schnabel, Asendorpf, & Greenwald, 2008). We thus included an Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) of forgiveness on an exploratory basis because recent research has documented that the forgiveness IAT constitutes a valuable addition to direct assessments of forgiveness (Fatfouta, Meshi, Merkl, & Heekeren, in press; Fatfouta, Schröder-Abé, & Merkl, 2014; Goldring & Strelan, 2017). In the absence of previous literature on the relationship between narcissism and implicit forgiveness, however, no specific predictions were made.

3. Method

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2012). To this end, supporting information that is not essential for understanding the conclusions of the manuscript, but nevertheless might benefit the reader is provided. The supplement and the data used for the analyses reported below are available from the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/6yhmp/>).

3.1. Participants and procedure

To detect the meta-analytic average of the correlation between narcissism and forgiveness ($|r| = 0.17$, $k = 10$, $N = 1866$; Riek & Mania, 2012) with a statistical power of 0.95, 444 individuals would be required. However, meta-analyses tend to overestimate the ‘true’ effect size (Bakker, van Dijk, & Wicherts, 2012). Consequently, the available estimate may potentially be biased. Furthermore, Riek and Mania (2012) did not differentiate between antagonistic, agentic, and communal narcissism facets. To guard against bias and to increase statistical power, we deliberately oversampled, yielding a statistical power of 0.99 according to a post hoc power analysis for the final sample.

A total of 1101 individuals participated. They were recruited via social networking sites as part of a larger, ongoing project on narcissism. As an incentive, participants received feedback about

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5046160>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5046160>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)