



Should have known better: The impact of mating experience and the desire for marriage upon attraction to the narcissistic personality



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ABSTRACT

Narcissistic males do not make good romantic partners. Narcissistic males lack commitment, engage in manipulative game-playing and are unfaithful. Despite this, they are still desired by females. Females value different traits in short-term and long-term partners. Previous mate sampling experience is also important to facilitate mate assessment. This study aimed to determine whether amongst young adult heterosexual females; their mate sampling experience and desire for marriage influenced their attraction to narcissistic personality traits in a potential mate. British females aged 18–28 provided information on past mating experience, future desire for marriage and rated their agreement with 20 statements relating to the extent that they found narcissistic personality traits attractive in a potential mate. Females with greater mating experience and those desiring marriage were more attracted to the narcissistic male personality. The narcissistic personality, whilst having many negative qualities, possesses qualities associated with status and resource provision. These traits are desirable in short and long-term mating contexts. Despite future long-term mating desires which are unlikely to be achieved with a narcissistic male and possession of substantial mate sampling experience, females view the narcissistic male as a suitable partner: a testament to the success of the narcissistic personality in facilitating short-term mating.

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1. Introduction

The Dark Triad comprises Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissism is a personality construct defined by an exaggerated sense of self-importance, authority, entitlement, self-sufficiency, exhibitionism, vanity and a willingness to manipulate others (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists show low scores for agreeableness and high scores for extraversion and openness on the Big Five personality domains (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). When considering the General Factor of Personality (Van der Linden, te Nijenhuis, & Bakker, 2010), narcissists can be tentatively suggested to score highly based on their high extraversion and openness. Narcissism is more prevalent in males than females (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Grijalva et al., 2014).

Short-term mating strategies are thought to be more evolutionarily adaptive to males than females due to males' lower parental investment and the costs to females of casual sexual encounters such as pregnancy, injury or infection (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Carter, Campbell, & Muncer, 2014). However, there are problems

for males associated with short-term mating strategies such as the willingness to compete with one's own gender, the ability to successfully engage in this competition and the ability to repel mates shortly after intercourse (Holtzman & Strube, 2010). Narcissism has been suggested to have evolved primarily in response to these problems and narcissists tend to pursue and excel at short-term mating (Carter et al., 2014; Holtzman & Strube, 2010; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). Narcissists are attractive to females, aware of the alternate mating opportunities available to them, begin new relationships with ease and are frequently non-monogamous (Campbell & Foster, 2002; Carter et al., 2014; Holtzman & Strube, 2010).

Whilst narcissism has clear reproductive benefits for the narcissist, the situation is largely negative for their romantic partner (Foster & Campbell, 2005). Narcissistic mates are more likely to be unfaithful (McNulty & Widman, 2014) and narcissism is associated with a lack of commitment (Campbell & Foster, 2002). This is due to their inflated self-view leading to dissatisfaction with their partner, their tendency to engage in manipulative game-playing within their relationships and their relative selfishness and lack of empathy (Campbell & Foster, 2002; Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002). In addition, narcissists are attracted to potential partners of high social status that provide the opportunity for enhancement

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via association (Campbell, 1999; Tanchotsrinon, Maneesri, & Campbell, 2007). This, combined with their poor commitment, can lead to narcissistic individuals being constantly on the lookout for more attractive or higher status partners (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

Despite these disadvantages narcissistic males are still desired by females and are highly successful in short-term mating (Holtzman & Strube, 2010; Jonason et al., 2009). At least in the short-term, narcissists are frequently perceived as charming, popular, socially confident and entertaining (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Campbell et al., 2002; Watson & Biderman, 1994). Narcissists also frequently achieve high social status (Brunell et al., 2008; Young & Pinsky, 2006). These traits are desirable in potential mates (Bressler & Balshine, 2006; Buss, 2007; Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013; Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher, & Gate, 2000). Narcissistic males are also attractive to females due to their physical attractiveness (Holtzman & Strube, 2010), enhanced grooming and advertisement of potential resource provision (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008) as well as the personality construct itself being attractive (Carter et al., 2014).

For a multitude of reasons, narcissistic mates are therefore attractive to females. This is particularly proposed to be the case with younger females who typically exhibit a more short-term focus in their relationships (Carter et al., 2014), a mating scenario in which the narcissistic male excels (Carter et al., 2014; Holtzman & Strube, 2010; Jonason et al., 2009). However many factors can potentially influence female mate choice; such as their future relationship desires and their mating experience.

Many studies have indicated that females value different traits in potential short-term and long-term partners (e.g. Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Regan et al., 2000). Females also show higher selectivity when choosing long-term partners (Stewart, Stinnett, & Rosenfeld, 2000). Traits such as sexual desirability and attractiveness are important in potential short-term partners, whilst traits such as intelligence, honesty, dependability, kindness, resource acquisition and status are valued in potential long-term partners (Buss, 2007; Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Regan et al., 2000). This difference has also been demonstrated in the Dark Triad context with females preferring males low on Machiavellianism as long-term partners and males high on Machiavellianism in short-term mating contexts (Aitken, Lyons, & Jonason, 2013).

Another factor that can influence a female's choice of mates is their previous mating experience. Females with greater mating experience demonstrate more confidence in their assessment of attractive traits in potential mates than less experienced females (Waynforth, 2007). Humans typically engage in sequential mate search via dating a number of individuals successively before choosing a long-term partner. This search entails sampling a number of potential mates to provide information upon mate value. This information can then be utilised when choosing a suitable future long-term partner (Miller & Todd, 1998; Todd, 1997).

There has been little research, to our knowledge, into the effects of young females' future relationship desires and past mating experience upon attraction to narcissistic mates. In the current study the aim was thus to determine whether amongst young adult heterosexual females (ranging from ages 18 to 28); their number of previous partners and their desire for marriage influenced their attraction to the narcissistic personality in a potential mate.

We hypothesise that females with greater mate sampling experience and those with a desire for long-term relationship commitment will be less attracted to the narcissistic male personality.

This is due to experienced females being better able to assess the traits important in a potential mate (Miller & Todd, 1998; Todd, 1997; Waynforth, 2007), and due to matrimonial minded females seeking males displaying traits important in long-term relationship contexts (Aitken et al., 2013; Buss, 2007; Li et al., 2002; Regan et al., 2000). In both these situations, we would predict that narcissistic males would be found wanting due to the disadvantages associated with the narcissistic personality.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participant recruitment

One hundred and forty-six young British females (mean age 23.6, range 18–28) participated in this study which was conducted via online questionnaire. Of these, 76% ($n = 111$) desired marriage in the future and 24% ($n = 35$) did not. Within this sample, 52.1% ($n = 76$) of the participants had 0–5 previous partners, 21.2% ($n = 31$) had 6–10, 15.8% had 11–15 ($n = 23$), 3.4% had 16–20 ($n = 5$) and 7.5% ($n = 11$) had 21+ previous partners.

The questionnaire was advertised on the social media websites Facebook™ and Twitter™. The young target population frequently utilise the internet and social media sites thus an internet based survey was easily accessible to participants. Participants were required to be over the age of 18, under the age of 28, female and heterosexual in order to complete the questionnaire. No identifying personal data were collected, and participants were reassured that all responses were voluntary, data remained anonymous, and all information collected was held securely. Participants provided informed consent. The study was approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee.

2.2. Questionnaire design

Participant age information was obtained and they were presented with two closed ended questions relating to the participant's desire for marriage (Yes/No) and number of previous mating partners (0–5; 6–10; 11–15; 16–20; 21+). Subsequently, participants were asked to consider 20 statements relating to the extent that they found narcissistic personality traits attractive in a potential mate. These statements were based on those utilised in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin & Hall, 1979). The NPI is a viable tool for the measurement of the general construct of narcissism and is the most common measure of narcissism validated for use with nonclinical populations (John & Robins, 1994; Raskin & Terry, 1988). The NPI was adapted for this study in order to investigate female attraction to narcissistic personality traits. In developing the scale used in this study, we changed the NPI from 40 statements with a forced choice format to 20 statements with a Likert-type format. The statements assessed female attraction to narcissistic male traits such as being egotistical, arrogant, driven to succeed, confident, proud, competitive, vain, manipulative, devoid of empathy, self-important, praise and attention seeking, assertive, influential and authoritative. The statements covered the seven components of the narcissistic personality construct; authority, superiority, self-sufficiency, exhibitionism, entitlement, vanity and exploitiveness (Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements such as “Confidence in a male is more alluring than modesty” on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (Table 1). Attraction to the narcissistic male personality was calculated by summing the scores for each statement (with values ranging from 5 for “strongly agree” to 1 for “strongly disagree”). Hence a high total score indicated that the participant found narcissistic traits to be attractive in a potential mate.

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