



Self-esteem mediates narcissism and aggression among women, but not men: A comparison of two theoretical models of narcissism among college students



Michael D. Barnett *, Hillary A. Powell

University of North Texas, Department of Psychology, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 June 2015

Received in revised form 11 August 2015

Accepted 26 September 2015

Available online 22 October 2015

Keywords:

Narcissism

Self-esteem

Physical aggression

Verbal aggression

Gender

Psychodynamic mask model

Threatened egotism model

ABSTRACT

Previous research has linked narcissism, self-esteem, and aggression. Two theoretical models have been advanced to explain these relationships: the psychodynamic mask model and the threatened egotism model, each with empirical support. Past research has found gender differences in narcissism, self-esteem, and aggression; however, little extant research into relationships between these variables has explored the role of gender. The purpose of this study was to investigate the mediating role of self-esteem between narcissism and aggression (physical aggression and verbal aggression) among U.S. college students and to explore whether these relationships varied between men and women. Results found support for the psychodynamic mask model, but only among women.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Many studies have linked narcissism, aggression, and self-ideology (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Heiserman & Cook, 1998; Perez, Vohs, & Joiner, 2005); however, previous research has yielded inconsistent results regarding the directionality of these relations. Two theoretical models of narcissism and aggression – the psychodynamic mask model and the threatened egotism model – have both received support in the literature. Additionally, although significant gender differences have been found on narcissism, self-esteem, and aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992; Heiserman & Cook, 1998; Sprecher, Brooks, & Avogo, 2013), little extant research has investigated interrelationships between these variables and gender. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between narcissism, self-esteem, and aggression among college men and women in order to test these theoretical models of narcissism and aggression.

2. Narcissism

Narcissism can be understood as a category – Narcissistic Personality Disorder in the *DSM-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) – or as a dimensional trait. The current study conceptualizes narcissism as a

trait. Narcissism is associated with feelings of elevated self-worth and superiority, and narcissistic individuals tend to become overly tormented by threats to their self-image, and carry out maladaptive strategies to handle these threats (e.g., violence, aggression; Pincus et al., 2009).

3. Narcissism and aggression

Kernberg (1975) and Kohut (1966) proposed models of narcissism that influenced the establishment of the psychodynamic mask model, which states that narcissistic individuals use a grandiose sense of self as a mask to hide their low self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2013). Previous studies have found that narcissistic individuals have fragile and vulnerable self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2000; Cale & Lilienfeld, 2006; Heiserman & Cook, 1998; Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2013). Myers and Zeigler-Hill (2012) found support for the psychodynamic mask model of narcissism by utilizing the bogus pipeline technique to reveal how narcissistic individuals have lower self-esteem than they overtly express. Donnellan et al. (2005) found that the relationship between low self-esteem and aggression is independent from narcissism.

Baumeister et al. (2000) present the threatened egotism model of aggression to explain how global self-esteem does not necessarily lead to physical and verbal aggression, but the threat to one's self-esteem is what causes aggression. Narcissistic individuals think highly of themselves, and expect others to share in this same view. Bushman et al. (2009) found that high self-esteem was linked with aggression, but the combination of high self-esteem and ego threats produced higher

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Michael.Barnett@unt.edu (M.D. Barnett), HillaryPowell@my.unt.edu (H.A. Powell).

Table 1
Bivariate correlations.

Measures	1	2	3
1. Narcissism			
2. Self-esteem	-.416**		
3. Physical aggression	.294**	-.219**	
4. Verbal aggression	.401**	-.243**	.609**

Note: $N = 831$ ($n = 238$ males; $n = 593$ females).** $p < .001$.

rates of aggression; low self-esteem had no relationship with aggression. Baumeister et al. (2000) found that narcissistic individuals did not differ from their non-narcissistic counterparts in regard to aggression as long as there were no insulting threats made towards their ego, making narcissism more of a risk factor that can increase aggression to provocation than a direct causal link (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

The psychodynamic mask model and the threatened egotism model agree in the sense that narcissistic individuals possess unstable self-esteem; however, their differences in how self-esteem plays a causal role in the relationship between narcissism and aggression cause the relationship to remain ambiguous.

4. Narcissism, aggression, and gender

Much of the existing literature explores the relationships between narcissism, self-esteem, and aggression. However, little extant research explores the role of gender in these relations. Since there are gender differences in self-esteem, aggression, and narcissism independently, it is important to consider the role of gender in interrelationships between these.

Overall, studies have shown support that women tend to have lower self-esteem than men (Sprecher et al., 2013). Consistent with these findings, narcissistic women tend to be more prone to experiencing shame while narcissistic men tend to be more likely to exert aggression (Heiserman & Cook, 1998; Lewis, 1976; Tangney, 1994). Considerable empirical evidence suggests that men tend to be more aggressive than women (Averill, 1982; Bailey & Ostrov, 2008; Heiserman & Cook, 1998). Men elicit more physical aggression, verbal aggression, and hostility than women; however, there is a larger disproportion between the sexes for physical aggression than any other type of aggression Buss and Perry (1992).

5. The current study

This study investigated relationships between these variables within the theoretical frameworks of the psychodynamic mask model and the threatened egotism model in an effort to provide a clearer view of the relationship due to existing mixed and ambiguous empirical evidence. Consistent with the literature, it was hypothesized that (H1) narcissism would positively predict physical and verbal aggression; (H2) narcissism would predict self-esteem; (H3) self-esteem would predict physical and verbal aggression in a manner consistent with the psychodynamic mask model or the threatened egotism model (e.g., self-esteem negatively predicts physical and verbal aggression, or self-esteem positively predicts physical and verbal aggression); (H4) self-esteem would mediate the relationship between narcissism and both forms of aggression; and (H5) gender would moderate the relationship between narcissism, self-esteem, and aggression in that moderation would be found among men, but not women.

6. Method

6.1. Participants

Participants consisted of undergraduate students ($N = 831$) from a large public university in the southern United States. Participants were

recruited through the department research website. Participants consisted of 593 females (71.2%), and 238 males (28.6%), whose ages ranged from 18 to 62 years ($Mage = 21$; $SD = 3.86$). The ethnic/racial composition was 53.5% White/Caucasian, 16.1% Black/African American, 19.3% Hispanic, 7.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Native American, and 2.9% "other."

6.2. Measures

The *Pathological Narcissism Inventory* (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009) is a 52-item, self-report measure of narcissism. The PNI is multidimensional, assessing narcissistic grandiosity (characterized by entitlement rage, exploitativeness, grandiose fantasy, and self-sacrificing self-enhancement) and narcissistic vulnerability (characterized by contingent self-esteem, hiding the self, and devaluing). The PNI scales assess clinically relevant aspects of pathological narcissistic traits (e.g., "I often fantasize about being admired and respected," "It irritates me when people don't notice how good a person I am."). Participants rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all like me* to 6 = *very much like me*). Higher total PNI scores represent higher levels of narcissism. In this study, the PNI demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .961$).

The *Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire-Short Form* (BPAQ-SF; Bryant & Smith, 2010) is a 12-item, self-report measure of aggression. This shortened version of the original 29 item Buss-Perry Scale (Buss & Perry, 1992) assesses physical aggression (e.g., "There are people who pushed me so far that we came to blows."), verbal aggression (e.g., "I can't help getting into arguments when people disagree with me."), anger (e.g., "I have trouble controlling my temper."), and hostility (e.g., "At times I feel I have gotten a raw deal out of life."). Participants respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *extremely uncharacteristic of me* to 5 = *extremely characteristic of me*). For the purposes of this study, only physical aggression and verbal aggression will be assessed. Higher scores indicate higher levels of physical and verbal aggression. In this study, the verbal aggression subscale demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .684$).

The *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item, self-report measure of overall feelings of self-worth (e.g., "I take a positive attitude towards myself."). Participants respond to each item on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly agree* to 4 = *strongly disagree*). In this study, the RSES demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .884$).

6.3. Procedures

The study was approved by the university IRB. Participants completed the survey online and received course credit for participating.

Table 2
Descriptive data.

	Gender		Total sample M (SD)
	Males M(SD)	Females M (SD)	
Continuous variables			
PNI	179.98 (36.95)	183.46 (41.08)	182.62 (40.11)
RSES	29.03 (5.72)	29.61 (5.79)	29.44 (5.77)
BPAQ-PA	7.51 (2.87)	6.52 (2.92)	6.80 (2.94)
BPAQ-VA	8.09 (2.67)	7.49 (2.77)	7.67 (2.75)

Note: $N = 831$ ($n = 238$ males; $n = 593$ females). PNI: Pathological Narcissism Inventory (Pincus et al., 2009). RSES: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scales (Rosenberg, 1965). BPAQ: Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire – Physical Aggression & Verbal Aggression subscales (Buss & Perry, 1992).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7250714>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7250714>

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