Personality and job satisfaction: The role of narcissism

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Narcissism has been studied in relation to leadership and productivity in the workplace. However, few studies have been conducted on how narcissism influences work attitudes. The first goal of this study is to measure the association between narcissism and the five factor model (FFM) of personality in an organizational sample. The second goal is to measure the influence of narcissism on job satisfaction when controlling for FFM traits. A total of 224 employees from a public organization have filled out self-rating measures of job satisfaction, FFM traits and a measure of narcissism. Results indicated that narcissism was positively correlated with FFM extraversion and openness to experience and negatively correlated with agreeableness. Narcissism had a significant influence on job satisfaction, even when controlling for FFM traits. We believe that these results stress the importance of better understanding the role of narcissism in employee attitudes in order to weigh the pros and cons of hiring or promoting narcissistic employees.

1. Introduction

Narcissism can be defined as a "relatively stable individual difference consisting of grandiosity, self-love and inflated self-views (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011, p. 269). Narcissistic individuals, in the trait approach (Five Factor Model or Big Five), can be viewed as "disagreeable extraverts" (Paulhus, 2001). Narcissistic individuals fantasize about fame and power; see themselves as more intelligent and attractive (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 2006; Raskin & Novacek, 1991) and are in constant search of admiration and superiority (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Despite the fact that studies report that business students present higher scores of narcissism when compared to students in other disciplines (Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2010; Robak, Chiffriller, & Zappone, 2007; Westerman, Bergman, Bergman, & Daly, 2012), the interest for the study of this construct in industrial/organizational contexts is far more recent. In fact, Keith Campbell et al. (2011, p. 281) conclude their review on narcissism in the workplace with these words "Finally, from our perspective, the single most important theme in research on narcissism in organizations is that there is more research needed". The authors indicate that although narcissism may be attractive in a selection process and even related to success in the short-term, it will eventually lead to destructive consequences to the organization in the long run (Campbell et al., 2011). Indeed, they report that narcissism may present many problems that are directly relevant to HR practices such as counterproductive work behavior (aggression and bullying) and an overly sexualized workplace (Keith Campbell et al., 2011). Very

few studies have examined the relationship between narcissism and employee attitudes such as job satisfaction. Because job satisfaction is related to employee work performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001) and turnover intentions (Hellman, 1997), we believe that it is important to assess the role of narcissism on employees' level of job satisfaction.

This study proposes to be one of the first to measure the relationship between narcissism and the FFM traits in an organizational sample. The second goal of the present study is to measure the relationship between narcissism and job satisfaction when controlling for FFM traits.

1.1. Narcissism and the five factor model of personality

Paulhus and Williams (2002) have drawn attention to three well-documented destructive personalities, which they refer to as the "Dark Triad," consisting of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. The authors report that, despite the fact that these three personalities share a number of features like a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness; their data do not support the contention that in normal populations, these three constructs of personality are equivalent (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). When compared to the FFM of personality, researchers have consistently found that those high on self-reports of the Dark Triad traits are also low in agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008). Even though these studies did not use work-related samples, interesting results emerged among these traits with respect to other FFM domains. For example, aside from being negatively related to agree-

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ableness, narcissism was also positively related to openness and extraversion, but unrelated to conscientiousness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Vernon et al., 2008). Some studies have found similar results with samples of undergraduate students (negative correlation with agreeableness, positive correlations with extraversion and no significant correlation with conscientiousness); however, they found that narcissism was also negatively correlated with neuroticism (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Miller, Maples, & Campbell, 2011). All of these studies were conducted with student populations. To our knowledge, very few studies have empirically tested the relationship between FFM and narcissism in an organizational sample.

1.2. Narcissism and job satisfaction

Locke (1976, p. 1300) has defined job satisfaction as the "positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences." Spector (1997) defines job satisfaction either as an overall feeling about the job or as a related set of attitudes about different facets of the job. Research has proven that unsatisfied employees leave their jobs more often than satisfied employees (Hellman, 1997). Yiing and Ahmad (2009) have found a significant relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Very few studies have empirically measured the relationship between narcissism and job satisfaction. Kopelman and Mullins (1992), using two student samples have found that narcissism was associated with lower levels of job satisfaction. Using an organizational sample, Soyer, Rovenpor, Kopelman, Mullins, and Watson (2001) found job satisfaction to be negatively correlated to narcissism when the construct was measured with the narcissism-hypersensitivity subscale of the MMPI (Serkownek, 1975), the Narcissistic personality disorder scale (Wink, 1991) and the Margolis–Thomas Measure of Narcissism (Margolis & Thomas, 1981) but not with the most widely used and validated instrument, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979). It should be noted that the NPI had the highest internal reliability of the four measures of narcissism (Soyer et al., 2001). In essence, very few studies have empirically tested the relationship between job satisfaction and narcissism in an organizational context. However, research has shown that narcissism is related to low relationship commitment in part because narcissistic individuals perceive the quality of alternative partners to be higher than do less narcissistic people (Campbell & Foster, 2002). This may well be linked to the fact that narcissists are "preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love" (APA, 2000). In the workplace, we believe that narcissistic individuals could also be less satisfied with their jobs in part because they present inflated views of their contributions (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; John & Robins, 1994). Furthermore, we believe that these inflated self-views, combined with the fact that they probably think that there are better alternatives in terms of jobs will contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction for narcissistic individuals.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

Employees from a public service organization were asked to participate in this project by completing a series of assessments. In total, 224 employees completed self-report measures of job satisfaction, FFM and narcissism, a participation rate of 91.6%. Of the 224 participants, 41.5% were men ($n = 93$) and 58.5% women ($n = 131$). The ages ranged from 20 to 66 (mean = 44.3). For marital status, 33.2% of the participants were married, 3.6% were divorced,

1.8% were widowed, 21.1% were single, 37.7% were living with their spouse but not married, and 2.7% were in a relationship but did not live with their spouse. About half (46.8%) did not have children, 18.9% had one child, 28.4% had two children, 3.2% had 3 children, 2.3% had four children and 0.5% had more than four children. As for the level of educations, 0.4% had not completed high-school, 10.3% had completed a high-school diploma, 51.1% had completed a two-year college degree (Associates Degree), 22.9% had completed a Bachelor's Degree, and 4.9% had completed a Master's Degree. On average, employees were in their current jobs for 7.3 years and had been employed by their company for 12.6 years (minimum = 1 month and maximum = 37 years).

This project was part of a larger study on personality in the workplace for which the first author has received ethics approval. The survey, including all of the measure for the larger project, took about 45 min to fill-out. Employees completed a paper–pencil version of the questionnaire during their work hours.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured using a short version of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ; Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). This repeatedly validated instrument includes 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = very low satisfaction and 6 = very high level of satisfaction). Cronbach alpha for the present study was .91.

2.2.2. Narcissism

Narcissism was measured using a short version of the Narcissistic Personality inventory (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). The NPI is, by far, the most common measure used by researchers to assess narcissism in normal populations (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Furthermore, the NPI and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) as measured through the Structured clinical interview for DSM-IV axis II personality disorders (First, Gibbon, Spitzer, Williams, & Benjamin, 1997) used by the clinical psychologists and the psychiatrists overlap and are strongly correlated (Miller, Gaughan, Pryor, Kamen, & Campbell, 2009). Ames et al. (2006) built and validated the measure by conducting five studies using the NPI-16. Results indicate that the NPI-16 has notable face, internal, discriminant, and predictive validity. Each item presents two statements and the participant must choose the one that best describes him or her. The narcissistic statements were coded 1 whereas the "non-narcissistic" statements were coded 0, and the 16 items are added together, for a total score ranging from 0 to 16. Cronbach's Alphas for the present sample was .63.

2.2.3. Big Five Inventory (BFI-44)

FFM traits were measured using the 44-item version of the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). The BFI-44 is a 5-point Likert-type scale presenting items related to the five subscales (traits) of the FFM (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism). The BFI is a widely used and validated instrument measuring the FFM (see John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). Alpha coefficients for the five traits were as follows: Extraversion (.67); Agreeableness (.73); Conscientiousness (.77); Neuroticism (.82); Openness (.79).

In addition to conducting correlational analyses between our study variables, we also conducted multiple linear regressions to determine the influence of narcissism on job satisfaction when controlling for FFM traits.