

Brief Report

# Narcissism and romantic attraction: Evidence from a collectivistic culture ☆

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between narcissism and romantic attraction in a collectivistic culture (i.e., Thailand). In Study 1, participants completed a measure of narcissism and rated their attraction to four potential romantic partners. There was an overall preference across participants for caring targets. Additionally, high narcissists were more attracted to admiring and high status targets than were low narcissists. A similar pattern of results was found in Study 2 with targets that were either high caring/low status or high status/low caring. Overall, caring in a partner was highly valued in a collectivistic culture, but narcissism still predicted attraction to targets who offered the potential for self-enhancement. These findings suggest that classically Western self-enhancement can be found in Eastern samples; however, to uncover these self-enhancement processes, researchers might need to use a personality variable such as narcissism.

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## 1. Introduction

A good deal of past research has examined the role of narcissism in predicting behavior in romantic relationships. In general, narcissism is linked to a self-enhancing, agentic,

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individualistic, and selfish approach to romantic relationships. This approach is effective for initiating and exploiting (although not necessarily maintaining) romantic relationships (e.g., [Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002a](#)). The link between narcissism and relational functioning is readily apparent in Western cultures, with their focus on individualism ([Triandis, 1995](#); [Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003](#)). Narcissists' approach to relationships, however, might differ in more collectivistic cultures where communal concerns trump individuality and egotism. In the present research, we examine the role of narcissism as a predictor of romantic attraction in a collectivistic culture, specifically Thailand. We predict that narcissists' generally self-enhancing style will be evident in a collectivistic culture, but that the culture's collectivistic concerns will govern romantic relationships for narcissists and non-narcissists alike.

## **2. Narcissism and interpersonal relationships**

Narcissism is typically linked with positive and inflated views of the self, and a relative lack of interest in forming close, caring, and warm relationships with others. Narcissists do not shun relationships, however. Instead, narcissists use relationships as a self-regulatory strategy that maximizes the social status and esteem of the narcissist. In essence, narcissists use close relationships largely for the purpose of gaining social status and self-esteem ([Campbell, 1999](#)). A good example of this can be found in narcissists' reports of romantic attraction. Narcissists are particularly attracted to individuals who are (a) high in social status (e.g., successful, popular, and attractive) and can provide the narcissist with self-enhancement via association, and (b) admiring and can enhance the narcissist's self-views directly via flattery and attention. In contrast, narcissists typically report less attraction for partners interested in close, caring relationships ([Campbell, 1999](#)). These data, however—like the vast majority of data on narcissism—were collected in the U.S. The question is still open as to whether narcissists' relative preference for social status and admiration over caring in a potential mate will be evident in collectivistic cultures that place a high value on close, communal relationships.

## **3. Narcissism and culture**

Higher levels of narcissism are found in individuals who (a) are members of individualistic cultures, and (b) report more independence on the personality and self level. In a large, cross-cultural Internet sample, for example, [Foster and colleagues \(2003\)](#) found higher levels of narcissism in Western (i.e., more individualistic) compared to Eastern cultures. Likewise, narcissism is associated with independence and agency on personality measures (e.g., [Bradlee & Emmons, 1992](#)) and self-construal measures ([Le, 2005](#)). Furthermore, when narcissists' self-conceptions are examined directly, narcissists report highly positive self-ratings on agentic traits (e.g., dominance, independence, and creativity), but relatively lower self-ratings on communal traits (e.g., caring, morality, and kindness) ([Campbell et al., 2002a, Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002b](#)).

## **4. The present research**

The goal of the present research was to examine narcissism and relational functioning in a collectivistic culture. This line of inquiry is important for at least four reasons: first,

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