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Using the bogus pipeline to investigate grandiose narcissism



Amy B. Brunell *, Terri D. Fisher

Ohio State University at Mansfield, 1760 University Drive, Mansfield, OH 44906, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- A bogus pipeline paradigm examined self-assessments of narcissism and self-esteem.
- Grandiosity was higher if surveys might be seen than when monitored by a polygraph.
- Self-esteem was higher if surveys might be seen than when connected to a polygraph.
- Narcissism was positively correlated with self-esteem in all study conditions.
- Findings contradict the psychodynamic mask model and the DSM-V perspectives.

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ABSTRACT

The present study used a bogus pipeline methodology to investigate the extent to which grandiose narcissism and other narcissism-related constructs were sensitive to bias in reporting. In addition, we sought to test the psychodynamic mask model by examining the association between narcissism variables and deep-seated feelings of self-esteem for men and women when both narcissism and self-esteem were assessed simultaneously under three different conditions: a bogus pipeline condition, an anonymous condition, and an exposure threat condition wherein participants believed that somebody else might be reviewing their responses. Results revealed that the assessment of narcissistic grandiosity and global self-esteem was sensitive to study conditions whereas assessment of narcissistic personality and psychological entitlement was not. Grandiose narcissism and self-esteem were positively correlated within each study condition, a finding which contradicts the psychodynamic mask model and has implications for understanding narcissistic functioning.

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Introduction

Narcissists are frequently described as grandiose, entitled, and self-centered, which aids their belief that they are superior to others and leads them to seek attention and admiration from others (e.g., Raskin & Terry, 1988). In personality psychology, narcissism is viewed as an individual differences variable that can be measured in the general population and is frequently referred to as "grandiose narcissism" (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006; Campbell & Foster, 2007; Foster & Twenge, 2011). Grandiose narcissists tend to be self-focused and self-serving (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Shaw, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). They believe they are more intelligent and more attractive than others (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994), and they exaggerate their abilities and achievements (John & Robins, 1994). For grandiose narcissists, relationships serve as a means of self-esteem regulation or personal gain, rather than for intimacy (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Campbell et al., 2006).

Early theorizing by Kernberg (1974) and Kohut (1977) suggested that narcissists' grandiosity functions as a mask for below-the-surface vulnerabilities, which some scholars have termed "the psychodynamic mask model" (see Bosson et al., 2008; Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2011, for reviews). Because narcissism scholars consistently report a modest positive correlation between grandiose narcissism and explicit self-esteem (Bosson et al., 2008), recent research has focused on the vulnerability aspects to examine the extent to which grandiose narcissists "dislike themselves deep down inside" (Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007, p. 228; see also Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003; Zeigler-Hill, 2006) by examining grandiose narcissists' performance on implicit self-esteem measures. Such measures enable the investigation of deep-seated feelings based on performance on tasks that are believed to assess automatic and unconscious self-beliefs.

Implicit attitudes are most commonly assessed with the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000), which is a computerized categorization task that assesses self-relevant (e.g., "me") and non-self-relevant (e.g., "them") words with pleasant and unpleasant words. Results from these studies have been mixed. Some scholars argue that narcissism is associated with high explicit but low implicit self-esteem (e.g., Jordan et al., 2003; Zeigler-Hill, 2006). However,

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: brunell.2@osu.edu (A.B. Brunell), fisher.16@osu.edu (T.D. Fisher).

others counter that these implicit measures confounded agentic (e.g., dominant) and communal traits (e.g., cooperative), such that the association between grandiose narcissism and low implicit selfesteem was driven by terms that activated communal qualities in which narcissists are lacking and therefore was not necessarily indicative of low self-esteem. Put another way, grandiose narcissists tend to view themselves as possessing positive agentic traits (e.g., clever) and negative communal traits (e.g., crude; Jones & Brunell, 2014), and thus assessment of communal traits is not a proper measure of selfesteem. When Campbell et al. (2007) carefully controlled self-beliefs concerning agency and communion, grandiose narcissists scored high on both implicit and explicit measures of agency but neutral on measures of communion (which combined positive and negative traits; Campbell et al., 2007). Therefore, grandiose narcissists do not appear to have low implicit self-esteem, which weakens the vulnerability argument.

The question of the true relationship between narcissism and selfesteem cannot be fully answered without an understanding of the degree to which commonly-used explicit measures of narcissism and self-esteem are subject to reporting bias. Although a meta-analysis by Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhllmann, and Banaji (2009) suggested that explicit modes of assessment of the self-concept are more valid than implicit modes, the possibility remains that reporting bias plays a role in research on the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem when explicit measures are used. In the current study, we sought to investigate the extent to which the and other narcissism-related constructs are sensitive to bias in reporting, an issue which has not been previously investigated by means of a bogus pipeline study. It is possible that when connected to lie detector equipment (a bogus pipeline condition), people might respond differently to NPI (or other narcissismrelevant) items than they would anonymously or when they think somebody else might become privy to their responses.

A bogus pipeline paradigm facilitates honesty in reporting because when participants are led to believe that they are connected to physiological lie-detecting equipment, people might be more thoughtful in their responses by considering how they actually are rather than how they desire to see themselves. Furthermore, to the extent that some people believe that answers in the narcissistic direction are less socially desirable, they might have lower scores on a measure of narcissism when they think someone might be viewing their responses, compared to a bogus pipeline condition in which there is pressure to be honest. On the other hand, if people believe that answers in the narcissistic direction are desirable, they might have higher scores on narcissism when they believe their answers might be seen by others. Thus, it appears that the assessment of narcissism under bogus pipeline conditions is warranted.

Recently, Myers and Zeigler-Hill (2012) used a bogus pipeline paradigm to investigate grandiose narcissists' reporting bias of self-esteem. They sought to understand the extent to which grandiose narcissists actually believe that their self-esteem is high, or whether they simply inflate their self-esteem when responding to questionnaire items. In their study, female participants first completed an online survey that included NPI Raskin & Hall, 1979. Participants then reported to the laboratory where they were randomly assigned to either the bogus pipeline or the control condition. In the bogus pipeline condition, participants were led to believe that they were connected to a functioning lie detector. They were then videotaped while they were orally administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). In the control condition, participants were connected to the lie detector equipment, but were told that it had been deactivated. They were videotaped while orally completing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Myers and Zeigler-Hill (2012) found that women with higher NPI scores reported lower self-esteem in the bogus pipeline condition than in the control condition. The NPI was positively associated with global self-esteem in the control condition, but negatively associated with self-esteem in the bogus pipeline condition. Myers

and Zeigler-Hill concluded that grandiose narcissists actually possess lower self-esteem than they typically report.

The purpose of our research was different than that of Myers and Zeigler-Hill (2012) in that we wanted to examine socially-motivated reporting bias on narcissism-related measures and self-esteem in both women and men. Therefore, in the present study, we used a bogus pipeline paradigm to assess grandiose narcissism and self-esteem simultaneously. In our study, regardless of condition, participants completed paper versions of the questionnaires, thus providing a consistent basis for comparison. Although some bogus pipeline studies, including that by Myers and Zeigler-Hill (2012; see also Tourangeau, Smith, & Rasinski, 1997) utilized an in-person interview, we chose not to use this approach because requiring participants to provide their answers orally to another person is time-consuming and might be unduly stressful, which would reduce the chances of participants revealing sensitive information (Catania, 1999; Durant, Carey, & Schroder, 2002; Schroder, Carey, & Vanable, 2003). Using an interview format with the bogus pipeline methodology is not necessary, as the technique has been highly effective using a paper questionnaire format (e.g., Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 2013), likely because the typical participant does not have enough knowledge about how the equipment works. Indeed, Alexander and Fisher (2003) considered oral administration of the instruments in a bogus pipeline study to be a confound which they wished to eliminate. In addition, we wanted to be able to examine the impact of response bias on each of the measures that we used.

In addition to the bogus pipeline and anonymous conditions, an "exposure threat" condition was used to assess whether participants alter their responding when they are led to believe that others might be able to see their responses. This protocol has been used in similar studies that use the bogus pipeline paradigm (e.g., Alexander & Fisher, 2003). The exposure threat condition provides a stronger contrast to the bogus pipeline condition than simply including an anonymous condition, which might decrease respondents' accountability and therefore decrease motivation to answer questions in thoughtful and precise ways (Lelkes, Krosnick, Marx, Judd, & Park, 2012). In addition to assessing narcissism with the NPI, we also included measures that examine entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004), and grandiosity (Rosenthal, Hooley, & Steshenko, 2007) because some scholars have recently argued for measurement of narcissism beyond the NPI to better understand the narcissistic self-concept (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009). Finally, we assessed both men and women in order to examine if gender moderates the association between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem.

Method

Participants

Participants were 538 Introductory Psychology students (214 male and 324 female) at two regional campuses of a large Midwestern university. They were 18.72 years old on average (SD = .97). Most of the participants (80.3%) self-identified as White with another 10.1% self-identifying as Black.

Instruments

The first scale was the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). The NPI is a forced-choice measure wherein respondents choose between two alternative response-options (e.g., "I think I am a special person" versus "I am no better or worse than most people"). The narcissistic response option is assigned a score of 1 whereas the non-narcissistic response is scored as a 0. Scores are summed across the 40 items. For our sample, $\alpha=.84$, M=15.03, SD=6.76.

The Psychological Entitlement Scale (Campbell et al., 2004), was used to assess a sense of entitlement and consists of 9 statements, such as "Great things should come to me." Participants used 7-point

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