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Individual differences in narcissism: Inflated self-views across the lifespan and around the world[☆]

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Abstract

The present investigation examined associations among narcissism, age, ethnicity, world region, and gender, using a large ($n = 3445$) sample of participants representing several different world regions and ethnicities. The results suggest that (1) reported narcissism declines in older participants, (2) consistent with previous findings, males report being more narcissistic than females, (3) that ethnic differences in reported narcissism are generally comparable to those found in the self-esteem literature, and (4) that world region appears to exert influence on narcissism, with participants from more individualistic societies reporting more narcissism. The results are discussed in terms of how age and culture might impact narcissism and how future research might address this topic.

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1. Introduction

Culture and development across the lifespan play crucial roles in shaping the self. Personality and general character sometimes change as people age, especially as they

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move through adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Ozer & Gjerde, 1989). Culture also exerts a great deal of pressure on the shaping of personality. For example, the DSM-IV TR notes that people who have recently immigrated may appear to have diagnosable personality disorders when, in fact, they are simply expressing personality traits common to their country of origin (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Indeed, many authors have argued that culture strongly influences our personalities and views of self (e.g., Heine & Lehman, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Even within a single country, culture may influence people to define themselves quite differently (Plaut, Markus, & Lachman, 2002).

In the present investigation, we examined how age and culture influence the personality construct of narcissism. In order to collect data from as diverse a sample as possible, we used the Internet. The Internet is fast becoming recognized as a valid and reliable tool for data collection and has been utilized in several large-scale projects that collected data from thousands of participants worldwide. For example, Robins, Trzniewski, Tracy, Gosling, and Potter (2002) collected self-esteem reports from a worldwide sample of participants. Another set of researchers used the Internet to collect self-report personality questionnaires from a large set of respondents representing different ages (Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, *in press*). The results of investigations such as these may yield valuable insight into the effects of age and culture on personality.

The goal of the present investigation was twofold. First, we wanted to collect data on narcissism from a larger and more inclusive sample of participants compared to what one typically finds in the narcissism literature. Specifically, we wanted to gather data on narcissism from people who represented various age and ethnic identity categories as well as different regions of the world. Second, we wanted to test several specific hypotheses and conduct exploratory analyses with narcissism on this large and inclusive sample. Specifically, we wanted to determine whether age, ethnic identity, and country of residence are related to narcissism. We also wanted to replicate previous research showing that men usually report more narcissism than women (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1999; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; Joubert, 1998; Ladd, Welsh, Vitulli, Labbe, & Law, 1997). Before we state our specific predictions we briefly address the general issue of narcissism and how it relates to other psychological constructs.

Narcissism has a brief but rich history of psychological investigation. Early research in this area centered on narcissism as a personality disorder. The DSM-IV TR defines narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) as lack of empathy, need for admiration, and a pattern of grandiosity (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Personality/social psychological researchers, however, focus on “sub-clinical” or “normal” narcissists—those who display some of the characteristics of NPD, but not necessarily enough to be diagnosed with NPD. In the present paper, when we refer to the term “narcissist,” we are using the personality/social psychological definition.

Narcissism is correlated with several undesirable traits and behaviors. For example, narcissists tend to be less agreeable (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), tend to be motivated less by intrinsic and more by extrinsic desires (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), and

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