The effect of overt and covert narcissism on self-esteem and self-efficacy beyond self-esteem

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ABSTRACT

Past literature has suggested a dual nature of trait based narcissism, comprising overt and covert forms. While several studies have examined the two subtypes in relation to self-esteem, very few studies have examined narcissistic subtypes and self-efficacy. 115 Psychology undergraduates filled in self-report measures of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Results demonstrated no significant relationship between overt and covert narcissism, suggesting two distinct subtypes. Overt and covert forms of narcissism were found to significantly contribute to self-efficacy beyond self-esteem. Further, overt narcissism positively predicted both self-esteem and self-efficacy beyond self-esteem. Conversely, covert narcissism was found to negatively predict self-esteem and self-efficacy beyond self-esteem. Overt narcissism subscale associations were also computed, with Power being associated with higher self-efficacy but not self-esteem, suggesting Power to be a more adaptive subscale. The Special Person subscale was associated with higher self-esteem but not self-efficacy, suggesting it forms the maladaptive core of overt narcissism. Exhibitionism was not associated with either self-esteem or self-efficacy. Results appear congruent with past literature, and have given an additional insight into the implications of trait based narcissism regarding self-efficacy. Findings appear to suggest trait based overt narcissism is a more adaptive construct to individual self-concept than covert narcissism.

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1. Introduction

It has been suggested that there are two distinct forms of pathological (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971, 1977) and more recently non-pathological narcissism (Wink, 1991). Several studies have explored the associations of overt and covert narcissism and self-esteem (Miller et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2009; Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2012; Rose, 2002). However, narcissism and its subtypes have not been considered in relation to the associated domain of self-efficacy. Exploring associations between narcissistic subtypes and self-efficacy may further highlight adaptive and maladaptive elements of these multifaceted personality constructs. Moreover, differences in self-efficacy may have implications for associated behavioural distinctions between overt and covert subtypes of narcissism, such as aggression (Okada, 2010).

It has been conceptualised that there are two forms of trait based narcissism, overt and covert (Wink, 1991). The overt form, described as Grandiosity–Exhibitionism consists of exhibitionism,

an exaggerated sense of self-importance, grandiosity and desire for attention (Wink, 1991). Conversely, the covert or Vulnerability–Sensitivity form of narcissism is characterised by hypersensitivity to criticism, a lack of self-confidence, being socially withdrawn, but similar to the overt form, an element of grandiosity (Wink, 1991). Whilst covert narcissism is comprised of grandiosity as a constituent part, there is an element of insecurity in grandiosity (Miller, Gentile, Wilson, & Campbell, 2013).

Since the binary conceptualisation of trait based narcissism, growing empirical attention has examined the overt and covert constructs. Research has affirmed the independence of these subtypes (Rathvon & Holmstrom, 1996). Findings have additionally suggested fundamental differences in terms of expression, with covert narcissism being characterised by greater distress (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003). However, differences in reported distress may be partially attributed to overt narcissists' tendency to deny problems (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003). Nonetheless, the lack of a significant relationship between overt and covert measures of narcissism (Smolewska & Dion, 2005) appears to affirm the suggestion of their independence.

Research has identified a variety of factor structures corresponding to the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, with two/three

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(Kubarych, Deary, & Austin, 2004), four (Emmons, 1984) and even seven (Raskin & Terry, 1988) factors being suggested. The four and seven factor solutions have been derived exclusively through Principal Components Analysis (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Conversely, the two and three factor solutions were additionally explored using Confirmatory Factor Analysis, with the three factor solution demonstrating the best fit (Kubarych et al., 2004). Therefore, the present research will consider the three subscales of Power, Exhibitionism and Special Person identified in Kubarych et al. (2004).

Psychoanalytic perspectives have identified pathological narcissism as a defensive grandiosity in compensation for underlying feelings of inferiority (Kernberg, 1975). Alternatively, social learning perspectives have suggested that narcissism consists of genuine underlying beliefs of superiority (Millon, 1981). Given these alternate suggestions of self-concept regarding pathological narcissism, it is unsurprising that research has extended to trait based narcissism and self-esteem. Self-esteem can be defined as the view people have of themselves; whether they view themselves to be a good and valuable person or not (Kernis, 2003). Higher overt narcissism has been associated with higher self-esteem, with covert narcissism being conversely associated with lower self-esteem (Miller et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2009; Rohmann et al., 2012; Rose, 2002). Thus, findings may be interpreted as suggesting that regarding individual self-concept, overt narcissism is a more adaptive construct than covert narcissism. Equally, subscale level associations with self-esteem have been explored, with the Special Person and Power subscales being associated with increased self-esteem (Brunell, Staats, Barden, & Hupp, 2011). Conversely, no significant association has been found between Exhibitionism and self-esteem (Brunell et al., 2011). This demonstrates differing subscale effects which may be suppressed if total scale scores are exclusively considered.

Another element within the domain of self-concept is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be defined as how people judge their ability to both organise and carry out tasks (Bandura, 1986). Moreover, as a concept it has implications for feelings, thoughts, motivation and in turn, behaviour (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy can be influenced by whether or not success in tasks is achieved, hence may vary depending on recent events (Andersson, Moore, Hensing, Krantz, & Staland-Nyman, 2014). In this respect, self-efficacy bears similarity to self-esteem which is liable to fluctuation in response to life events, especially in narcissistic individuals (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). It has been identified that self-esteem and self-efficacy are distinct, but related concepts which are moderately correlated (Brown, Hoye, & Nicholson, 2012). The similarity between self-efficacy and self-esteem may suggest that self-efficacy is likely to differ between narcissistic subtypes. Despite there having been several studies examining narcissistic subtypes and self-esteem, research has not considered narcissism in relation to self-efficacy. Exploring self-efficacy in relation to narcissism may further expand understandings of differences between narcissistic subtypes and shed more light on the variation in self-concept associated with the differing presentations of narcissism.

This study examined overt narcissism, covert narcissism, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Due to self-esteem being moderately correlated to self-efficacy, it appeared appropriate to consider the impact of overt and covert narcissism on self-efficacy, beyond the variance accounted for by self-esteem. The aims for the study were to (i) assess the relationship between overt and covert narcissism, (ii) assess overt and covert narcissism's link to self-esteem, and (iii) assess whether overt and covert narcissism independently predicted self-efficacy, beyond self-esteem. To further explore specific facets of overt narcissism, Narcissistic Personality Inventory subscale analyses were also computed.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 115 participants (27 males and 88 females) were recruited from an in-house research participation system at a British University. Although age demographics were not directly collected, all participants were Psychology undergraduates and therefore primarily aged between 18 and 21 years.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Overt narcissism

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin & Terry, 1988) was used to gain a measure of overt narcissism. While a number of scales have been used to assess narcissism, the NPI has been suggested to be a strong measure of overt narcissism, with good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$) respectively (Hendin & Cheek, 1997). The NPI consisted of 40 questions, with a choice between two statements for each question. Statements which were characteristic of overt narcissism were counted as a score of one, with opposing statements scored as zero.

2.2.2. Covert narcissism

The Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS) (Hendin & Cheek, 1997) has been suggested to be an adept measure of covert narcissism, and has been found to have good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$). The scale consisted of a ten question likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (very uncharacteristic or untrue, strongly disagree) to 5 (very characteristic or true, strongly agree).

2.2.3. Self-esteem

To obtain an overall score for self-esteem, the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used. Previous findings have indicated good internal reliability of the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ found by Brown et al. (2012)). The scale used a four point likert scale, which ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). Questions (2, 5, 6, 8 and 9) were negatively phrased, hence were reverse coded.

2.2.4. Self-efficacy

The Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) has been found to have good internal reliability, ranging from $\alpha = .75$ to $\alpha = .91$ (Scholz, Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). Hence the Generalized Self-Efficacy scale was administered to acquire an overall measure of self-efficacy. The scale employed a four point likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (exactly true).

2.3. Procedure

The study was advertised on an in-house internet accessible board. A questionnaire comprising several scales was administered to gather self-report measures of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Following informed consent, the four overall scales (Narcissistic Personality Inventory, Hypersensitive Narcissism scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and Generalized Self-Efficacy scale) were administered in a computer randomised order. Participants viewed the debrief form which identified the aims of the study. Research was conducted in line with the code of ethics set out by the British Psychological Society.