

Does Discrepant Implicit and Explicit Self-Esteem Relate to Narcissistic Personality?

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Abstract

Discrepant implicit and explicit self-esteem is theorized to explain the inconsistent results of self-esteem research. This form of fragile self-esteem is determined by high explicit self-esteem and low implicit self-esteem. Underlying all the surface grandiosity, narcissism is characterized in the clinical description as a covert vulnerability and worthlessness. The present study examined 225 undergraduate students in Iran who completed measures of implicit self-esteem (NLT), explicit self-esteem (RSES) and narcissism (NPI). The results revealed that discrepant high self-esteem could not predict narcissism.

Keywords: *Explicit Self-Esteem; Implicit Self-Esteem; Self-Enhancement; Discrepant High Self-Esteem; Narcissism*

Introduction

Self-esteem shows to mental evaluations of individual worth or competence and self-acceptance [1]. Despite its connection with brands of psychological adjustment such as personal well-being [2-4], there also resembles to be a dark side to high self-esteem. That is, high self-esteem has been associated to a variety of negative consequences such as prejudice [5], aggression [6], and multiple policies to preserve or heighten self-esteem [7,8]. Contemporary scholars [9,10] have suggested two types of high self-esteem: secure high self-esteem and fragile high self-esteem. This hypothesis seeks to understand how high self-esteem can be correlated with both positive and negative issues. There are at least four approaches to discriminate between secure and fragile high self-esteem: defensive self-esteem :contingent self-esteem [9,11], unstable self-esteem [12] and discrepant implicit and explicit self-esteem [13-16].

Current progress in the research of implicit methods involves implicit self-esteem [17]. As cognitive-experiential self-theory assumes personality functioning is the product of two psychological systems: a rational system and an evolutionarily older experiential system [18], explicit self-esteem is considered to exhibit the process of the rational, reflexive system, whereas implicit self-esteem is reflected the process of the experiential, impulsive system [19,20]. The association between people's explicit and implicit self-esteem is poor at the best, however, both implicit and explicit self-esteem are developed based on interplays with meaningful others [21,22]. It could be rooted in the distinct quality of people's implicit and explicit beliefs [23,24]. If explicit and implicit self-esteem are shaped by dissimilar processes, low relationships between implicit and explicit measures should be anticipated [19]. The valid and reliable implicit measures of self-esteem are essential for self-esteem inquiry. Hence, different implicit measures of self-esteem have been formed in current years and have assembled a remarkable mass of data [25]. Implicit self-esteem can be determined as "the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) effect of the self-attitude on an evaluation of self-associated and self-dissociated objects" [26]. Although explicit self-esteem measured by means of questionnaires is considered conscious and deliberative in nature, implicit self-esteem is viewed as the outcome of automatic self-evaluative processes that can be measured with indirect measurement tools [27,28]. Particularly, several

researchers conceptualize implicit self-esteem as an automatically initiated self-attitude [26,27] that is supposed to have an unconscious influence on the evaluation of self-associated and self-dissociated objects [26]. Implicit self-esteem is assumed to reflect self-evaluative associations [28], with most tests assigned to capture the intensity of associative connections between subjective figures of 'self' and special evaluative content. According to this sense, there are several implicit self-esteem measures [21], but the Name-Letter Test measure [29] and the Self-esteem Implicit Association Test [28] are the two most regularly used measures.

Presumably, individuals can simultaneously be accommodating views approaching the self at both implicit and explicit levels that are inconsistent together [30,31]. Explicit self-esteem is the outcome of conscious interpretations or reinterpretations of social experiences, however, implicit self-esteem may directly represent these acquired social evaluations. Discrepancies between implicit and explicit self-esteem may be the result of this variation in the cognitive processing of experiences. A form of fragile self-esteem determined by high explicit self-esteem and low implicit self-esteem indicates discrepant high self-esteem [32].

Narcissism is frequently acknowledged as a significant collection of personality traits and processes. This personality disorder comprises a grandiose yet fragile judgment of self and entitlement as well as a preoccupation with success and requirements for approval [33,34]. Narcissist's self-concept is branded by positivity (i.e., thinking in a highly positive way), egocentrism (i.e., thinking without taking the views of others), and a sense of uniqueness or "specialness." Clinical theories of narcissism assume the paradoxical coexistence of explicit self-perceptions of grandiosity and secret fragility and worthlessness [35]. Clinical point of view in the narcissistic personality disorder has reported the arrogance, exploitativeness, envy, propensity toward shame, and other traits that define this form of self-dysfunction [36]. Narcissists also regulate strategically self-concept positivity in various processes. These processes involve visible representations of self-importance, the imagination of reputation and power, and negative affective responses to recognized self-threats. Ultimately, narcissists are labeled as owning inadequate interpersonal relations. Narcissistic relationships are described by a sense of individual entitlement, exploitation of the partner, insensitivity approaching the partner's needs, and a lack of true love [37].

Self-enhancement is a fundamental feature of narcissism [38,39]. Consistent with the study investigating narcissism and forms relevant to relational functioning, such as empathy [40], agreeableness [41] and need for intimacy [42], Narcissists, but not non-narcissists, enhance even at the price of diminishing a close partner. Why are narcissists willing to enhance the self at the expense of their partner? Or why are non-narcissists prepared to discredit the self for the benefit of a close other? Researchers propose three explanations. First, narcissists are limited interpersonally oriented, than non-narcissists (e.g., empathetic or agreeable). Second, the self-enhancement approach evidenced by narcissists in the present research arguably exhibits a chronic reaction to self-treat. Narcissists' self-enhancement may, in part, be driven by negative affective situations, such as anger, aimed toward the partner [43]. Third, narcissists' responses may be underlined by an inflated sense of own abilities linked with a lack of thought about the partner. Not only to be perfect, Narcissists also appear to be defended versus worthlessness [35]. Another side of narcissism, not well captured in the DSM, but obviously expressed in clinical reports is covert fragility and vulnerability. These reports assume that underlying all the surface grandiosity, narcissists covertly hide concerns of inferiority and worthlessness [44]. Clinical theories emphasize the self-deceptive nature of narcissistic self-regulation [45], then Horvath and Morf propose that the defensive mechanism is repression and the avoidance strategy is employed automatically. It means narcissist is not conscious he or she is protecting against threatening stimuli by avoiding them [35].

The associations between narcissism and implicit self-esteem (as an indirect measure of worthlessness) are investigated in recent research. Since narcissists may be blocking worthlessness to surface within their own self-system and thus may be deceiving even themselves, it is reasonable that explicit measures such as self-report questionnaires demand to be complemented by implicit measures when evaluating worthlessness [46]. The purpose of the present study was to examine whether discrepant high self-esteem is associated with narcissism.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 250 undergraduate students (120 boys and 105 girls) from the University of Tehran took part as volunteers in the present study (mean age = 22.40 years, age range = 20 to 35, SD = 2.46). Participants were at the age of 20 at the end of May 2016. This specified qualification regarded because of self-esteem fluctuation during adolescence ages and its stability during youth ages [3,47]. This sample group was selected by probability cluster sampling method from technical, medical, art, law and political science, and management college. All in all, from 250 questionnaires that distributed among sample group, 225 of them were filled completely and has recognized as qualified for research. Participants were at the age of 20 - 35. The average's ages of respondents was 22.40 with the domain of 20-35 and standard deviation of 2.47. Since gender did not predict narcissism, and including gender did not significantly alter the results, gender was omitted from the analyses.

Measures

Rosenberg self-esteem (RSES): Measures a person's overall evaluation of his or her worthiness as a human being. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was translated into 28 languages and administered to 16,998 participants across 53 nations. The RSES factor structure was largely invariant across nations. RSES scores correlated with neuroticism, extraversion, and romantic attachment styles within nearly all nations, providing additional support for cross-cultural equivalence of the RSES [48]. Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale [49], a well-validated measure of global self-regard [50,51]. Test-retest correlations greater than .80 have previously been reported [49]. Participants were instructed to complete the scale according to how they typically or commonly feel about themselves. Each question will get a grade based on a five-items scale.

Name-Letter Test (NLT): Based on the measurement developed by Nuttin [29,52], participants assessed each letter of the alphabet using response scales ranging from 1 (I dislike this letter very much) to 7 (I like this letter very much). Name-Letter Test (NLT) scores were determined by subtracting the normative rating of each participant's first and last initial (averaged across participants whose names did not contain that letter) from each participant's evaluation of his or her own initials [53]. NLT reflects the extent to which participants assess their initials more positively than other participants evaluate these letters. Former research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of NLT [21,53-55]. The correlation between participants' preferences for their first and last initials served as a measure of internal consistency, $r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$.

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI): The most applied list of self-reporting is formed from narcissistic traits in the normal population. As a whole, the NPI is measuring a general narcissism construct, with two or three separable, correlated factors relating to 'power', 'exhibitionism', and being a 'special person'. This questionnaire has 40 statements, each of them consisting two items. The respondent should select one of the items. The total score will determine the narcissism. The reliability of Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) has concluded by coincidental performing of the questionnaires with Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-II (MCMI-II) which is able to assess narcissistic personality disorder better than other questionnaires and its significant correlation was significant ($r = 0.79$, $p < 0.0001$).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all of the measures in the current study. The main effect for the RSES was significant, $\beta = -.53$. However, the interaction of Name-Letter Test and RSES did not approach conventional levels of significance, $\beta = .01$, $p = .75$.

	1	2	3
1. Name-Letter Test	1		
2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	.075	1	
3. Narcissistic Personality Inventory	.006	-.312*	1
Mean	1.93	5.29	23.07
Standard Deviation	2.21	4.27	6.95

Table 1: Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics for Measures of Explicit Self-Esteem, Implicit Self-Esteem, Narcissism.

Discussion

Consistent with previous findings [21,28], the implicit self-esteem measure was not correlated with the measure of explicit self-esteem level. The previous research revealed that implicit and explicit self-esteem are, at the best, only moderately associated with each other. Hypotheses concerning discrepant high self-esteem were tested through the use of hierarchical multiple regression analysis. All predictors were first centered on their respective means [56]. On Step 1, the main effect terms for implicit self-esteem and explicit self-esteem were entered. On Step 2, the interaction of implicit self-esteem and explicit self-esteem was entered. Because hypotheses concerned the interaction of implicit and explicit self-esteem, these regression analyses were followed by the simple slopes tests recommended by Aiken and West [56] to describe the interaction of two continuous variables. Emphasizing on more explanation of implicit processing versus explicit processing, this study for the first time applied a current implicit scale, NLT, for Iranian sample. The scores that have achieved from this test, used for interaction to scores of explicit self-esteem to predict narcissism. The results of regression analyses did not show a significant relationship between this interaction and narcissism. The research findings did not confirm the mentioned hypothesis. As we mentioned before, the study had shown a poor correlation between implicit self-esteem and narcissism, and a negative weak correlation between explicit self-esteem variable and narcissism. It seems that negative poor correlation between explicit self-esteem and narcissism is compatible with inconsistent findings of the relation between these variables. Zeigler-Hill [32] stated that individuals with the high degree of discrepant self-esteem have shown the highest levels of narcissism. But the considerable point is that this finding discovered when he used both Implicit Association Test [28] and Implicit Self-Evaluation Survey [57], not Name-Letter Test (NLT) that used in present study. Thus, consistent with this research, in Zeigler-Hill's research, Name-Letter Test failed in predicting of narcissism. Name-Letter Test may capture a feature of implicit self-esteem that is distinct from that measured by the IAT or ISES. The considerable point is that narcissism is not equal to high self-esteem [58]. Many individuals with high self-esteem do not exhibit the representations of narcissistic traits but People with grandiose patterns of narcissism do typically record higher self-esteem [59].

The main aim of this study is to notice when there is a conflict between explicit and implicit believes in relation to determining factor like self-esteem, it may initiate lots of problems at various psychological level. These problems may produce different behavior such as self- and other-defeating. These maladaptive behaviors in narcissistic individuals are the consequence of disorder between narcissistic person's behavior and the reality, and also the impact that appears in a self-evaluating and emotional react of the person to this self-evaluating. If the exact predictor relation between explicit and implicit self-esteem and narcissism will be clarified, it could be expected that by increasing in implicit self-esteem and originating a higher similarity self-esteem, then maladaptive narcissistic traits will reduce, as a result, a higher psychological adjustment.

To see implicit self-esteem as multifaceted would be a solution. For instance, Sakellaropoulo and Baldwin [17] considered self-liking and self-attractiveness as two separate dimensions of implicit self-esteem, executing two different versions of the NLT. According to this perspective narcissistic thoughts and emotions, produced by two different priming manipulations, were correlated with a remarkable pattern in which a glowing implicit evaluation of self-attractiveness was combined with a lack of self-liking. However, the suggested solution by this research is due to the conflicting results obtained in implicit self-esteem assessment studies (e.g., some of the effects do not seem to replicate well across studies), It is of vital importance to design new implicit tasks to capture this phenomenon [60]. It means that we should pay attention to new implicit measures towards implicit self-esteem, such as an online game in which the gamers do not know what factor is evaluating. This theoretical proposal will be an inspiration for future studies [61-63].

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