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Adaptive and Maladaptive Narcissism among University Faculty, Clergy, Politicians, and Librarians

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ABSTRACT

Some adaptive narcissistic characteristics may be prevalent in individuals in occupations that involve leadership or authority, provide social attention and prestige, or require a confident social presentation. The present study investigated the expectation that narcissistic characteristics would be more prevalent in higher status occupations involving frequent opportunities for attention and admiration from others. Of four occupations sampled, politicians scored highest in total narcissism, as well as in leadership and authority; university faculty and librarians did not score particularly high or low on any narcissism indices; and clergy were lowest in exploitativeness and entitlement, which represent the more maladaptive aspects of narcissism. The results were discussed with respect to Holland's (1985) classification of vocational personalities.

While narcissism has received considerable attention in the psychoanalytic literature for many decades, the inclusion of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM; American Psychiatric Association [APA]) in 1980 spurred increased research into the nature of narcissism. The most recent edition of the DSM (4th ed.; APA, 1994) characterizes narcissism as involving: grandiosity, a need for admiration and attention from others, exaggerated self-importance, a preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power or brilliance, envy, entitlement, exploitiveness, limited empathy, and arrogance. When these characteristics are predominant and pervasive they are maladaptive primarily due to consequent impaired interpersonal relationships.

Empirical studies of narcissism were bolstered by the development of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Hall, 1979), a questionnaire designed to measure individual differences in narcissism based on DSM criteria. Multivariate analyses of the NPI indicate that narcissism is a multidimensional construct that can be conceptualized with either seven components (Raskin and Hall, 1979; Raskin and Terry, 1988) or four components (Emmons, 1984, 1987). Emmons's (1984) four NPI dimensions provide a parsimonious set of scales with good validity evidence indicating that several dimensions of narcissism are adaptive (i.e., Leadership/Authority, Superiority/Arrogance, and Self-absorption/Self-admiration) while one dimension appears more clearly maladaptive (Exploitativeness/Entitlement). Emmons (1984) found that the three adaptive NPI scales were positively associated with self-esteem, extroversion, dominance, and independence; and negatively with self-abasement, self-ideal discrepancy, neuroticism, and social anxiety. The Exploitativeness/Entitlement NPI scale was associated with competitiveness, suspiciousness, tenseness, extroversion, anxiety, neuroticism, public self-consciousness, but not with self-esteem. Emmons (1987) also reported that only the Exploitativeness/Entitlement scale was significantly associated with two measures of pathological narcissism as well as affective intensity. Adaptive narcissism was also found to be associated with positive personal adjustment and optimism while the reverse was found for maladaptive narcissism (Hickman, Watson, and Morris, 1996). Individuals with high levels of narcissistic characteristics have also been described as exhibiting a need for attention and admiration from others, and NPI total scores were found to be associated with self-reported concerns for self-presentation, status, power, dominance, and physical beauty (Hill and McFerren, 1995). Narcissism has also been associated with a need for power (Carroll, 1987).

Adaptive narcissistic characteristics may prove advantageous to individuals in social or occupational situations that require leadership, authority, and a confident social presentation. Also, high levels of narcissism may lead some individuals to select occupations that better gratify needs for social attention, prestige, and status. Vocational interests have been observed as an important indicator of personality, and vocational stereotypes have been suggested to have reliable and important psychological and sociological meaning (Holland, 1985). Holland (1985) proposed that individuals both select and perform best with occupations that fit their personality. Holland (1985) describes occupations using three of six personality styles (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional) in rank order of importance. Adaptive narcissism appears to overlap with features of Holland's (1985) "social" personality, which was described as ascendent, friendly, persuasive, sociable, and warm and the "enterprising" personality, which was described as agreeable, possessing leadership and speaking ability, talkative, optimistic, and self-confident. Maladaptive narcissism might also be associated with Holland's (1985) "enterprising" personality which was

also described as acquisitive, domineering, exhibitionistic, ambitious, excitement seeking, and aggressive.

The present study pursued the expectation that narcissistic characteristics would be more prevalent in individuals engaged in occupations involving frequent opportunities for attention and admiration from others, social prestige, and power, and that narcissism would be less prevalent in occupations that provide less of these characteristics. The occupations selected for analysis included university faculty, politicians, clergy, and librarians.

University faculty, politicians, and clergy were selected for sampling because these occupations involve frequent appearances before audiences and thus frequent social attention, as well as authority over others, relatively high levels of prestige and status, responsibility, and power. Librarians were selected as an occupation that might be of less interest to individuals with high needs for prestige, social attention, power, and admiration from others. These expectations regarding occupational differences were based on stereotypes of the roles involved rather than an empirical assessment. A literature review revealed no empirical studies of narcissism related to occupational choice with the exception of one study, which found no significant pathological narcissism characteristics in sixty-four ministerial candidates, but above-average dominance scores (Patrick, 1990). Faculty, politicians, and clergy were all expected to exhibit higher levels of adaptive narcissism than librarians, who were expected to manifest lower levels of adaptive narcissism. We did not expect any occupation to manifest high levels of maladaptive narcissism because the interpersonal impairment associated with high Exploitativeness/Entitlement would likely interfere with successful occupational functioning.

METHOD

Procedure

Participants were randomly selected from occupation-related mailing lists in each of the following four occupational groups: 1) all full-time university faculty at one southeastern United States (U.S.) university with a field-appropriate terminal degree were sampled without regard to department affiliation (except those from Library Services; $N = 567$); 2) state legislators, from both the state senate and house of representatives, from four southeastern U.S. states were all solicited to participate using mailing lists provided by each state's respective legislative information service ($N = 575$); 3) clergy—including 200 Methodist ministers, 200 Baptist ministers, and 192 Catholic priests located within North Carolina—were solicited from mailing lists provided by the central offices of the respective denominations ($N = 592$); and 4) librarians were solicited from a list of North Carolina Librarian Association members ($N = 600$). All participants were mailed identical questionnaire packets containing: a cover letter requesting participation and explaining voluntary consent, a copy of the NPI, a set of demographic questions, and an addressed, postage-paid return envelope.

Measure

The NPI is a forty-item self-report questionnaire that uses a forced choice format (Raskin and Hall, 1979). In addition to a total narcissism score, four subscales were derived (Leadership! Authority, Superiority! Arrogance, Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration, and Exploitativeness/Entitlement) with alpha coefficients ranging from .69 to .86 (Emmons, 1984). Considerable evidence supporting the stability, internal consistency, and validity of the NPI has been reported (Emmons, 1984, 1987; Raskin and Hall, 1979; Raskin and Terry, 1988).

RESULTS

Of the 2,334 questionnaires mailed out, 459 were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 19.7 percent. The response rate varied significantly [$\chi^2(9, N = 459) = 1377.0, p < .001$] between occupation sampled: faculty 21.7 percent ($N=123$), politicians 7.3 percent ($N=42$), clergy 16.7 percent ($N= 99$), and librarians 32.5 percent ($N=195$). The means and standard deviations of the scores for the total NPI and each of the four subscales for each occupation sample are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1
NPI Mean Scores and Standard Deviations by Occupation

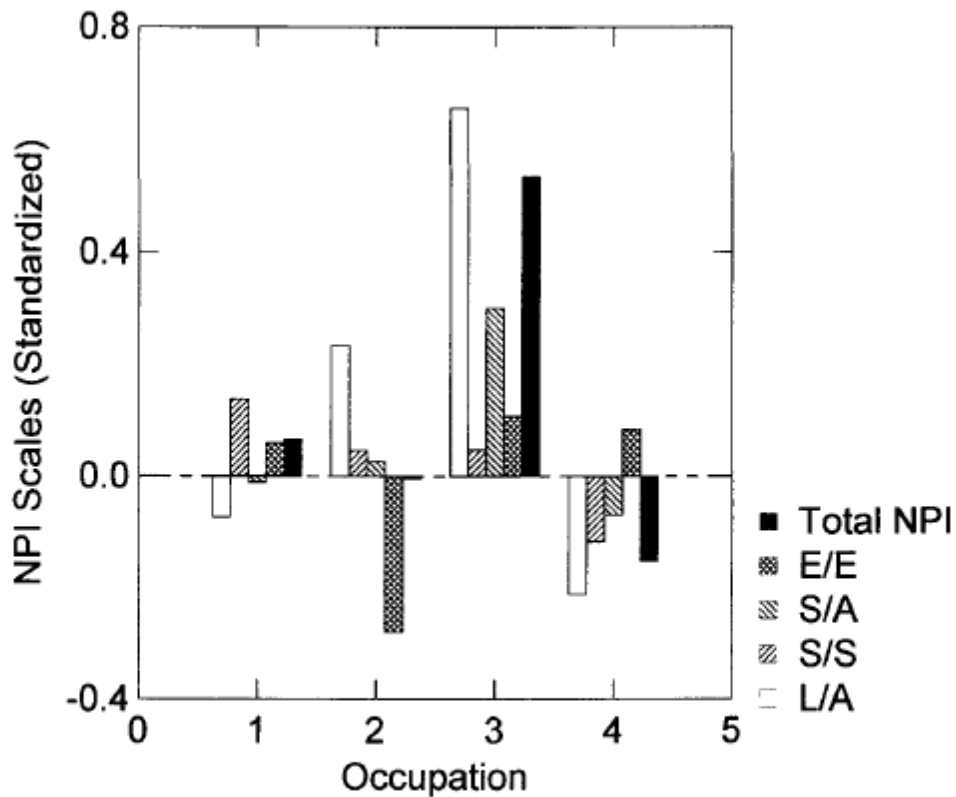
Subscale	Professors		Clergy		Politicians		Librarians	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Full NPI	12.40	5.87	11.98	5.38	15.19	6.22	11.09	6.00
LA	3.76	2.21	4.47	1.94	5.43	1.84	3.45	2.38
SS	2.90	1.91	2.74	1.78	2.74	1.99	2.47	1.77
SA	1.56	1.43	1.62	1.53	2.02	1.79	1.47	1.43
EE	1.07	1.08	0.69	0.83	1.12	1.17	1.09	1.23

Note: NPI, Narcissistic Personality Inventory; LA, Leadership/Authority; SS, Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration; SA, Superiority/Arrogance; EE, Exploitativeness/Entitlement.

An analysis of variance indicated that total narcissism scores were significantly different by occupational group [$F(3,455) = 5.91, p < .001$]. *Post hoc* examination of mean difference scores indicated that politicians were significantly higher in total narcissism (Tukey HSD $p < .05$), with faculty, clergy, and librarians not significantly different from each other in total narcissism. Further analyses of variance were conducted for each of the four NPI subscales in order to determine which subscales contributed to differences in narcissism between occupational samples. Of the four subscales, Leadership/Authority [$F(3,455) = 11.73, p < .001$] and Exploitativeness/Entitlement [$F(3,455) = 3.38, p = .02$] were significantly different for the occupations sampled. *Post hoc* analyses indicated that politicians scored significantly higher than the other occupations on the Leadership/Authority subscale (Tukey HSD $p < .001$). Clergy scored significantly lower than all other occupation samples on the

Exploitativeness/Entitlement sub scale (Tukey HSD $p < .05$). The differences in scores on the NPI subscales, which were standardized for the graphical comparison, are represented for each of the four occupations in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Narcissism Scales by Occupation



Notes: Mean Narcissistic Personality Inventory Scale Scores (standardized) by Occupational Group. Occupation 1 = faculty, 2 = clergy, 3 = politicians, 4 = librarians. Legend: L/A = Leadership/Authority Narcissism scale; S/S = Selfabsorption/Self-admiration; S/A = Superiority/Arrogance; E/E = Exploitativeness/Entitlement.

DISCUSSION

Differences in the manifestation of narcissistic characteristics were expected among occupational groups which involve differing opportunities for leadership, authority, social attention, prestige, and admiration from others. We found that politicians as a group responded less frequently to the survey packet than the other occupations sampled. Faculty and librarians may be more familiar with academic research surveys, and thus more inclined to participate, and politicians may experience a higher volume of mail with less time and inclination to respond to unnecessary correspondence. We could not determine any relationship between response rate and narcissism scores from our data.

Among the different occupations sampled, politicians scored highest in total narcissism as well as the Leadership/Authority dimension. The Leadership/Authority sub scale is associated with warmth, dominance, extroversion, and social boldness, and has been described as an adaptive aspect of narcissism (Emmons, 1984). The politicians appeared to manifest strong leadership traits relative to the other occupations sampled, consistent with the demands of political activity. State legislators likely achieve elected office with successful adaptive leadership and authority characteristics.

Holland (1985) suggested that the most important vocational personality types associated with politicians were: 1) enterprising, entailing the manipulation of others to attain organizational goals or economic gain and an acquisition of leadership and persuasive competencies (and less developed scientific skills); 2) social, with a preference for activities that entail informing, training, or developing others, well-developed relationship skills, and an aversion to explicit vocational activities involving materials, tools, or machines; and 3) artistic, with a preference for ambiguous, unsystematized activities entailing the manipulation of materials to create products or art, with an aversion to ordered activities. Holland's enterprising and social vocational personality descriptions appear consistent with the adaptive NPI scales (Emmons, 1984) in describing politicians. In fact, state legislators are modestly compensated part-time politicians with some other occupation during much of the year. We nonetheless correctly anticipated that politicians manifest high levels of adaptive narcissism.

University faculty did not score particularly high or low on any of the narcissism subscales relative to the other occupations. While the role of university faculty might often involve social prestige, authority, and frequent opportunity for attention and perhaps admiration from others, narcissism scores for this group were average among the occupations sampled. The average narcissism scores for these four occupations may be high relative to other groups, but no normative data for the four Emmons (1984) NPI scales has been described. In Holland's (1985) classification of vocational personality, university faculty were characterized as: 1) social (described above); 2) investigative, with a tendency to observe and synthesize physical, biological, or cultural phenomena to better understand and control it with a disposition to acquire scientific and mathematic competencies; and 3) artistic (described above). The descriptors that characterize Holland's (1985) "social" personality appear particularly consistent with adaptive narcissism characteristics.

Of the occupations sampled, clergy were lowest in Exploitativeness/Entitlement, which represents the more maladaptive aspects of narcissism. Exploitativeness/Entitlement is related to suspiciousness, tenseness, anxiety, and neuroticism, and is manifested by an expectation of special or exceptional importance and a willingness to use others to achieve desired ends. Clergy endorsed less of these characteristics than the other occupations sampled. This low level of maladaptive narcissism is consistent with a more altruistic characterization of clergy with fewer mistrustful, self-serving, and manipulative tendencies than the other occupations sampled. Of the dimensions of narcissism reflected by the NPI, clergy scored highest on the Leadership/Authority sub scale indicating an endorsement of social dominance, social boldness, warmth, and extroversion. The NPI scales endorsed by clergy are consistent with Holland's vocational personality descriptions of clergy as social, artistic, and investigative, emphasizing the same characteristics as university faculty in a different order of priority.

While librarians scored lowest in total narcissism, they were not significantly less narcissistic than faculty and clergy, in spite of the relatively lower level of prestige, social attention, and admiration from others that might be stereotypically associated with this occupational role. Sampling librarians as an attempt to identify an occupation low in narcissistic characteristics was not as successful as anticipated perhaps because of our underestimate of the degree of social interaction library work involves. Of the dimensions of narcissism sampled by the NPI, librarians were lowest on the Leadership/ Authority scale, especially relative to politicians and clergy, indicating less social dominance and extroversion, which is consistent with a description of librarians as typically more introverted than extraverted (Meyers and McCaulley, 1985). Holland (1985) classified librarians as social, artistic, and investigative (like clergy), emphasizing the preference for interpersonal interactions and responsibility that also characterized faculty and clergy.

This investigation demonstrated some support for differing levels of narcissistic characteristics associated with occupational role. Politicians were found to exhibit markedly high levels of adaptive narcissistic characteristics, and clergy manifest notably low levels of maladaptive narcissism relative to the other occupations sampled. Future research might sample other occupations and include other indices of leadership, experience of attention from others, and beliefs about one's occupational role. Future researchers may also wish to investigate the additional issues of job performance and both occupational and personal satisfaction as a function of the fit between occupation and personality. Among the vocational personality types described by Holland (1985), the "enterprising" personality might better target occupations high in narcissistic characteristics, and the "realistic" and "conventional" vocational types might be investigated for lower levels of narcissism. The results of this investigation support the hypothesis that narcissistically inclined individuals may select occupations that complement their personality by providing social attention, prestige, power, and opportunities for social influence.

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