

Narcissism and Self-Perceived Flourishing

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Abstract: *With the increased use of technology and social media, narcissism as a personality trait has been seen to increase in the general population. It is necessary to study the relationship between narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing as narcissistic individuals might perceive to have positive well-being which can open more areas for research for not just narcissism but the emerging field of positive psychology. Convenience sampling was used to administer a self-report online questionnaire on 338 undergraduate students of Forman Christian College. Narcissistic Personality Inventory-40 and the Flourishing scale were used as instruments. This study looked into the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables and the gender differences that might exist between them. Descriptive (Mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and Multivariate Analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to analyze the data. There was a weak and positive correlation between narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing while gender differences were found in narcissistic traits.*

Key Words: Narcissistic Trait, Self-perceived Flourishing, Wellbeing

Introduction

Narcissism has been one of the most researched areas of interest over the years. Narcissism has not only been studied in clinical populations but also among the general population who possess narcissism as a personality characteristic. Narcissistic individuals have been categorized into two different sets of characteristics, positive and negative. One is extremely and negatively looked upon in society and is quite relational in terms but the positive one is more individualistic. Negative narcissistic individuals have feelings of a grandiose self, superiority over others, extreme lack of empathy and a willingness to manipulate others (Pauletti, Menon, Menon, Tobin, & Perry, 2012). However, positive narcissistic individuals have feelings of superiority over others, extreme self-love and the need to maintain a positive self-image (Ha, Hoang & Yen, 2018). Narcissism, in this study, has been described as positive because these

characteristics might have a very positive effect on an individual's well-being.

Narcissistic personality has been studied with many other concepts like self-esteem, aggression, forgiveness and depression. Narcissistic personality traits have also been categorized into two types, adaptive and maladaptive traits. Adaptive traits are self-sufficiency and authority while maladaptive is, are entitlement and exploitativeness. Narcissism has also been categorized as normal and pathological narcissism. Normal narcissism is having a personality trait of narcissism and pathological is when the narcissist becomes maladaptive and clinical (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro & Rusbult, 2004). With the increased use of technology and social media over the past two decades, research has shown that the narcissistic personality trait has increased in the general population and that is why it is important to study the

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effects it can have on different aspects of life such as Flourishing (Gnamb & Appel, 2017).

Flourishing is a very recent construct in the emerging field of positive psychology. It is the self-perceived positive well-being of an individual. It extends beyond what we simply call happiness. It takes into account different constructs of positive psychology and combines them into one construct, flourishing; a sense of success that a person might feel they have in different areas of their lives. The concept of flourishing was derived from the five-factors PERMA model by Martin Seligman which consists of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments (Seligman, 2011). However, due to the vast nature of this construct, positive psychologists believe that optimism, resilience, self-esteem, purpose and personal growth also contribute to the concept of flourishing. Flourishing has been related to many constructs like personality traits, life satisfaction and mental health.

Narcissistic trait and self-perceived flourishing seem to have a relationship as when a person is narcissistic in nature, loves themselves extremely and always need to present themselves in a positive light, they will perceive themselves to be more flourishing in their lives. As flourishing is the positive well-being of an individual, narcissists will believe to have a high sense of flourishing.

Operational Definitions

Narcissistic Traits

The feeling of superiority over others, along with extreme self-love and the need to maintain a positive image (Ha, Hoang & Yen, 2018).

Self-Perceived Flourishing

An individual's self-perceived success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose in life and optimism (Diener, 2009).

Purpose of Study

In this study, the relationship between narcissism, as a personality trait and self-perceived flourishing will be looked upon in university students. Moreover, gender differences will be looked upon if males and females differ in narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing.

Rationale

Narcissism has increased over the years and research has proved its negative effects on an individual's life and interpersonal relationships. But studies also suggest that narcissism as a personality trait might also be beneficial for an individual. Studies around the world have started working on narcissism being a positive trait but there is a lack of evidence for the relationship between narcissism and self-perceived flourishing in Pakistan. Also, as Pakistan is a collectivist society, narcissistic individuals are looked down upon and this study might contribute to the changing of views.

Literature Review

There has been extensive research done on narcissistic personality traits and flourishing but researchers have not studied them together. Research has been conducted on narcissism with various types of well-being like psychological well-being and subjective well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem and relationships but not directly to flourishing as a concept.

Narcissistic individuals have more positive character as their well-being significantly correlates with the subscale of narcissism like leadership, self-admiration, and superiority. Narcissism has also been found to be positively correlated to well-being and psychological health as individuals who had high levels of narcissism evaluated themselves more positively, were more satisfied with their lives and had better psychological health (Ha, Hoang & Yen, 2018; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro and Rusbut, 2004). Narcissism has also been positively correlated with life satisfaction in adolescents and emerging adults (Hill & Roberts, 2011). Paul and Keith (2004) found out that narcissists perceive themselves to be successful in moving towards and achieving their goals which eventually results in higher well-being when the goals are achieved. We can say that narcissism might be unhealthy in the case of pathological or with respect to society, but this study gives evidence that narcissists perceive themselves to be happy individuals which says a lot about how they will perform in their lives.

Research has looked at the dark triad personality and its relationship with happiness and subjective well-being and individuals who were effective leaders, had grandiose narcissism and were self-confident. Narcissistic people rated themselves as more happy

people and narcissism was also predicted by extraversion. We see that personality might also be a predictor of narcissism and well-being (Egan, Chan and Shorter, 2014). Moreover, happiness might be subjective as Cieslik (2015) talked about how people have relationships with others and try to make them work only because they want to satisfy their own narcissistic needs. Narcissistic needs have been described as even in relationships people tend to find their own happiness which is subjective. And when people do feel happy, their positive well-being increases.

Studies have shown that personality traits that are related to narcissism are also related to well-being. Flourishing has a very strong relationship with high extraversion and conscientiousness and low neuroticism (Schotanus-Dijkstra, Pieterse, Drossaert, Westerhof, Graaf, Havel, Walburg, & Bohlmeijer, 2016; Villieux, Sovet, Jung & Guilbert, 2016; Egan & McCorkinale, 2007; Rogoza, Zemojtel-Piotrowska, Kwiatkowska & Kwiatkowska, 2018).

As we have seen that studies have provided evidence for narcissism being favourable to the well-being of a person. On the other hand, studies have suggested otherwise as well. Narcissistic individuals tend to have lower well-being than individuals who have comparatively lower levels of narcissism (Zuckerman & O'Loughlin, 2009). When self-esteem was added to the relationship, then high narcissism resulted in high well-being in the presence of high self-esteem (Zuckerman & O'Loughlin, 2009). Narcissism has different types and grandiose is related to optimal and higher than average self-esteem (Rogoza, Zemojtel-Piotrowska, Kwiatkowska & Kwiatkowska, 2018; Golmaryami and Barry, 2009).

Eryilmaz (2014) carried out his research in a school where they worked on exploring perceived personality traits, types of teachers, students liked or disliked, and their relationship with students' academic achievement and subjective well-being. They found out that the teachers who were disliked by the students showed narcissistic personality traits and their students had lower academic achievement and subjective well-being. Although the direct relationship between narcissistic personality and their own self-perceived flourishing is not there it is established that if the authority figure has a narcissistic personality then people around them would have lower well-being.

Narcissistic leaders' personality traits are more likely to result in lower psychological well-being of the employees (Erkutlu, 2014). He also found out that

employees who had higher psychological capital which consists of characteristics like self-confidence, self-esteem, optimism, and a positive psychological state, perceived the negative effects of the narcissistic leader's behaviour less. So, the results did not bring about a similar relationship due to the moderating effect of the psychological capital of the individual.

Narcissists are more likely to prioritize their personal success rather than interpersonal relationships in the process of admiration. Moreover, grandiosity and goal-driven persistence was significant when narcissistic vulnerability moderated the relationship, which means even though grandiose narcissists have inflated views about themselves, they are only motivated and persistent in the presence of self-doubt (Manley, Roberts, Beattie and Woodman, 2018)

A study conducted in Pakistan on personality traits inhibiting gratitude, social cognition and well-being of employees found that flourishing is strongly related to gratitude, but gratitude is very weakly related to narcissism (Jawed & Siddiqui, 2019). However, the relationship between narcissism and flourishing was not established directly and there still is a need for the evidence.

Krizan and Bushman (2011) Research has been done on narcissist's social comparison tendencies and narcissists who have high self-esteem make more social comparisons, thought they were better than and prioritized themselves over their loved ones. Another study by Robins and Beer (2001) on positive illusions about the self-talks about narcissists have inflated views about themselves and these positive illusions promote well-being. The article also suggests that there will be a downward trajectory for narcissists who self-evaluate their self-esteem and subjective well-being. However, this article does not cater to adaptive or maladaptive narcissism so we cannot generalize the findings to everyone who scores high on the narcissism scales.

Narcissism is positively correlated with both, eudonic and hedonic well-being and also suggests that subclinical narcissism might be beneficial for the individual's and others' well-being, in contrast with previous research (Aghababaei & Blachnio, 2015). Narcissistic individuals are more optimistic and have higher self-esteem and perceived agency (Brown, Fries, Carroll & Arkin 2016; Hickman, Watson & Morris, 1996).

Giacomin and Jordan (2016) examined how narcissism was related to well-being on three different measures: life satisfaction, state narcissism and positive

and negative affect. State narcissism was positively associated with higher well-being. Grandiose narcissism was related to daily hostility which is similar to how daily guilt and shame relate to pathological narcissism. The study focused on state narcissism which is treated as a state that a person is in a situation and not as a stable personality trait.

Narcissism can be good for people in different ways and it has gender and cultural differences. Males tend to score higher than females and narcissism scores are higher in the West rather than East (Campbell & Foster, 2007). However, a study done by Chan and Cheung (2020) in Hong Kong says that males are high on narcissism as compared to females. Similar results have been concluded by Grijalva, Newman, Tray, Donnellan, Harms, Robins and Yan (2014) that say that males tend to score higher on narcissism. Moreover, Saleem, Adeeb, Zaffar and Mustapa (2016) concluded that males are lower on narcissism than females. Alam, Rafique and Anjum (2015) also concluded that females are more narcissistic than males. However, in the research carried out by Anwar, Mahmood and Hanif (2016), it was found that males score higher than females on Narcissistic Personality Inventory which means that they are more narcissistic. The results of these researches on gender differences have been inconclusive and there is a need to find evidence if there's any relationship of gender difference with narcissism and flourishing.

The following research questions and hypotheses are formulated in the light of literature reviewed

Research Questions

- 1) Is there a relationship between narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing?
- 2) Does gender affect the relationship between narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing?

Hypotheses

- 1) There will be a significant relationship between narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing.
- 2) There will be significant gender differences in narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing.

Method

Research Design

This research has been designed as a correlational study.

Participants

The sample consisted of 338 undergraduate male and female students of Forman Christian College University, Lahore with an expected age range of 18-25 years. Convenience sampling was used to get participants, through an online questionnaire.

Instruments

Narcissistic Personality Inventory-40 (NPI-40)

NPI-40 was constructed by Raskin and Terry (1988). It has 40 items and each item has a dichotomous response format with one being the narcissistic statement and the other a non-narcissistic statement. The scoring is done by giving one mark for every narcissistic option. The score range is 0-40. It has seven subscales: authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, vanity and entitlement. The scale has shown high internal consistency and reliability with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.82 (Saleem, Adeeb, Zaffar & Mustapa, 2016).

Flourishing Scale

The scale was developed by Diener and Biswas-Diener (2009) and has 8 items. The items are rated across the 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The scale measures the self-perceived success of the respondents in the areas of relationships, self-esteem, purpose and optimism. The score range is 8-56, with higher scores indicating higher well-being. The authors report a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.87.

Procedure

The participants were approached through email and social media sites like Whatsapp and Messenger. They were briefed about the study and their rights in the first part of the online questionnaire. Their continuation to the next part of the questionnaire was considered as their consent. The survey consisted of 55 questions which included demographic questions and the two scales. Participants were also requested to forward the questionnaire to their class fellows at Forman Christian College after they completed the survey.

Statistical Technique

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was calculated to measure the strength of the relationship between narcissistic traits and flourishing. Multivariate Analysis of

variance (MANOVA) was used to measure the gender differences between the variables, narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing.

Results

Pearson Product Moment correlation and Multivariate analysis of variances were used to interpret the data. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant correlation between narcissistic traits and self-

perceived flourishing and there would be gender differences between these variables as well.

The sample was 338 after screening and fell into the age group of 18-25 years ($M=21.99$, $S=1.54$). The sample consisted of primarily single individuals and no gender biases were seen in the sample. The majority of the sample were psychology majors and seniors as due to the convenience sampling technique it was easier to reach people within the immediate circle.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Gender, Marital Status, Household Composition and year of Education in the Sample

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	172	50.9
Female	166	49.1
Marital Status		
Single	331	97.9
Married	7	2.1
Household Composition		
Nuclear	233	68.9
Joint	105	31.1
Year of Education		
Freshmen	33	9.8
Sophomore	34	10.1
Junior	80	23.6
Senior	191	56.5

Pearson product-moment correlation was carried out to find out the strength of the relationship between the variables; narcissistic trait and self-perceived flourishing. No violations of linearity, normality and

homoscedasticity were noted. There was a positive and weak but significant correlation between the two variables [$r=.225$, $n=338$, $p<.0005$]. The variables had a shared variance of 5%.

Table 2

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between the Narcissistic trait and Self-perceived Flourishing

Variables	NPI	FS
NPI	-	.255**
FS	.225**	-

*NPI= Narcissistic Personality Inventory, FS= Flourishing Scale. n=338, **p<.0005*

One way between groups multivariate analysis of variance was carried out to find out the gender differences in narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing. The independent variable was gender (male and female) and the dependent variables were narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing. No violations were noted for normality, homogeneity,

linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers. Statistically significant results were achieved for gender differences and the combined dependent variables: $F(2, 335) = 8.99$, $p<.0005$; Wilks' Lambda=.95; partial eta squared=.05. Furthermore, dependent variables were considered separately to look for statistical significance, by using a Bonferroni adjusted

alpha level of 0.0025. The narcissistic trait has statistically significant results: $F(1, 336) = 17.0$, $p < .0005$, partial eta squared = .05. Males reported slightly higher levels of the narcissistic trait ($M = 15.42$,

$SD = 5.91$) than females ($M = 12.84$, $S = 5.59$). Even though the results are significant, the difference between the means scores is less than 3 scale points.

Table 3

Multivariate tests for Gender differences in narcissistic trait and Self-perceived Flourishing

Variable	Value	F	Significance (p<)	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.051	8.988 ^b	.0001	.051
Wilks' Lambda	.949	8.988 ^b	.0001	.051
Hostelling's Trace	.054	8.988 ^b	.0001	.051
Roy's Largest Root	.054	8.988 ^b	.0001	.051

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to look at the relationship between narcissistic traits and a self-perceived sense of flourishing. According to the literature review, narcissism might be a positive trait for individuals as they perceive themselves to be more flourishing in life but on the other hand, there are evidences that also say that narcissistic traits are not desirable for individuals as it affects their well-being. In this research, self-perceived flourishing is looked upon in individuals, which is basically positive well-being.

The results of the study align with the literature review which says that narcissism is desirable for the individual itself as it contributes to their well-being. There was a weak positive relationship between narcissistic traits in individuals and their self-perceived flourishing, according to the Pearson product-moment correlation. There might be a few reasons behind this as the sample might have not been naturally very narcissistic in nature. As the data was collected from a university of a collectivist society, we might explain that people are not very narcissistic in nature due to cultural norms. Ha, Hoang and Yen (2018) in their research expected low narcissistic levels in their sample as Vietnam is also a collectivist society. They concluded that narcissistic levels in their sample might be influenced due to the cultural, economic and social development in big cities as his sample was only from Hanoi. We might have expected similar results, but we see that narcissistic levels are not very high in our own sample. Even though the majority of the sample came from nuclear households, which might hint towards the development of individualistic values in society, it can be said that collectivist values still strongly exist. The results of the study can be supported by Ghorbani, Watson, Krauss, Bing and Davison (2004). They looked at the narcissistic trait, individualistic and

collectivist values and religious interests in Iran and America. Narcissism was negatively correlated with collectivist values in Iran and no significant relationship of narcissism with individualistic values was present. Although, religious interests were positively correlated with collectivist values. Pakistan, being a collectivist country with a strong inclination towards religion, teaches its children to put the betterment of religion and society before themselves. Another reason that might have influenced low narcissistic scores, has been the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Religion might have mediated as religious and spiritual communities often turn to their creator as a coping mechanism, therapy or repentance to face difficult times and Pakistan, standing on a religious foundation, supports the latter. Individuals, in the majority of the questions, chose a non-narcissistic option and it might be because of the sense of unity and community that they have developed during these difficult times. A study done in Pakistan during the initial months of COVID-19 in Pakistan states that the majority of the participants dealt with their stress and anxiety through religious coping (Salman, Asif, Mustafa, Khan, Shehzadi, Hussain, Tahir, Raza & Khan, 2020). Another study reported that participants used religion as a coping strategy along with the drive to serve humanity (Munawar & Choudhry, 2020).

As the results showed a positive relationship, if the narcissistic trait in individuals is high, then the subjective well-being may also be high and vice versa. However, even the scores of the flourishing scale have not been very high in the sample which can also be explained by the uncertainty and different stressors being in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As Gloria and Steinhart (2013) stated that individuals high on flourishing score very low on stress, depressive symptoms and anxiety. There has been a

major health and economic crisis, loss of jobs and educational opportunities, and uncertainty about the future of oneself, the country and the world in general so the scores of flourishing might have been influenced due to the actual decrease of the sense of wellbeing. An increase in stress, anxiety and depression levels has been stated in a research study done on the university students of Pakistan during these crises (Salman, Asif, Mustafa, Khan, Shehzadi, Hussain, Tahir, Raza & Khan, 2020). Another study done by Munawar and Choudhry (2020) reported similarly increased anxiety and stress levels in their sample from Pakistan.

Paul and Keith (2004) state that narcissistic individuals perceive themselves to be more successful when they have to achieve a goal, and when the goal is achieved, they feel a sense of higher well-being. The results of our study align with this as narcissists feel an excessive amount of self-love and they evaluate themselves positively, rather than accurately. However, our study does not provide any evidence if they actually have higher well-being.

Moreover, the results of our study have small significance but due to the large sample, it cannot be ignored. The relationship does align with many other types of research like the one carried out by Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro and Rusbult (2004) stating that normal narcissism, which is narcissism as a personality trait in non-clinical populations, is better for individual subjective wellbeing and subsequently their psychological health. Paul and Keith (2004) also stated that while narcissism can be unhealthy for individuals if it is pathological or if it is looked at with respect to society, their research provides evidence that they perceive themselves to be happier than other individuals. Another study by Egan, Chan and Shorter (2014) says that individuals who were high on narcissistic traits rated themselves as to be more happy individuals. Not only do narcissists perceive themselves to be happy individuals but Hill and Roberts (2011) state that narcissism scores of individuals positively correlated with their life satisfaction scores. Life satisfaction can be counted as perceived as the questionnaire used was self-reported by the individual.

In this study, we looked at narcissism as a personality trait in individuals, and not just an individual in a narcissistic state. Personality traits are very stable in nature and do not change over a short period of time, but state narcissism is a state in which a person might be in that time of their life. Giacomini and Jordan

(2016) stated that state narcissism had a positive relationship with higher well-being. It resonates with our research that narcissism and positive well-being, their sense of themselves flourishing in life, do share a relationship. Even though state narcissism and narcissistic trait are different but whether it is something stable or changing, they do have a positive effect on the individual's higher well-being.

The results of our study also align with Manley, Roberts, Beattie and Woodman's (2018) study which looked at the relationship between narcissism and persistence in university students. Persistence was measured through different variables that make up persistence. Optimism, self-confidence and self-esteem scores increased as narcissism scores increased which means these variables had a positive relationship. Self-perceived flourishing is also known as the positive well-being of a person and how much an individual feels success in areas like optimism, self-esteem, relationships and purpose in life. Narcissistic person has an extreme love for themselves and has a high tendency to evaluate themselves positively, so they will evaluate themselves as having high self-esteem, confidence and optimism in life. Similar results were seen in the study carried out by Hickman, Watson and Morris (1996) where optimism was positively correlated with healthy forms of narcissism (overt) and negatively correlated with unhealthy narcissism (covert).

As Aghababaei and Blachnio (2015) state subclinical narcissism is beneficial for individuals because we know how difficult situations and different stressors make a person doubt their self-esteem and capability but narcissistic individuals always feel and evaluate themselves in a positive light and we might say, if it is beneficial, then these stressors don't affect the narcissistic individual as much as a person who is low on narcissism.

According to our second hypothesis, there would be gender differences in our variables. There were significant differences according to the statistical analysis, MANOVA, in our groups but between subject effects showed that there were significant differences for males and females in the narcissistic trait only. Males showed slightly higher levels of narcissism in our sample and similarly, Anwar, Mahmood and Hamid (2016) also concluded that males score higher on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Another study by Campbell and Foster (2007) stated that males score higher than females and this study took place in

the West. We see similar results in the East, as well. But some of the studies done in Pakistan report that females have higher narcissistic results than males (Saleem, Adeeb, Zaffar & Mustapa, 2016; Alam, Rafique & Anjum, 2015). A possible explanation might be that those studies were carried out a few years ago and as the world and especially Pakistan, has been developing really fast in terms of technology, awareness of different value systems and their acceptance. Saleem, Adeeb, Zaffar and Mustapa (2016) reported that females were more narcissistic as they had more selfie-taking and posting motivation and these activities were vastly accepted in the society if they came from females. But a recent study done by Chan and Cheung (2020) in Hong Kong says that males are higher on narcissism than females. And it can be said, that due to the changing times, more people have accepted the equality that the genders should have and have normalized the use of social media in all ways for both genders. So, it might be possible that males have been indulging more openly and freely in all sorts of self-love activities which has eventually led to higher narcissistic scores that were not reported earlier in the research. Asian cultures still hold collectivist values and the results of this study and Chan and Cheung's (2020) might be truly reflective of the changing times. Or it might be that the sample we used or the males that participated were more narcissistic.

Limitations

There have been many limitations that have influenced this study. First of all, the onset of the pandemic led to changes in the data collection method. An in-person questionnaire was converted into an online survey. The diversity got affected as people could only be contacted through social media platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp. Moreover, the study had a main variable of self-perceived flourishing and due to

natural and increased stress levels due to COVID-19, it was definite that responses would have gotten influenced.

Recommendations

Further research is needed in many areas, for example, different types of narcissism should be explored as their perceived sense of flourishing and actual well-being. As narcissists have inflated positive self-views, measures like well-being will not be very reliable and valid for self-report measures. A new scale or method needs to be devised by future researchers to measure actual well-being so that they could compare it with their self-perceived one. More diverse samples need to be taken in future to test and expand the results of this study in terms of wide age range, different economic backgrounds and cities of Pakistan, rather than one university of Lahore. Religion might have served as a mediator between the variables in this research so future research needs to take into account the influence of it in Pakistan and study it in detail.

Conclusions

Narcissistic traits and self-perceived flourishing show a weak positive relationship and the results align with the previous research. However, further research needs to be carried out to show if the same results are achieved without the influence of the COVID-19 outbreak. This research shows that the narcissistic trait in individuals has a positive impact on their self-perceived flourishing and it might be a positive trait for their wellbeing. This opens more avenues for researchers to use this research and its results to further find evidence for different areas of well-being and their relationship with narcissism and its different forms.

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