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Drop the bad attitude! Narcissism predicts acceptance of violent behaviour

Dr. Victoria Blinkhorn, Dr. Minna Lyons, and Dr. Louise Almond

Introduction

Narcissism, as a sub-clinical personality construct, has attracted the attention of social and personality psychologists worldwide. Studies have found a significant rise in mean narcissism scores from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) between 1979 to present (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008a, 2008b), and as a result, research on sub-clinical narcissism has significantly increased in recent years (Delic, Novak, Kovacic, & Avsec, 2011). It is generally agreed that narcissism is associated with low empathy (Watson & Morris, 1991), exploitativeness (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005), aggressive reactions to threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), high need for positive regard and admiration (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), and an inflated, often distorted, view of ability (Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007).

Previous research has found that narcissism is related to a number of offending behaviours such as domestic violence (Craig, 2003; Flournoy & Wilson, 1991), sexual coercion and aggression (Blinkhorn et al, 2015; Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012; Widman & McNulty, 2010), and general offending (Hepper, Hart, Meek, Cisek, & Sedikides, 2014). However, no research to date has explored the relationship between narcissism and attitudes towards these types of behaviours. Studies have found a direct relationship between attitudes towards offending behaviours and

subsequent offending (e.g. Helmus, Hanson, Babchishin, & Mann, 2013; Nunes, Hermann, & Ratcliffe, 2013). Therefore, due to the pre-existing knowledge that narcissism is linked to a number of offending behaviours, it is important to investigate the attitudes of narcissists and whether they are generally more accepting of these types of behaviours. It may be that, due to narcissists having distorted self-perceptions (Grijalva & Zhang, 2015), narcissism may not relate to more accepting attitudes towards violence, just the actual offending behaviour itself. The present study aims to elucidate whether or not narcissism is related to more accepting attitudes towards violence in a sub-clinical non-offending population in four domains; attitudes towards war, penal code violence, corporal punishment, and intimate violence (Anderson, Benjamin, Wood, & Bonacci, 2006).

To date, we know very little on the subject of narcissists and their attitudes. However, we do know that narcissism is related to a number of specific behaviours, which in turn, could be linked to attitudes. For example, aggression (Maples et al., 2010; Reidy, Foster, & Zeichner, 2010) and authoritarianism (Carnahan & McFarland, 2007) have been linked to narcissism, which suggests that individuals high in narcissism may have more accepting attitudes towards particular phenomena such as war, the violent punishment of criminals, and the use of physical force to dominate others. Further, narcissism has been found to be related to social dominance orientation (Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009), which is associated with the acceptance of corporal punishment, specifically against children (Hess, Gray, & Nunez, 2012). It may be that narcissists are more accepting of aggressive behaviours such as corporal punishments, and also more likely to inflict them on others.

Indeed, some research has demonstrated that narcissism is related to child physical abuse (Collins, 2004; Crouch et al., 2015; Wiehe, 2003). For example,

Wiehe (2003) found statistically significant differences between abusive and non-abusive parents on the subscales of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). The abusive parents scored significantly lower on the authority and superiority subscales, and significantly higher on the exhibitionism and entitlement subscales. Overall, the findings demonstrated that the abusive parents had lower self-confidence, a greater lack of impulse control, and were generally more narcissistic than their non-abusive counterparts. It is unclear as to whether accepting attitudes towards the corporal punishment of children precedes this type of abusive behaviour by narcissistic individuals, something we aim to investigate in this study.

Narcissism has also been linked to intimate partner violence (Blinkhorn et al., 2015; Buck, Leenaars, Emmelkamp, & van Marle, 2014; Meier, 2005; Simmons et al., 2005). For example, Simmons et al. (2005) investigated the personalities of individuals who had been arrested for domestic violence and found higher rates of clinically elevated narcissistic personality traits. Similarly, Meier (2005) found that perpetrators of intimate partner violence scored higher on narcissism than non-perpetrators. These findings not only indicate that narcissism is related to intimate partner violence, but may also suggest that narcissists have more accepting attitudes towards intimate partner violence. This study aims to elucidate whether narcissists' attitudes are indeed related to their behaviours.

In addition to investigating the relationship between narcissism and attitudes towards violence, the different sub-facets of narcissism will also be examined. According to Ackerman et al. (2011), the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988) consists of maladaptive, or socially toxic, (i.e., Entitlement/Exploitativeness) and adaptive (Leadership/Authority) components. Further, they identified a third component, Grandiose/ Exhibitionism, which was not particularly maladaptive or adaptive in

nature. For the present study, we considered the Entitlement/ Exploitativeness subscale to be maladaptive and the Leadership/ Authority and Grandiose/Exhibitionism subscales relatively adaptive. No previous studies have looked at how these sub-facets of narcissism are related to a wide range of violence-related attitudes; we intend to address this in the present study. Moreover, as there are sex differences in how and by whom these sub-facets are manifested in violent behaviours (see Blinkhorn et al., 2015; Ryan, Weikel, & Sprechini, 2008), we will also make a comparison between the sexes.

To conclude, no previous research has investigated the relationship between narcissism and attitudes to a wide range of violent acts using the three-factor structure of the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988) developed by Ackerman et al. (2011). We predict that the higher the narcissism, the more positive, and accepting, attitudes an individual will have towards all aspects of violence.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 329 participants ($M = 26.61$, $SD = 12.43$, 21% males), predominantly British ($n = 225$) and American ($n = 78$). The strategy was to collect as many participants as possible. As such, an online survey was advertised at a University in North-West England to undergraduate students ($n = 186$) who could participate in exchange for course. In addition, the survey was advertised to the wider community via the authors' social networks ($n = 143$), and also on psychology research participation websites.

Materials

As in the previous study (Chapter 2), narcissism was measured using the 40-item forced-choice Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), points were totalled to create an overall narcissism score (range = 1–36) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), and the three-factor structure (Ackerman et al., 2011) was used where the NPI is split into Leadership/ Authority ($\alpha = .80$), Grandiose Exhibitionism ($\alpha = .78$), and Entitlement/Exploitativeness ($\alpha = .55$).

Attitudes towards violence were measured by the Velicer Attitudes Towards Violence Scale (VATVS; Anderson et al., 2006), a 39-item self-report questionnaire. The VATVS is separated into subcategories that assess attitudes towards different types of violence: 1) war (e.g., killing of civilians should be accepted as an unavoidable part of war), 2) corporal punishment of children (e.g., a child's habitual disobedience should be punished physically), 3) penal code violence (e.g., capital punishment is often necessary), and 4) intimate violence (e.g., it is all right for a partner to slap the other's face if challenged). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Responses were totalled to create an overall score (range = 39–164) ($\alpha = .94$) and four individual subscale scores; war ($\alpha = .90$), corporal punishment of children ($\alpha = .92$), penal code violence ($\alpha = .84$), and intimate violence ($\alpha = .95$).

Procedure

The first page of the on-line survey contained the participant information sheet and other relevant ethical information. Participants completed a selection of

demographic questions and then continued to complete the NPI, VATVS, and other questionnaires not reported in this paper. After completing the survey, participants were thanked, and presented with a full debrief.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and sex differences for all measures. Males scored significantly higher than females on total narcissism, total attitudes towards violence, and all subscales apart from one, Penal Code Violence.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and sex differences for all measures.

	Mean (SD)			<i>t</i>
	Overall <i>n</i> = 329	Males <i>n</i> = 70	Females <i>n</i> = 259	
Total NPI	11.71 (7.56)	15.56 (9.20)	10.67 (6.70)	4.15***
Leadership	3.79 (2.91)	5.20 (3.10)	3.41 (2.75)	4.39***
Grandiose Exhibitionism	2.43 (2.43)	3.14 (2.56)	2.25 (2.36)	2.77**
Entitlement/Exploitativeness	0.76 (1.02)	1.18 (1.16)	0.64 (0.95)	3.62***
Total VATVS	79.00 (21.34)	92.90 (25.87)	75.21 (18.26)	5.37***
War	31.50 (8.87)	37.27 (9.30)	29.94 (8.08)	6.51***
Corporal Punishment of Children	14.32 (6.34)	18.20 (7.55)	13.27 (5.54)	5.10***
Penal Code Violence	16.90 (5.64)	16.63 (6.29)	16.70 (5.45)	1.22
Intimate Violence	16.25 (6.90)	19.79 (10.33)	15.30 (5.27)	3.51**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

In Table 2, we report the associations between the NPI and VATVS subscales. In males, Leadership/Authority was positively associated with War, Corporal Punishment of Children, and Intimate Violence. Grandiose Exhibitionism was positively associated with Intimate Violence and Entitlement/Exploitativeness with War, Corporal Punishment of Children, and Intimate Violence. In females, Leadership/Authority and Entitlement/Exploitativeness were positively associated with each of the four VATVS subscales.

When shared variance between the narcissism subscales was controlled in multiple regressions (assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were checked), in males, the Leadership/Authority facet of the NPI predicted violent attitudes towards War and Corporal Punishment of Children. In females, the Leadership/Authority facet of the NPI predicted all four subscales of the VATVS. Grandiose Exhibitionism predicted less violent attitudes towards War, and the Entitlement/ Exploitativeness facet of the NPI predicted violent attitudes towards War, Penal Code Violence, and Intimate Violence.

Table 2

Zero-order correlations and standardised regression coefficients for NPI and VATVS subscales.

	Leadership/ Authority <i>r</i> (β)	Grandiose Exhibitionism <i>r</i> (β)	Entitlement/ Exploitativeness <i>r</i> (β)	Total NPI <i>r</i>
Men (<i>n</i> =70)				
1. War	.42*** (.36*)	.17 (-.11)	.38** (.21)	.43***
2. Corporal Punishment of Children	.39** (.36*)	.15 (-.10)	.32** (.14)	.39**
3. Penal Code Violence	.22 (.28)	.02 (-.15)	.15 (.04)	.18
4. Intimate Violence	.39** (.16)	.33** (.15)	.40** (.25)	.52***
Women (<i>n</i> =259)				
1. War	.34*** (.36***)	.08 (-.13*)	.21** (.13*)	.28***
2. Corporal Punishment of Children	.28*** (.28***)	.09 (-.08)	.20** (.13)	.26***
3. Penal Code Violence	.22*** (.20**)	.04 (-.12)	.24*** (.20**)	.23***
4. Intimate Violence	.25*** (.23**)	.07 (-.10)	.23*** (.18**)	.21**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The Fisher r - z transformation was used in order to test the significance of the sex differences within Table 2. Just one significant difference was found. The correlation between Grandiose Exhibitionism and Intimate Violence ($z = 1.99$, $p < .05$), was significantly different in males than in females. All other correlations were similar in both men and women.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated narcissism and attitudes towards violence in males and females from a sub-clinical non-offending population. Males scored higher than females on total narcissism, total VATVS, and all subscales apart from Penal Code Violence. In males, the Leadership/Authority facet of the NPI predicted violent attitudes towards War and Corporal Punishment of Children. In females, the Leadership/Authority facet of the NPI predicted all four subscales of the VATVS. Grandiose Exhibitionism predicted less violent attitudes towards War, and the Entitlement/Exploitativeness facet of the NPI predicted violent attitudes towards War, Penal Code Violence, and Intimate Violence. In addition, the correlation between Grandiose Exhibitionism and Intimate Violence was significantly stronger in males than in females. No other correlations were significantly different.

Our results are congruent with others (Grijalva et al., 2015; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998) in that males scored significantly higher on total narcissism and each of the subscales. However, as with the work of Simmons et al. (2005), Ryan et al. (2008), and Blinkhorn et al. (2015), when narcissism was investigated in relation to another behaviour, or specific attitudes in this case, maladaptive narcissism was a stronger predictor in females. Only the Leadership/Authority subscale was related to attitudes concerning War and Corporal Punishment of Children in males. However, in females, not only was the Leadership/Authority subscale related to all four attitudes towards violence, but the Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscale was also related to attitudes towards War, Penal Code Violence, and Intimate Violence. In addition, when empirically testing these sex variances, no significant differences were found in relation to the Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscale and all attitudes. This suggests that despite

males scoring higher than females on total narcissism, total VATVS, and all subscales apart from one (Penal Code Violence), the relationship between maladaptive narcissism and attitudes towards violence in females is just as strong as it is for males.

Narcissism has been linked to aggression (Maples et al., 2010; Reidy et al., 2010), authoritarianism (Carnahan & McFarland, 2007), and social dominance orientation (Hodson et al., 2009); with the latter also being associated with the acceptance of corporal punishment, specifically against children (Hess et al., 2012). According to Benjamin (2006), three of the VATVS subscales (War, Penal Code Violence, Corporal Punishment) are significantly correlated with attitudes regarding authoritarian aggression, and as such, these dimensions of the VATVS may be used as valid indices of attitudes towards authoritarian aggression. As our results generally demonstrate that individuals who scored higher on narcissism had more accepting attitudes towards violence, this suggests that narcissism may also predicts more accepting attitudes towards authoritarian aggression in both males and females.

Our results suggest that total narcissism, and more specifically, the Leadership/Authority subscale, relates to more accepting attitudes towards the corporal punishment of children. This finding compliments previous research that has demonstrated a link between narcissism and child physical abuse (Collins, 2004; Crouch et al., 2015; Wiehe, 2003). It has been found that the Leadership/Authority facets of narcissism are linked to recollections of having a cold mother (e.g. Jonason, Lyons, & Bethell, 2014); therefore, it may be that children who are parented this way subsequently develop more accepting attitudes towards the corporal punishment of children. Indeed, Kernberg's (1975) psychodynamic perspective on the development of narcissism suggests that narcissistic children will have parents who are cold, strict, and controlling. This combination of parenting has been labelled 'authoritarian' by

other theorists (e.g., Maccoby & Martin, 1983). It is possible that individuals who have high levels of Leadership/Authority, have been subjected to authoritarian parenting, which in turn, could be related to more accepting attitudes towards corporal punishment.

Interestingly, unlike the work of Wiehe (2003) who found abusive parents scored significantly higher on the Exhibitionism and Entitlement subscales of narcissism, we did not find a similar relationship between the Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscale and attitudes towards the corporal punishment of children. This suggests that, despite studies finding direct relationships between attitudes towards offending behaviours and subsequent offending (e.g. Helmus et al., 2013; Nunes et al., 2013), there may be differences in how narcissism relates to specific attitudes towards behaviour, and actually carrying out the behaviour. Our results suggest that these differences can be found within the different sub-facets of narcissism, and therefore, this finding requires future investigation.

With regard to females specifically, we found that those with higher levels of Entitlement/Exploitativeness and Leadership/Authority were more accepting of intimate violence. This compliments the work of Simmons et al. (2005), Ryan et al. (2008), and Blinkhorn et al. (2015), who found that females with higher levels of Entitlement/ Exploitativeness were more sexually coercive, and sometimes, domestically violent, towards their current partner. This finding may provide the reason as to why narcissistic females are more likely to engage in sexual coercion and domestic violence; simply because they think it is acceptable. These results emphasise how important the link between attitude and actual behaviour is, particularly in relation to offending behaviours.

This study has the same limitations as discussed in the previous (Chapter 2) concerning the imbalanced ratio of males to females and issues around socially desirable responding with self-report methods. Further, as also discussed within the Chapter 2, future research should explore the use of alternative measures of narcissism such as the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009).

In summary, our findings suggest that narcissism is associated with more positive, and accepting, attitudes towards violence. In addition, males who score more highly on Leadership/Authority and females who score more highly on Entitlement/Exploitativeness and Leadership/Authority, are more likely to have accepting attitudes towards violence. These findings contribute to the little we know about narcissists and their attitudes and emphasise how important the link between attitude and actual behaviour is, particularly in relation to offending behaviours.