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Narcissistic Self-Esteem or Optimal Self-Esteem? A Latent-Profile Analysis of Self-Esteem and Psychological Entitlement

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Abstract

Research into the relationship between self-esteem and narcissism has produced conflicting results, potentially caused by hidden subpopulations that exhibit distinct positive or negative associations. This research uses Latent Profile Analysis to identify profiles within a national panel study (N = 6,471) with differing relationships between psychological entitlement and self-esteem. We identified a narcissistic self-esteem profile (9%) characterised by high entitlement and high self-esteem, an optimal self-esteem (38.4%) profile characterised by high self-esteem but low entitlement, and three profiles that reported low entitlement but different levels of self-esteem. We additionally predicted profile membership using Big-Five personality. Results indicate that self-esteem is a necessary but not sufficient condition for high entitlement, and entitlement is not highly prevalent in New Zealand.

Keywords: narcissism, self-esteem, entitlement, five-factor model, personality

Narcissistic Self-Esteem or Optimal Self-Esteem? A Latent-Profile Analysis of Self-Esteem and Psychological Entitlement

Narcissists are defined by their extremely positive self-image, grandiosity, and sense of entitlement (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011; Bosson et al., 2008; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Both the psychological literature and popular conceptions of narcissism are concerned with whether this inflated self-view is a reflection of genuine confidence and excessive self-esteem, or whether the self-aggrandizing behaviour exists in order to bolster a sense of self that is in fact, quite fragile (e.g., Bosson et al., 2008; Brummelman, Thomaes, & Sedikides, 2016). Put another way: does narcissism mean you don't like yourself? Extant research shows a positive relationship between narcissism and self-esteem (Bosson et al., 2008), but differing conceptions of narcissism and entitlement make this association more complicated than first appears. Given this positive relationship, a related question then arises: is it possible to have high self-esteem without being narcissistic? Rising concerns about the 'narcissism epidemic' and 'culture of entitlement' (e.g., Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Twenge, 2013) have been attributed to the 'self-esteem movement' – the idea that everyone is special and deserves a trophy (Beck, 2013). This research employs a Latent Profile Analysis and analyses data from a national probability sample within New Zealand in 2009, in order to investigate whether those with high entitlement necessarily have high self-esteem, and whether high self-esteem is sufficient to display high entitlement.

The concepts of self-esteem and narcissism share some clear overlap, as both involve positive self-evaluation (Brummelman et al., 2016; Orth & Luciano, 2015). The narcissist's self-view, however, is inflated and unrealistically positive (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Morf & Rhodewalt (2001) describe the narcissistic self-view as grandiose, but unable to stand on its own. Narcissists therefore require constant external support, attention, and admiration for their self-esteem to be maintained, often at the expense of their interpersonal relationships (Byrne & O'Brien, 2014; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004). In fact, it has been argued that narcissists are 'addicted to self-esteem'

(Baumeister & Vohs, 2001). In particular, narcissists display high entitlement – a global tendency towards feelings of superiority and deservingness (Bosson et al., 2008; Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). In contrast, the positive self-view of someone with high self-esteem is more realistic (Brummelman et al., 2016; Horvath & Morf, 2010; Mruk, 2013). High self-esteem is not associated with interpersonal problems, entitlement, or superiority, and those with high self-esteem are not so dependent on others to regulate their self-view (Kernis, 2003; Horvath & Morf, 2010; Mruk, 2013; Rosenberg, 1965). One important avenue for research assessing the links between self-esteem and narcissism, then, is to identify and disentangle potential subpopulations who may show high narcissism and high self-esteem from those who show low narcissism and high self-esteem. Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) provides a method for doing precisely this.

Latent Profile Analysis

LPA allows us to group participants together into probability-based profiles where individuals grouped within a profile score similarly across measures. Rather than examining the relationships between variables, and assuming this relationship holds for everyone, LPA focuses on the relationships between individuals and their different patterns of responses (Collins & Lanza, 2009). It does so by modelling a latent categorical factor, consisting of a set of latent profiles, underlying the variation in individual responses to the continuous observed variables. The aim of a Latent Profile Analysis is to identify the number of profiles that best fits the data while still maintaining parsimony (Collins & Lanza, 2009).

This analysis is particularly suited to self-esteem and psychological entitlement as we do not expect there to be only a simple linear relationship; rather, we might expect some participants to score highly across both measures, others low across both measures, and still others to measure high on one measure but low on another. That is, it seems likely that one could be a narcissist who reports high self-esteem, but we do not necessarily expect everyone with high self-esteem to be a narcissist (e.g., Brummelman et al., 2016). Additionally, previous research shows an overall positive relationship between self-esteem and narcissism (Bosson et al., 2008), so some people may score very low on both measures while others may score very high on both measures. As research into the relationship between self-esteem and narcissism has shown some conflicting results (e.g., Bosson et al., 2008), an LPA can identify the different combinations of high or low entitlement and self-esteem participants might have, answering questions about the structure of self-concept. LPA provides a novel approach to the research area and can provide new insights into correlational relationship between self-esteem and entitlement by unpacking it into separate, perhaps contrasting, patterns.

Self-Esteem and Narcissism

Our first question considers whether or not high self-esteem is a necessary condition for high entitlement. The relationship between explicit self-esteem and narcissism has been found to have a small to moderate positive relationship in meta-analysis (Bosson et al., 2008), reviews (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Sedikides et al., 2004), and recent research (Ackerman et al., 2011; Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009). Narcissists are often outgoing, have a good opinion of themselves, and enjoy leadership positions (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011; O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2015). Yet, their dependence on validation from others and high entitlement suggests that narcissists might not be psychologically healthy (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2007; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Vazire & Funder, 2006; Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2012).

One concern raised regarding the positive relationship between narcissism and self-esteem is that measures of narcissism tend to tap into a blend of maladaptive and adaptive traits, and the adaptive traits overlap considerably with self-esteem measures (e.g., Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2012). Some argue that by defining adaptive traits as part of narcissism, measures of narcissism such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) are also directly measuring self-esteem which therefore accounts for narcissism's relationship with positive psychosocial outcomes (Brown et al., 2009; Rosenthal & Hooley, 2010). When separating out maladaptive elements of narcissism such as Entitlement/Exploitativeness, research shows weak or even negative relationships with self-esteem (Ackerman et al., 2011; Clarke, Karlov, & Neale, 2015; Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2012). Thus, the moderate positive relationship found between narcissism and self-esteem (Bosson et al., 2008) may be concealing some of the negative consequences of narcissism.

One study found that narcissism is beneficial to mental health, but only as long as it is associated with high self-esteem (which may not always be the case; Sedikides et al., 2004). Recently, researchers have been calling for a move towards using individual facets of narcissism rather than thinking of narcissism as a single overarching factor (Clarke et al., 2015; Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2012). Narcissism can be conceptualised as two distinct dimensions, with contrasting relationships with self-esteem: grandiose/overt narcissism which is largely adaptive and measured using the NPI, and vulnerable/covert narcissism, which is largely maladaptive and measured using the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008; Miller et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2009; Rose, 2002; Wink, 1991). These dimensions have been identified in both clinical and social areas of research (Cain et al., 2008), and form separate factors consistently across measures (Clarke et al., 2015).

The grandiose or overt narcissist is characterised by an overall sense of superiority, accompanied by arrogance and self-absorption (Bosson et al., 2008), and as such is expected to have high self-esteem. Meanwhile, the vulnerable or covert narcissist is characterised by low self-esteem and self-reported inferiority. Yet, the vulnerable narcissist still has grandiose fantasies, a tendency towards being exploitative and high feelings of entitlement (Bosson et al., 2008; Wink, 1991). Correlational research supports this conception of narcissism, finding a positive link between self-esteem and grandiose narcissism, and a negative link between self-esteem and vulnerable narcissism (Cain et al., 2008; Brookes, 2015; Foster et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2009; Rose, 2002). However despite accounting for these distinct dimensions, there are still some inconsistencies in the literature. Some research has found a negative relationship between vulnerable narcissism, but no relationship between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2012) and other research has found negative correlations with both types of narcissism and self-esteem (Barnett, 2015).

We argue that it is therefore important to use LPA to examine this relationship as it may identify profiles with differing associations between entitlement and self-esteem, and potential additional profiles not yet considered. Based on the dimensions of narcissism, which share a common core of entitlement (Brown et al., 2009; Horvath & Morf, 2010; Pincus et al., 2009; Pryor, Miller, & Gaughan, 2008; Maxwell, Donnellan, Hopwood, & Ackerman, 2011; Miller et al., 2011) but report divergent explicit levels of self-esteem, we can expect to identify two different narcissistic profiles within this research. We hypothesise that we will find one profile that is high on both entitlement and explicit self-esteem (representing grandiose narcissism), and another profile that is high on entitlement but low on explicit self-esteem (representing vulnerable narcissism). Overall, this would suggest that having high self-esteem is not a necessary condition for being high in entitlement.

Optimal versus Narcissistic Self-Esteem

Our second question then asks if high self-esteem is a sufficient condition for high entitlement. Self-esteem and entitlement are only weakly positively correlated (Brown et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2004), and this relationship may differ when considering optimal, genuine or authentic self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). Optimal self-esteem is characterised by a lack of defensiveness, strong interpersonal relationships (Kernis, 2003), and a realistic positive self-evaluation (Mruk, 2013), all of which suggests low levels of psychological entitlement. As such, we can expect to identify an optimal self-esteem profile consisting of those who score high on explicit self-esteem but show no signs of entitlement.

Conversely, optimal self-esteem is sometimes contrasted with the high self-evaluation reported by narcissists (Bosson et al., 2008; Byrne & O'Brien, 2014), which may be untruthful, defensive, or conditional on reactions from others (Kernis, 2003). This form of self-evaluation has previously been labelled as fragile, unstable (Kernis, 2003), defensive (Jordan et al., 2003) or narcissistic self-esteem (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Thus, the concept of narcissistic self-esteem matches our earlier hypothesis regarding grandiose narcissists – those who report high self-esteem but who also display high entitlement in order to support this self-view. Overall, because high self-esteem does not necessarily reflect a genuinely positive self-view, we can expect to find two distinct profiles with high self-esteem but differing levels of entitlement. This would suggest that high self-esteem is not a sufficient condition for high entitlement.

Demographic Predictors

In addition to identifying profiles, Latent Profile Analysis also allows us to treat these profiles as a categorical variable, and covariates can be used to test if the profiles differ as a function of certain characteristics. For example, we can test whether men are more likely to belong to a particular profile than women. Previous research has found the relationships between self-esteem and narcissism and demographic factors to be remarkably consistent. Entitlement and narcissism tend to be higher in men (Campbell et al., 2004; Clarke et al., 2015), as well as negatively associated with age (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Wilson & Sibley, 2011). A recent meta-analysis also found that men tend to be more narcissistic than women, and that this difference remained stable across time and different age groups (Grijalva, et al., 2015). Another meta-analysis has shown that men tend to be consistently higher in self-esteem, although the difference is small (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). As such, we would expect that belonging to high entitlement, high self-esteem groups will be associated with being young and being male, compared to those with high self-esteem and low entitlement.

Personality Predictors

Grandiose narcissists have been described primarily as 'disagreeable extraverts' (Paulhus, 2001), with research consistently finding that narcissism is associated with higher Extraversion and lower Agreeableness (O'Boyle et al., 2015; Holtzman, Vazire, & Mehl, 2010; Miller et al., 2011; Miller, Gentile, & Campbell, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Samuel & Widiger, 2008). These results mirror the idea that narcissists tend to be manipulative, and require an audience for their self-aggrandizing (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; O'Boyle et al., 2015). A meta-analysis also reported that narcissism was positively associated with Openness and Conscientiousness, and negatively associated with Neuroticism (O'Boyle et al., 2015). Vulnerable narcissism shares the negative association with Agreeableness, but is also negatively associated with Extraversion and positively associated with Neuroticism (see Crowe, LoPilato, Campbell and Miller, 2015; Miller et al., 2011). However, positive relationships have been found between Neuroticism and both dimensions of narcissism (Miller et al., 2013; O'Boyle et al., 2015).

We expect that a high self-esteem and low entitlement profile (i.e. the optimal self-esteem) will most likely be characterised by socially desirable personality traits such as high Extraversion, high Agreeableness, and low Neuroticism. Relative to the optimal self-esteem profile, the high self-esteem/high entitlement grandiose narcissist profile should be characterised by higher Neuroticism and lower Agreeableness, but not necessarily differ in Extraversion. The high entitlement/low self-esteem profile of vulnerable narcissists, on the other hand, is likely to show lower Agreeableness, higher Neuroticism, and lower Extraversion than the optimal self-esteem profile.

Overview

This research aims to identify profiles of relationships between self-esteem and entitlement. Due to the distinct dimensions of narcissism, we expect to find two groups of people high in entitlement: one with high self-esteem and one with low self-esteem, representing grandiose and vulnerable narcissists respectively (Cain et al., 2008). We also aimed to identify whether having high self-esteem is a sufficient condition for being highly entitled. Reflecting conceptions of optimal self-esteem – a self-view that is positive but realistic, and lacking defensiveness – we also hypothesise we will find a group who are as high on self-esteem as the grandiose narcissists, but do not report high entitlement (Kernis, 2003). Essentially, we suggest that self-esteem is not a sufficient condition for entitlement, nor is high self-esteem necessary to be high in entitlement.

In addition to identifying these profiles, Latent Profile Analysis also provides information on a little-addressed topic – the prevalence of high entitlement and high self-esteem. While mean levels of narcissism may be increasing (Twenge, 2013; cf. Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010), and clinical measures of Narcissistic Personality Disorder put the prevalence at around 6% (Stinson et al. 2008), we have little idea of what 'entitlement culture' actually means, and how common psychological entitlement is within a sample-weighted nationally representative sample. Moreover, this analysis may also identify groups that have not been previously discussed in the literature. For example, a positive relationship between self-esteem and narcissism suggests that while some are high on narcissism and self-esteem, others are low on both self-esteem and narcissism, indicating a very negative self-view. This is the first time LPA has been used in this area, and will provide novel information on what the structure of people's self-concept looks like in a sample-weighted national panel study by teasing apart the correlational relationship between self-esteem and entitlement.

Method

Sampling Procedure

The Time 1 (2009) NZAVS contained responses from 6,518 participants sampled from the 2009 New Zealand electoral roll. The electoral roll is publicly available for scientific research and in 2009 contained 2,986,546 registered voters. This represented all citizens over 18 years of age who were eligible to vote regardless of whether they chose to vote, barring people who had their contact details removed due to specific case-by-case concerns about privacy. In sum, postal questionnaires were sent to 40,500 registered voters or roughly 1.36% of all registered voters in New Zealand. The overall response rate (adjusting for the address accuracy of the electoral roll and including anonymous responses) was 16.6%.

Materials

Self-esteem was measured using three items adapted from Rosenberg's (1965) Self Esteem Scale, on a scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate): "On the whole am satisfied with myself", "Take a positive attitude toward myself", and "Am inclined to feel that I am a failure" (reverse-coded) (α = .70). This is a widely used measure of self-esteem, and is considered a good measure for distinguishing self-esteem from narcissism (Rosenthal & Hooley, 2010, Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004).

Psychological entitlement was measured using three items from the Psychological Entitlement Scale (Campbell et al., 2004): "Feel entitled to more of everything", "Deserve more things in life", and "Demand the best because I'm worth it" (α = .70). Responses were rated on a scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate). The items selected were the three highest loading items from the confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the Psychological Entitlement Scale by Campbell et al. (2004).

The Five-Factor Model of personality was measured using the 20-item Mini-IPIP6 (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006). Each trait is measured using 4 items rated from 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate) and averaged to give scale scores for Extraversion (α

= .71), Agreeableness (α = .66), Conscientiousness (α = .65), Neuroticism (α = .64), and Openness to Experience (α = .67).

Participants

Analyses were run for participants who provided full responses to our measures of self-esteem, psychological entitlement, and personality (N = 6,471). The sample was 40.5% male (n = 2,620) and 59.5% female (n = 3,851). Eighteen percent of the sample indicated they were of Maori ethnicity, 4% were of Pacific ethnicity, and 5% were of Asian ethnicity, and 82% were New Zealand European. Some participants reported they were of multiple ethnicities. The mean age of the sample was 47.91 (SD = 15.72).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Sample weighted estimates of entitlement (M = 3.11, SD = 1.30) and self-esteem (M = 5.15, SD = 1.19) were uncorrelated at the bivariate level ($r_{(6463)}$ = -.006, p = .651). Indeed, it is noteworthy just how close to r = .00 this correlation was. We additionally tested for a non-linear relationship between entitlement and self-esteem, which was also non-significant (b = -.024, se = .013, t = -1.865, p = .062). Crucially, these non-significant relationships do not preclude the possibility that there may be distinct subgroups within the population with different low/high combinations of entitlement and self-esteem, and for whom these two traits may be negatively correlated, or positively correlated.

Model Estimation

We conducted a Latent Profile Analysis using Mplus 7.30 examining different combinations of low/moderate/high psychological entitlement and self-esteem. Estimates were weighted using standard NZAVS post-stratification sample weights, which adjusted for sample biases in gender and ethnicity (see Sibley, 2014 for more details). We also included gender and age as predictors of profile membership using the three-step weighting approach.

This allowed us to examine the extent to which these demographic factors were linked with increased or decreased odds of being in one profile relative to another (as per a multinomial regression), without the demographic information itself affecting the estimation of the latent profiles.

Model Selection

We considered solutions that ranged from 3-7 profiles, given that we hypothesised at least three profiles, but parsimony is lost with each additional profile. We opted for a five-profile model as our preferred solution. The five-profile model was a better fit to the data than the three and four profile models, but more parsimonious than the six and seven profile models which simply distinguished between finer and finer distinctions of the other previously identified profiles (with lines parallel to those of the five-profile solution, but slightly lower or higher in their intercept) rather than any qualitatively distinct profiles in their own right. The Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test indicated that a five-profile solution performed significantly better than a four-profile solution (LRT = 66.36, $p = .03$; adjusted LRT = 63.93, $p = .033$; see Lo, Mendell, & Rubin, 2001). However, a six-profile solution did not significantly improve on the preferred five-factor model (LRT = 79.10, $p = .10$; adjusted LRT = 76.20, $p = .109$).

The preferred five-profile model approached reasonable fit, with entropy = .672. Entropy values range from 0 to 1.0, where a high value indicates a lower classification error. An entropy value of close to 1.0 (and typically above .70 - .80) indicate that there is a clear separation of profiles, or in other words, that the model clearly separates the data into distinct profiles (Collins & Lanza, 2009). Entropy, the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) for different solutions are presented in Table 1 (see Akaike, 1987; Schwarz, 1978). The probability (averaged across participants) that a participant belonged to a given profile for our preferred five-profile solution ranged from .69

to .83. These values indicate that there was only a small average likelihood of misclassification. The classification likelihoods for the five profiles are shown in Table 2.

Profiles

Estimated mean levels of psychological entitlement and self-esteem for each of the five profiles are presented in Figure 1. The preferred solution identified four profiles where people report similar levels across both traits. This included a low self-regard profile (2%), a low-moderate self-regard profile (14%), a high-moderate self-regard profile (36%), as well as a grandiose narcissistic self-esteem profile (9%) with high entitlement and high self-esteem. We also identified a clear 'cross-over' profile of people who were low in entitlement but high in self-esteem. Our weighted sample estimate indicated that this profile represented 38% of the New Zealand population. We label this profile optimal self-esteem, in line with the idea of having high self-esteem that is unaccompanied by entitlement or an exaggerated sense of self-worth, in contrast to the grandiose narcissistic self-esteem class (Byrne & O'Brien, 2014; Campbell et al., 2007; Kernis, 2003). We did not, however, identify a clear vulnerable narcissistic self-esteem profile that would have high entitlement but low self-esteem.

These results clearly indicate that those high in entitlement consistently have high self-esteem. However, the vast majority of people with high self-esteem do not show high levels of entitlement. Combined, our analysis indicated that roughly 47% of people have high self-esteem overall, and of those with high self-esteem, 81% are not narcissistic. Thus, high self-esteem is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of high entitlement. That is, people's self-concept seems to be structured in such a way that being high in entitlement requires that you also have high self-esteem, but having high self-esteem does not necessarily involve being entitled. The five-profile solution also identifies a small yet important segment of the population labelled the low self-regard class that report both low entitlement and low self-esteem.

Demographic Differences

Results from the three-step weighted multinomial logistic regression model assessing gender, age, and personality differences in the likelihood of profile membership are presented in Table 3 (Lanza, Tan, & Bray, 2013). Crucially, this approach allowed us to estimate odds ratios and logits that were weighted to adjust for misclassification in profile membership. The optimal self-esteem profile was used as the reference profile in this analysis, and thus all results reflect gender and age differences between this profile and each of the other profiles.

Looking first at differences between the narcissistic self-esteem profile and the reference profile (optimal self-esteem) in Table 3, results indicated that men were more likely to be high in both entitlement and self-esteem (grandiose narcissistic self-esteem) relative to women. However, gender did not predict membership in the low self-regard, low moderate, or high moderate profiles relative to the optimal self-esteem profile. Thus, being male predicted increased likelihood of belonging to the only profile that was high in entitlement, but did not differentiate membership to any other profiles. In contrast, age predicted decreased likelihood of membership in all profiles (low self-regard, low moderate, high moderate and narcissistic self-esteem) relative to membership in the optimal self-esteem profile. Thus, age predicted increased likelihood of reporting high self-esteem but low entitlement across the board.

Personality Differences

Results assessing personality differences in the likelihood of profile membership are also presented in Table 3. Results showed that belonging to the low moderate profile relative to the optimal self-esteem profile was predicted by all five personality traits. Essentially, belonging to the low moderate profile was related to a less socially desirable personality pattern of lower Extraversion, lower Agreeableness, lower Conscientiousness, higher Neuroticism, and lower Openness. The high moderate profile showed the exact same pattern, although the effect for Neuroticism was about twice as weak. Interestingly, results differed when comparing to the low self-regard profile. While lower Extraversion, lower Conscientiousness, and particularly higher Neuroticism were all predictive of belonging to the low self-regard profile, there were no differences in Openness or Agreeableness. Most importantly, belonging to the narcissistic self-esteem profile relative to the optimal self-esteem profile was predicted by lower Agreeableness, but not lower Extraversion, as shown in Table 3. Belonging to the narcissistic self-esteem profile was also predicted by higher Neuroticism, but these profiles did not differ on any other traits.

Discussion

We employed Latent Profile Analysis to assess the psychological structure of people's self-concept in a national probability sample of over 6,000 New Zealanders. We investigated whether having high self-esteem is a sufficient condition to also display a high sense of entitlement, and whether being entitled means you necessarily have high self-esteem. As hypothesised, our results identified two profiles that measured high in self-esteem. The first of these, the grandiose narcissistic self-esteem profile, also measured high in entitlement. In contrast, the optimal self-esteem profile (which constituted the largest part of the sample) was low on entitlement. We did not, however, identify a high entitlement, low self-esteem profile, which could be an indicator of a vulnerable narcissism profile (Wink, 1991). The LPA also identified a profile that measured low on both measures of self-regard, labelled the low self-regard profile. Finally, two separate profiles were identified with middling self-esteem and entitlement, although one profile had noticeably higher self-esteem than the other. These profiles were labelled the low moderates and high moderates, respectively.

One question driving this research concerned the 'culture of entitlement' and whether having high self-esteem means one is also entitled. We hypothesised that we would identify two clearly different profiles with high self-esteem. Our results support this hypothesis, first identifying a profile with high self-esteem and low entitlement. Based on conceptions of self-esteem as being ‘optimal’ or ‘genuine’ for some, and narcissistic for others, this profile was labelled ‘optimal self-esteem’ to represent high self-esteem that is unaccompanied by defensiveness or entitlement (Jordan et al., 2003; Kernis, 2003; Byrne & O'Brien, 2014). We then identified another profile with high self-esteem, but also high entitlement. This profile was labelled ‘narcissistic self-esteem’, reflecting the idea of the narcissistic self-concept being dependent on reinforcement from others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Similarly, Campbell and colleagues (2007) describe narcissistic self-esteem as, feeling good, but only when the social environment is cooperative.

Importantly, these results show that while there is certainly a group of people who have high self-esteem and are highly entitled, the narcissistic self-esteem profile only accounted for 9% of the census-weighted sample in New Zealand, while all the remaining profiles measured low and relatively similar on entitlement (below the midpoint of the scale). Even the vast majority of people who were high in self-esteem were the lowest in entitlement, as the optimal self-esteem group accounted for approximately 38% of the sample. If we look purely at those who scored high in self-esteem, less than 20% also scored high in entitlement. These results suggest that entitlement is not highly prevalent, and more importantly, that self-esteem is not a sufficient condition for a sense of entitlement – not only is it possible for people to have high self-esteem but not feel entitled, it is likely that someone high in self-esteem is unentitled.

Building on the narcissism literature, we expected to identify two classes that scored high on entitlement, but with alternately high and low self-esteem (Cain et al., 2008). The narcissistic self-esteem profile could certainly represent grandiose narcissists, as they measured high on entitlement, and high on explicit self-esteem. However, we found little evidence for a group of vulnerable narcissists within our sample, who are defined by their low self-esteem, as well as their high entitlement. This may reflect the idea that fragile narcissists are high in entitlement (e.g., Pincus et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2011), but they conceal their narcissistic tendencies in favour of false modesty and humility (Bosson et al., 2008). It could be possible that vulnerable narcissists who are concealing their narcissism actually fit into the low self-regard profile. Nonetheless, our results show no clear evidence of a profile high in entitlement and low in self-esteem. This suggests that reporting high self-esteem is in fact a necessary condition for displaying high entitlement.

Two ‘moderate’ profiles also were identified who measured near the midpoint of the scale on both measures. One displayed slightly higher self-esteem than entitlement. Their self-esteem measured as above the midpoint of the scale, and their entitlement was below the midpoint, suggesting reasonably healthy wellbeing. This high moderate profile might essentially be a less exaggerated version of the optimal self-esteem profile. Comparatively, the low moderates show the same levels of entitlement, but lower self-esteem. They sit below the midpoint of the scale for both measures of self-regard. Following on from this profile is the low self-regard profile, consisting of people who measured even lower on self-esteem and entitlement. The existence of this profile raises concerns. While only a small segment of the population (approximately 2%) their low self-regard across the board indicates that those belonging to this profile could be at risk of poor psychological health and adjustment, and externalising problems (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Harter, 1993; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007).

These results provide an interesting test of the health of New Zealand self-evaluation. Nearly 40% of the sample has very high self-esteem and very low entitlement, showing optimal self-esteem was the most commonly reported self-evaluation among New Zealanders. Additionally, we discovered that 91% of the sample reported low psychological entitlement, indicating that New Zealand is not particularly high in entitlement, and ‘entitlement culture’ may not be much of a concern in this context. The ‘true New Zealander’ is defined in part as someone with liberal and democratic values such as being friendly, tolerant and inclusive, environmentally friendly, and getting ahead based on your own merits (Sibley, Hoverd, & Liu, 2011). ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome’ is also part of New Zealand culture – the tendency to ‘cut down’ those who stand out and are successful (Kirkwood, 2007). Thus, New Zealand society has a particular focus on expressing humility and low deservingness. Cross cultural replication may therefore show significantly different proportions of the population sitting within the narcissistic self-esteem and optimal self-esteem classes; however, we would expect that the structure of self-concept (i.e. the profiles identified here) would remain the same across Western contexts.

Demographics

Age was a consistent predictor of what profile one belongs to, in that older people are more likely to belong to the optimal self-esteem profile, and younger people were more likely to belong to any of the other profiles, all with lower self-esteem and/or higher entitlement. These results fit nicely with research showing that self-esteem increases across age, while entitlement decreases across age (Foster et al., 2003, Wilson & Sibley, 2011), so older people are more likely to belong to a high self-esteem, low entitlement profile. However, this effect of age was small for all profiles.

Men were more likely to be in the narcissistic self-esteem profile as compared to the optimal self-esteem class. In fact, men were 1.8 times more likely to belong to this profile as compared to women. This means women are more likely to have high self-esteem but low entitlement, while men are more likely to have high self-regard overall. This fits with research consistently showing that men tend to have higher levels of narcissism and self-esteem than women (Campbell et al., 2004; Clarke et al., 2015; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Interestingly, this was the only profile difference predicted by gender. Despite women having lower self-esteem and narcissism overall in extant research, women were not more likely to be in the low self-regard or low moderate classes, relative to the optimal self-esteem class. This suggests that membership of these profiles with particularly negative self-evaluation could be related to more clinical explanations such as mental illness.

Personality Differences

Relative to other profiles, the optimal self-esteem profile is characterised by a socially desirable personality pattern of high Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Extraversion, Openness, and low Neuroticism. It draws interesting parallels to the 'Big One' personality trait proposed by Musek (2007) – a single factor personality structure that shares this pattern of Five Factor Model personality scores and is associated with high wellbeing, including high self-esteem. However, while the low self-regard profile is also predicted by lower conscientiousness, lower extraversion, and higher neuroticism, it does not differ from the optimal self-esteem profile in terms of Agreeableness or Openness. This suggests that the low self-regard profile is likely not a group of vulnerable narcissists hiding their narcissistic tendencies, as they would most likely be characterised by low Agreeableness (e.g., Pincus et al., 2009).

The narcissistic self-esteem profile shares many of the socially desirable traits with the optimal self-esteem profile, as they do not differ in terms of Extraversion, Openness or Conscientiousness. However, belonging to the narcissistic self-esteem profile is predicted by lower Agreeableness, reflecting the idea of narcissists as being 'disagreeable extraverts' (Paulhus, 2001). Interestingly, membership of this profile is also predicted by higher Neuroticism relative to the optimal self-esteem profile, yet they report similar levels of self-esteem to those with optimal self-esteem. This could potentially indicate that reported self-esteem is somewhat inflated, although we do not test this here. Alternatively, this high neuroticism may provide some evidence that our 'missing' vulnerable narcissists have been folded into the narcissistic self-esteem profile. Generally, we would expect grandiose narcissists to score low on neuroticism. However, Crowe and colleagues (2015) identified a group of high entitlement, high neuroticism individuals which appeared to be characterised by a mix of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Nonetheless, overall, the narcissistic self-esteem profile shows the blend of socially desirable and undesirable personality traits that match descriptions of grandiose narcissists as leaders with high reported wellbeing, yet interpersonal difficulties (Bosson et al., 2008; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rosenthal & Hooley, 2010). In contrast, the optimal self-esteem profile consists of those with ‘genuine’ wellbeing and a socially desirable personality pattern. Generally, the personality patterns support our conception of and distinction between the five profiles.

Strengths and Future Directions

Using a Latent Profile Analysis, we have identified five different profiles with different relationships between entitlement and self-esteem, as well as different mean levels of self-regard. These profiles may provide some insight into the prevalence of entitlement, considering concerns about ‘entitlement culture’, as well as illustrating the many complicated and contrasting relationships between self-esteem and entitlement. While there was one clear profile that was high in entitlement, the rest of the profiles clustered low on the entitlement scale, indicating that entitlement is not particularly prevalent (see Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). Interestingly, the self-esteem scores of these profiles varied from one end of the self-esteem scale to the other. As such, it is not surprising that results are varied when looking for correlational relationships between self-esteem and narcissism. In this research, there was almost no correlational relationship between entitlement and self-esteem ($r = -.006$). However, using LPA to unpack this correlational relationship indicated that approximately 40% of the sample showed a negative association between self-esteem and entitlement, while the remaining 60% show roughly equal levels of self-esteem and entitlement. These contrasting profiles may be driving the slight positive association found previously (e.g., Bosson et al., 2008). Thus, this research demonstrates there are many more patterns or structures of self-concept than identified in extant research.

From here, we raise questions about how membership in a certain profile may change over time. Recent research suggests that both high narcissism and low self-esteem can lead to the experience of stressful life events, which in turn cause low self-esteem (Orth & Luciano, 2015). Therefore, belonging to the low self-regard profile or the narcissistic self-esteem profile may be related to low self-esteem over time. If belonging to the low self-regard profile is consistent over time, it raises concerns about a small segment of the population and their risk of significant psychological distress. Alternatively, this may be a transitional profile that many people fall into at some point within their life-span, perhaps after experiencing negative life events, but move out of over time. Similarly, while the narcissistic self-esteem class currently has high self-esteem, they may not in the future (Orth & Luciano, 2015), particularly considering that narcissists' self-esteem is more reactive to external events and shows more fluctuation (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Finally, there remains the question of whether membership in the narcissistic self-esteem profile is growing over time, as narcissism has been found to be increasing in some research (Twenge, 2013), but remaining stable in others (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). These questions pave the way for a latent transition model, which allows us to test for changes in profile membership over time.

Limitations

One limitation to this research is that our nationally representative panel study did not include an implicit measure of self-esteem, and so our interpretation of the results is limited to the ways in which people self-report their self-esteem. This 'mask' model of narcissism, wherein high explicit self-esteem among narcissists is suggested to be merely a cover for the deep insecurities and low implicit self-esteem, has seen support in some studies, but not in others (see Bosson et al., 2008, for a review). What our results tell us is that highly entitled people are consistent in their positive view and representation of themselves, and previous research suggests that these reports are genuine (Sedikides et al., 2004). We suggest that both groups do in fact view themselves positively, but in different ways. For our narcissistic self-esteem group, the positive self-view is accompanied by a sense of entitlement and the resultant set of behaviours and outcomes (e.g., Brummelman et al., 2016). High self-esteem therefore looks different in this group than in the optimal self-esteem group. Brummelman and colleagues (2016) have proposed a similar theory, where those with high self-esteem and those with high narcissism both have positive self-evaluations, but high self-esteem means seeing oneself as worthy while narcissism means seeing oneself as superior to others.

The fact that we do not identify a profile of vulnerable narcissists may relate to our measure of entitlement. Ackerman and colleagues (2011) and Pryor and colleagues (2008) suggest that the NPI Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscale (which shows consistent negative relationships with self-esteem) captures more vulnerability than the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES). Thus, the PES is potentially not tapping into vulnerability enough for the vulnerable narcissists group to emerge as a profile. Arguably, entitlement and self-esteem on their own might not be enough to clearly distinguish this group. Vulnerable narcissists may not diverge from other groups on these measures, but may differ on others. Future research could include different measures of narcissism, such as the PNI. In this case, we might expect to see a vulnerable narcissists profile with low or middling entitlement and self-esteem scores, but distinguished from other groups by their high scores on narcissistic vulnerability. Our ability to detect this profile could also be limited by the use of our 3-item short-form adaptation of the PES – a necessary evil for large scale studies such as the NZAVS. Overall, these results support arguments that the PES taps into a more grandiose, and potentially adaptive, form of narcissism, and as such we reserve remarking too much upon the lack of a vulnerable narcissism profile.

Conclusion

Findings of rising levels of narcissism and self-esteem raise concerns over the ‘narcissism epidemic’, and a ‘culture of entitlement’ (Twenge, 2013). This research answers questions about the structure of self-concept at the explicit level, by investigating the variety of ways in which one’s self-views can be related to a sense of entitlement. Self-esteem was not found to be sufficient cause for being entitled; however, having high self-esteem did appear to be a necessary condition for high entitlement. Put more simply: you can have high self-esteem and not be a narcissist, but you cannot be a narcissist without high self-esteem (or at least, *reporting* high self-esteem in order to maintain consistency). Overall, the vast majority of our sample did not display high levels of entitlement, and the largest group in the sample had low levels of entitlement and high self-esteem, indicating healthy wellbeing is the most common self-view within New Zealand. While the question remains open about whether membership in the narcissistic profile is increasing over time, as of 2009, entitlement does not seem to be a great cause of concern. What is concerning, however, are the smaller segments of the sample with consistently negative self-views who may be at great risk of psychological distress.

Table 1

Model fit for the different profile solutions of the Latent Profile Analysis

	AIC	BIC	Entropy
Three Profiles	42276	42344	0.581
Four Profiles	42109	42197	0.639
Five Profiles	42048	42157	0.672
Six Profiles	41975	42104	0.648
Seven Profiles	41928	42077	0.673

Note: BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion

Table 2

Average latent profile probabilities for most likely latent profile membership (row) by latent profile (column).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Low moderates	0.835	0.043	0.000	0.122	0.000
2. Low self-regard	0.185	0.815	0.000	0.000	0.000
3. Optimal self-esteem	0.000	0.000	0.812	0.113	0.075
4. High moderates	0.112	0.000	0.117	0.748	0.023
5. Narcissistic self-esteem	0.000	0.000	.218	0.091	0.690

Table 3

Results of the distal multinomial logistic regression with the auxiliary variables of gender age, and personality using parameterisation on the optimal self-esteem profile as the reference category.

	b	se	z	p	OR
Low self-regard					
Gender	-.122	.221	-.550	.583	0.89
Age	-.037	.008	-.4596	.000	0.96
Extraversion	-.704	.155	-4.555	.000	0.49
Agreeableness	-.109	.140	-0.783	.433	0.90
Conscientiousness	-.825	.122	-6.765	.000	0.44
Neuroticism	2.475	.160	15.516	.000	11.88
Openness	.106	.126	0.838	.402	1.11
Low moderates					
Gender	-.121	.125	-.969	.333	0.89
Age	-.033	.004	-7.798	.000	0.97
Extraversion	-.498	.075	-6.661	.000	0.61
Agreeableness	-.246	.091	-2.699	.007	0.78
Conscientiousness	-.547	.074	-7.345	.000	0.58
Neuroticism	1.856	.107	17.392	.000	6.40
Openness	-.173	.074	-2.323	.020	0.84

High moderates					
Gender	.100	.1010	.996	.319	1.11
Age	-.014	.003	-4.173	.000	0.99
Extraversion	-.175	.057	-3.091	.002	0.84
Agreeableness	-.393	.068	-5.805	.000	0.68
Conscientiousness	-.397	.057	-6.959	.000	0.67
Neuroticism	1.127	.077	14.700	.000	3.09
Openness	-.224	.057	-3.943	.000	0.80
Narcissistic self-esteem					
Gender	.612	.235	2.610	.009	1.84
Age	-.039	.007	-5.841	.000	0.96
Extraversion	.293	.158	1.858	.063	1.34
Agreeableness	-.670	.148	-4.519	.000	0.51
Conscientiousness	.194	.155	1.250	.211	1.21
Neuroticism	.850	.231	3.670	.000	2.34
Openness	-.233	.141	-1.650	.099	0.79

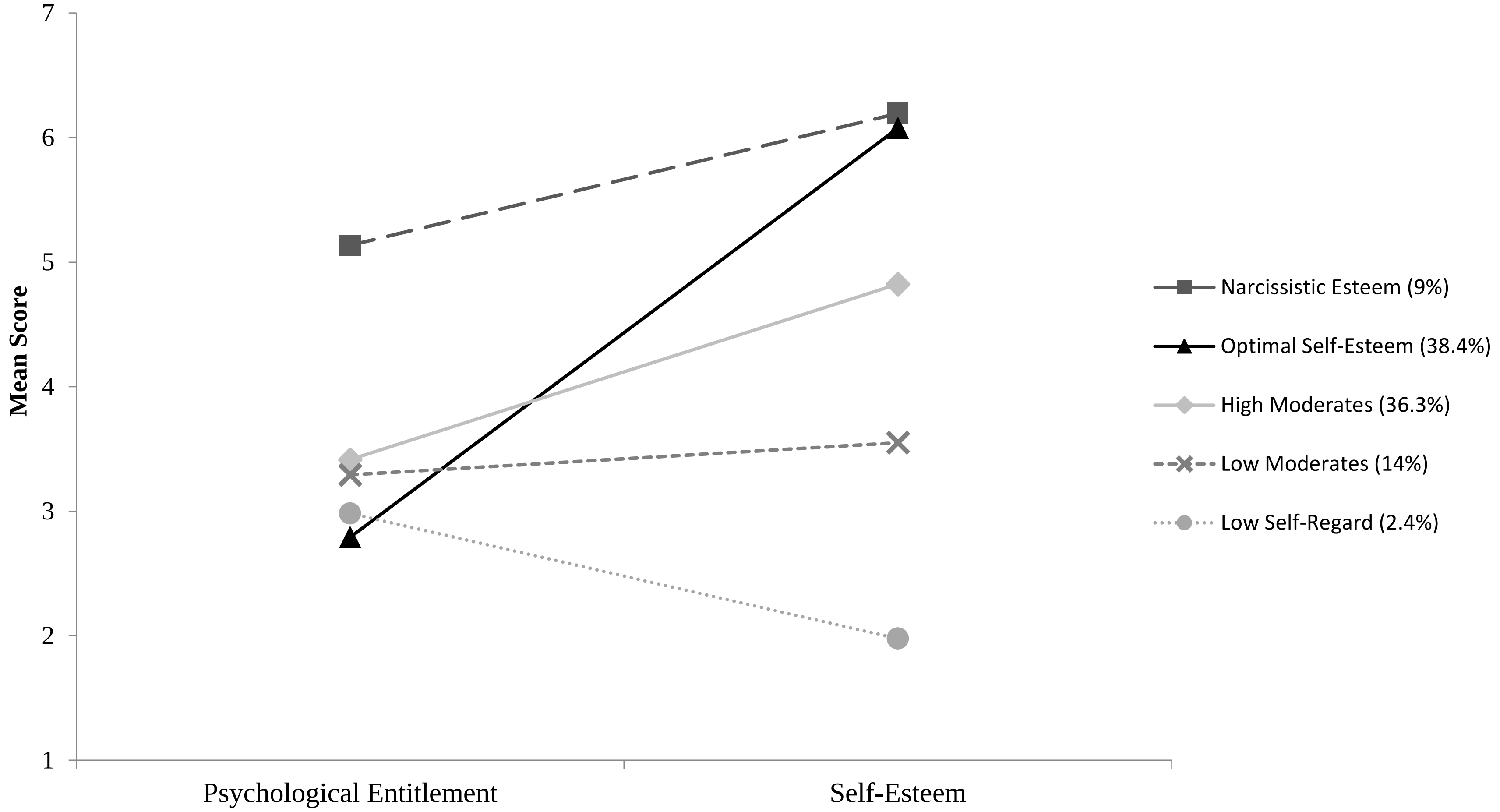

Figure 1. Mean scores of Psychological Entitlement and Self-Esteem for the five profiles identified by Latent Profile Analysis

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