



Narcissism, Meaning in Life, and Subjective Well-Being

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Introduction

According to research, narcissism is positively related to meaning in life (Womick, Foltz, & King, 2019) and is unique among the dark personality traits in its positive association with psychological well-being measurements.

Narcissism is reflected in grandiose self-views, dominance, entitlement (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Corry, Merrit, Mrug, & Pamp, 2008), engagement in self-promotion, and exploiting others (Emmons, 1987; Rhodewalt & Morf, 2005; Ackerman, Donnellan, & Wright, 2019) King and colleagues (2006) posit, “Lives may be experienced as meaningful when they are felt to have a significance beyond the trivial or momentary, to have purpose, or to have a coherence that transcends chaos” (p. 180).

The possibility that the association between non-clinical narcissism and psychological functioning might be explained by other aspects of well-being has received limited attention, focusing on self-esteem. Aspects of healthy functioning, beyond self-esteem, might also explain the association between narcissism and well-being.

Overview & Predictions

This research asked two questions:

Does meaning in life explain the association between narcissism and subjective well-being (SWB)?

Hypothesis 1: Meaning in life would explain the association between narcissism and subjective well-being (and that subjective well-being would not mediate the association between narcissism and meaning in life).

Is the facet of significance (believing that one’s life matters) more crucial than purpose (being directed by the pursuit of valued goals) or coherence (feeling the works makes sense) to the link between narcissism and global meaning in life?

Hypothesis 2: Significance will be the most important facet of meaning, explaining the association between narcissism and global meaning in life.

Methods

Study 1a:

Participants: Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N=415$). Participants completed measures online for a small payment.

Procedure: Participants completed the Presence of Meaning subscale of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ-P; Steger et al., 2006) and the SWLS. Narcissism was measured using the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Index, (Raskin & Hall, 1981).

Study 1b:

Participants: Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N=300$). The sample was 58.6% women, 76% White/Caucasian, 7.3% Black/African American, 7.3% Asian, 4.7% Latinx, 1.3% Native American, and 3% “other.” Ages ranged from 18 to 87, $M(SD)=36.70(13.10)$.

Participants completed measures online for a small payment.

Procedure: Participants were asked to completed the Presence of Meaning subscale of the MLQ.

Study 2:

Participants: Introduction to Personality undergraduate students ($N=295$) participated in online assessments as part of required homework. Students were asked to consent to having their responses used as research data. The sample was 25.8% male, 72.5% female, 0.7% transgender, and 1% indicated “other;” 80.7% White/Caucasian, 9.5% Black/African American, 4.7% Asian, 2.0% Hispanic/Latino, 3.1% “other.” Ages ranged from 18 to 39, $M(SD)=20.07(2.05)$.

Procedure: Participants completed the Tripartite Meaning Scale (TMS, Costin & Vignoles, 2019), Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale (MEMS, George & Park, 2016), the narcissism scale from the Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014), the MLQ-P, SWLS, and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

Results

Study 1a

Narcissism was positively correlated with SWB, $r=.20$, and meaning in life (MIL), $r=.24$ both $p's < .001$. Controlling for MIL fully mediated the relationship between narcissism and SWB: For the direct effect controlling for MIL, $B(SE)=0.01(0.003)$, $p=.15$, and the indirect effect, $0.01(0.002)$, $[.01, 0.02]$ (for comparison, the effect of narcissism on SWB without controlling for MIL, $B(SE)=0.02(0.004)$, $\beta=.21$, $p<.001$)

Study 1b

Narcissism was positively related to significance, $r=.49$, $p<.001$, purpose $r=.22$, $p<.001$, and coherence, $r=.14$, $p=.018$. Controlling for the significance facet of meaning wiped out the positive associations of narcissism with coherence (partial $r=-.15$, $p=.01$) and purpose (partial $r=-.06$, $p=.18$).

Study 2

Replicated Study 1a mediation but did not replicate Study 1b results for significance. Additionally, Study 2 showed that self-esteem does not explain the link between narcissism and MIL.

Conclusion

The studies show that meaning in life mediates the relationship between narcissism and subjective well-being.

Data did not support the facet of significance as being crucial to the link between narcissism and meaning in life. Instead, we found that all three facets of meaning in life were important to understanding the relationship between narcissism and the experience of meaning.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations, Study 2

