Narcissism: Its Impacts on Leadership and Sexuality

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Abstract

Research indicates that individuals with high narcissistic traits tend to be scored higher on competency and capabilities when it relates to leadership (Foster, & Shira 2006). While leadership may be a popular area of research in psychology the literature is not substantial when it comes to its relationship to narcissism. This study investigates whether individuals who indicate higher narcissistic traits also tend to be more effective leaders. Researchers also attempted to determine whether participants tended to be more open to sexuality, as an indicator of participants openness. The interpretation of the results conducted in this study will be further discussed in the following article.
Exploring the link between Narcissism, Leadership and Openness to Sexuality

Leadership roles are often among the most lucrative jobs (Bushman & Indjejikian, 1996) and most well positioned roles in society, with most roles allowing access into further development. Unsurprisingly leadership qualities and skills are highly researched with a lot of focus on understanding the qualities required for ‘good’ leadership. What sets apart the individuals who seem to possess natural leadership qualities?

More importantly, is leadership a skill which individuals has to learn to excel at or is there a second variable or measure, not fully understood, that contributes to their success? One such variable researchers postulate may be contributing to this ‘natural’ condition of leader is narcissism (de Vries & Miller, 1985). There has been considerable examination of whether individuals possess natural leadership genes and whether narcissistic tendencies do in fact give one an added edge.

A prominent area in leadership research is the factors that make a successful leader: one of these factors being what scores on the Big Five inventory tends to favor successful leaders. Traits as extraversion and conscientiousness have been consistently found to contribute to one’s success as a leader (Zhao & Seibert, 2006). An equally studied trait is openness. It can be expected that successful leaders tend to be more open to alternative ideas (Nicholson, 1998). By doing so these leaders seek improved cohesion between employees (Bird, 1977) and allow for more radical solutions. Researchers are yet uncertain of the effect narcissism has on openness and whether narcissistic individuals tended to be on average more or less open. A prominent conception in pop culture is that of the overconfident CEO who has a grandiose view of self; this individual leads and makes multiple decisions without fear or flinching. Not surprisingly he would be held accountable for much of the executive decisions such as hiring practices and branding (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). How do those two ideologies of a leader
mesh? Is it possible to appear to be open to ideas and opinions, while at the same time maintaining a grandiose image of self? In other words, can narcissism allow the leader to be open, solicit ideas, do what he thinks is best and then use that openness to convince employees it was the optimal decision, thus assuring himself their continued support?

Openness to sexuality is a separate trait that is currently focused on by the media and researchers have reemphasized this particular measure. What researchers have found is that when individuals are more open to the sexual orientation of others there is a correlation to general openness (Attwood, 2011). Researchers also suggest that the more narcissistic the individual the more likely for them to be open to others sexuality (Watson, Biderman & Sawrie, 1994).

Current research suggests narcissism is a trait found in successful leaders (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) as frequently as openness to experience was common to successful leadership (De Hoogh, Den Hartog & Koopman 2005). This study examined narcissism and sexuality in relation to leadership traits and abilities. Researchers hypothesized that individuals who hold more narcissistic traits are better leaders. Researchers also wished to investigate the correlation between leadership and sexuality, or more specifically whether those individuals with more open views to others sexuality tend to be better leaders.

**Method**

**Participants**

Twelve undergraduate students (2 Males and 10 Females; average age=21.16, SD=2.48) were recruited from a midsized university in the Southwest. The sample consists of 6 Caucasians, 1 Black, 2 Hispanics, and 3 Multicultural individuals. Participants volunteered in order to fulfil a course requirement or receive extra credit for a psychology course.
Materials and Procedure

Leadership. Participants completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S, which estimates their leadership capabilities as they may apply to their leadership styles. This is indicative of the participant’s ability to exhibit leadership traits. Items will include those such as “I make others feel good to be around me” on a scale of 0 – 4, with 0 being Not at all and 4 being frequently, if not always.

Narcissism. Participants completed the 40–item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), to calculate levels of narcissism. This added a second IV that was utilized to assess Resilience and Interpersonal/Empathetic Abilities. Participants choose between two options such as “I have a natural talent for influencing people” or “I am not good at influencing people.” These questions were scored using the assigned key and summed. The average person scored 15.3 out 40 on the NPI.

Sexuality. Participants completed the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG: Klein, 1978), to access their openness to sexuality. An example of a question was, “Our emotions directly influence, if not define, the actual physical act of love. Ask yourself if you love and like only the opposite sex or if you are also emotionally close to the same sex. What are you on the scale?”

Procedure

Participants were first asked to sign in, and then they were informed of the measures we put in place to ensure confidentiality. Participants were then asked to sign a consent form and then researchers gave a short summary of the coming surveys we would administer. Firstly they would take the Multifactor leadership questionnaire, after which they would be asked to complete the narcissistic personality inventory followed by a modification of the Klein sexual orientation grid. Lastly researchers h
ad the participants complete a demographics form. After completing each form researchers gave the participants a debriefing form in the event any complaints were found.

Results

A bivariate correlation was conducted between Narcissistic Personality inventory, the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, and each direction of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. There was no correlation found between narcissism (M=10.75, SD=0.57) and the leadership abilities (M=7.71, SD=0.67), r=0.46, p>.05. No correlation was found when participants narcissism (M=10.75, SD=0.57) and their openness to others sexuality (M=29.53, SD=8.85), r=.18, p>.05. No correlation was found among any other variable except when the multifactor leadership factor averages (M=7.71, SD=0.67) and other subcategories within the same leadership analysis. This correlation for leadership types was expected as it indicated certain leadership styles such as an intellectualism (M=7.25, SD=1.90) to be correlated with its parent category.

Consequently when researchers conducted the bivariate by gender, correlation was found. Particularly interesting was the correlation between females’ openness to others sexuality (M=30.61, SD=9.28) and their idealized leadership styles (M=7.01, SD=1.6) r=.63, p<.05. Furthermore when researchers conducted a bivariate by ethnicity the data revealed a correlation between different types of leadership and overall leadership for those of white ethnicity. Researchers found that narcissism (M=11.13, SD=5.94) was positively correlated with contingent leadership styles (M=7.51, SD=1.64) r=.85, p<.05. Data was found to support our original hypothesis when we restricted different variables, albeit without significant correlation.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether individuals who reported higher scores on
narcissistic traits also tend to be better leaders. However, no significant correlations were found. Researches also wanted to determine whether individuals tend to be more open to sexuality, an indicator researches consider representative of openness. Researchers were unable to find any significant data to support this hypothesis.

Researchers were however able to show that narcissism was correlated with higher leadership scores but only when researchers restricted demographics to whites. There is also significant literature (Michael, 2000) to show that there is a correlation and that individuals with these grandiose beliefs seem to convey a particular charm to others, leading to a perception of being better leaders (Judge, LePine & Rich, 2006). It is possible that the population participants surveyed i.e. college students, are not indicative enough of the political or corporate environments in which most leaders are found today, or that the sample size was simply not sufficient to make any significant conclusions.

Researchers findings that white participants correlated with higher narcissism which correlated with higher leadership scores on a specific measure, MLQ contingent, may indicate that whites are more likely to be narcissistic as well as better leaders. The MIQ contingent is a sub score on the MLQ scale which indicates participants comfort in telling others what to do. These results indicate that a narcissistic individual may be a better leader as he may be more assertive.

Another significant correlation found was that females tended to be more open to others sexuality (KSOG) when correlated against MLQ Idealized. The MLQ Idealized indicates that female leaders show their trust and keep others faith and respect. This demonstrates dedication to one’s group and ability to appeal to others hopes and dreams. This finding could be explained by females taking a softer somewhat more caring role towards others (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006), simply being perceived to be warmer than males (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2002).
Limitations

There were multiple limitations in conducting this study. Firstly the population sampled was all college students and with specialized criteria such as leadership the most likely areas to find leaders may be in the business world or another corporate setting. The small sample size also affected what participants could determine as a larger sample size may have provided significant data needed to draw the conclusions. It is possible that regardless of sample size, the actual effect size is not significant enough to demonstrate correlation. It is also likely that the measures used were not sufficient to determine the traits participants attempted to measure. For instance the Klein Scale for sexuality was modified in order to save time and the Leadership scale was split into multiple parts to determine specific leadership traits. A more inclusive leadership scale may have been more revealing as well as the full Klein Scale. Had the researchers considered these factors more thoroughly and had time to run the study again multiple factors would be changed in order to acquire more representative data.

Concluding Remark

Throughout the research there was no preexisting material on any study that measured all three variables as the participants have attempted to. While researchers were unable to find any significant correlation between all three variables, there has been much research to support findings on at least two of the variables when correlated together. For instance narcissism and leadership has much research that points to a positive correlation in leadership abilities (Judge, LePine & Rich 2006). The current study also echoed this notion with a correlation being found when whites were individually analyzed. There is significant literature that indicates narcissism to be correlated with openness, and a lack of data in supporting standing literature may have been due to researcher’s decision to measure specifically, openness to sexuality (Paulhus & Williams 2002). This is a measure researchers can revise in further
studies. Results also showed that female leaders who utilize high intellectual leadership tended to be more open to others sexuality, further indicating a possible strong correlation between openness and positive leadership.
References


