

OVERT AND COVERT NARCISSISM IN POLAND AND THE NETHERLANDS¹

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Summary.—This article reports a study of the relation between narcissism as a personality characteristic and the cultural dimension of individualism/collectivism. Participants from a more collectivistic society (Poland; $n = 167$) were compared with participants from a more individualistic society (The Netherlands; $n = 156$). Two dimensions of narcissism were distinguished: overt and covert. The cultural tendency for narcissism was measured by comparing average scores on both types of narcissism in both countries, as well as by the meaning that overt and covert narcissism seems to have for psychological well-being. More specifically, the correlations were compared among both types of narcissism and depression and meaning of life. In the Polish sample, the average score on covert narcissism was higher. In the Dutch sample, on the other hand, depression and meaning of life were significantly related to covert narcissism.

Personal characteristics develop in close relation to the cultural environment in which people live (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996). One important way to classify cultural environments is the dimension of individualism/collectivism (Triandis, 1995). Collectivism is a pattern of social relationships in which people are highly involved with one another and feel included in one or more collectives. They are guided in their behavior by the norms and obligations of these collectives. They place the realization of these collectives' goals above personal goals. In contrast, individualism is a pattern of social relationships in which people are more loosely involved with one another. They justify their behavior with an appeal to their individual preferences, wishes, and rights, and they place the realization of their own goals above the realization of other peoples' goals.

Individualism encourages a stronger focus on the self, while collectivism encourages a stronger focus on others. Since members of individualist cultures are more self-focused, they are supposed to develop more narcissism than members of collectivist cultures (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Narcissism is a strong focus on the self, accompanied by lack of empathy, need for admiration, and fantasies of omnipotence and grandiosity (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

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It is important here to distinguish between “subclinical” or “everyday” narcissism and “clinical” narcissism. Clinical narcissism is a personality disorder. People displaying subclinical or everyday narcissism, on the other hand, show some characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder, but not sufficient to diagnose them as suffering from narcissistic personality disorder (Foster, *et al.*, 2003; Campbell & Foster, 2007). In this study, subclinical or everyday narcissism was the variable of interest.

Narcissism is a multidimensional phenomenon. The two dimensions are “overt” and “covert” narcissism (Wink, 1991, 1996; Rose, 2002). Overt narcissists demand a great deal of attention from others and long to be admired by others. They perceive themselves to be grand and show it openly. They can be engaging to others, even if they have little interest in others’ needs. Overt narcissists will rarely admit to feeling small or experiencing emptiness in their lives. Overt narcissism generally correlates positively with psychological well-being and optimism (Hickman, Watson, & Morris, 1996), absence of depression (Rathvon & Holstrom, 1996), self-esteem, and satisfaction with life (Rose, 2002). In contrast, covert narcissists often feel inferior, insecure, shy, and inhibited; they have little self-confidence and are very sensitive to potential criticism on the part of others. The desire for admiration, “power and grandeur,” which they certainly harbor, remains hidden. Covert narcissism is often negatively related to psychological well-being (Wink, 1991); thus, covert narcissism is correlated with depression (Wink, 1992; Rathvon & Holstrom, 1996), anxiety (Rathvon & Holstrom, 1996), low self-esteem, and low satisfaction with life (Rose, 2002).

What is the relationship among overt and covert narcissism and individualism/collectivism? Research has mostly concentrated on the relationship between overt narcissism and individualism/collectivism. Overt narcissism usually has been found to be more dominant among members of individualist cultures. Euro-American (individualist) students scored as more overt narcissistic than Mexican-American (collectivist) college students (Morales, 1995), and Euro-American (individualist) students scored higher on overt narcissism than Japanese (collectivist) students (Fukunishi, Nakagawa, Nakamura, Li, & Qiu Hua, 1996). In an investigation with a very large sample ($N=3,445$) in several regions of the world, participants from individualist regions reported more overt narcissism than participants from collectivist regions (Foster, *et al.*, 2003). However, more overt narcissism is not always reported among participants from individualist backgrounds. Cheng (2004) found no differences in overt narcissism when comparing Asian undergraduate students, second generation Asian Americans (collectivist), and Euro-Americans (individualist). Overt narcissism was shown to be more dominant in students from the People’s Re-

public of China (collectivist) than in students from the United States (individualist; Fukunishi, *et al.*, 1996). Less is known about the relationship between cultural dimensions and the covert narcissistic spectrum. A study by Cheng (2004) showed that Americans with an Asian background and Asian undergraduate students (who are more collectivist) scored higher on covert narcissism than Americans with a European background (who should be more individualist). In some cases, it was impossible to decide whether the overt or covert narcissistic dimension was involved. Research by Ghorbani, Watson, Krauss, Bing, and Davison (2004), using the Margolis and Thomas Narcissism Scale, reported more narcissism among Iranians (collectivist) than among U.S. citizens (individualist). The Margolis and Thomas Narcissism Scale taps both the overt and covert narcissistic spectrum (Soyer, Rovenpor, Kopelman, Mullins, & Watson, 2001).

The aforementioned research compared the prevalence of overt and covert narcissism, i.e., the average scores on the tests in different cultures. However, the relationship among overt and covert narcissism and either individualism or collectivism can also be studied by looking for cultural differences in the relationship among overt and covert narcissism and other aspects of psychosocial functioning, such as psychological well-being.

What little research has been carried out has yielded no clear results. No cultural differences have been found, for instance, in the relationship between overt narcissism and either self-esteem (Morales, 1995) or Type A behavior (Fukunishi, *et al.*, 1996). A literature search of research on the culturally specific relationship between covert narcissism and psychological well-being yielded no published studies. The above-mentioned comparison between U.S. residents and Iranians (Ghorbani, *et al.*, 2004) does not allow a distinction between overt and covert narcissism since the Margolis and Thomas Narcissism Scale does not distinguish between the two dimensions.

The purpose of this study was to gather more information about the relationship among individualism/collectivism and overt and covert narcissism. The relationship between narcissism and culture was examined in two ways, by investigating the prevalence of overt and covert narcissism in an individualist and a collectivist culture and by investigating the culturally specific relationship among overt and covert narcissism and two aspects of psychological well-being, meaning of life and depression. A Dutch (Western European) and a Polish (Eastern European) sample were compared. According to various cultural psychologists, Poland is a much more collectivist society than The Netherlands (Triandis, 1989; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

As stated above, individualist cultures encourage a stronger focus on the self than collectivist cultures and this focus manifests itself in a more widespread occurrence of narcissism. It was therefore expected that more

overt and covert narcissism would be found in an individualist culture. Therefore, it was expected that overt and covert narcissism scores would be higher in the Dutch sample than in the Polish sample.

Well-being is closely connected to self-focus in individualist cultures, while it is more strongly related to other-focus in collectivist cultures (Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007). Stronger correlations were expected in the individualist culture among overt and covert narcissism and well-being, measured as depression and meaning of life. The direction of these relationships will differ for overt and covert narcissism because overt narcissism is positively related to psychological well-being whereas covert narcissism is negatively related to it (Rose, 2002). For that reason, overt narcissism should have a negative correlation with depression and a positive one with meaning of life, and covert narcissism should have a positive correlation with depression and a negative one with meaning of life.

METHOD

Participants

The Dutch sample comprised 156 students (22 men, 134 women) from the psychology faculty of the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Their average age was 24.5 yr. ($SD = 7.1$). The Polish sample included 167 students (42 men, 125 women) from the psychology and education faculties of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the University of Zielona Góra. Their average age was 21.2 yr. ($SD = 2.2$). All the respondents completed all the questionnaires except the Depression questionnaire, which was completed by 116 of the 156 Dutch respondents.

Measures

Narcissism.—Narcissism was studied using the Dutch Narcissism Scale (Ettema & Zondag, 2002), a measure of subclinical narcissism. The Dutch Narcissism Scale is based on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory developed by Raskin and Hall (1979, 1981) and on Hendin and Cheek's Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Hendin & Cheek, 1997). The Dutch Narcissism Scale comprises two subscales assessing Overt and Covert narcissism. An example of an item from the subscale for Overt narcissism is, "I can easily get others to do what I feel is necessary"; an example from an item from the subscale for Covert narcissism is, "When I enter a room I am often painfully aware of the way others look at me." For both scales, participants responded using a 7-point Likert-type scale with anchors of 1: Certainly not the case to 7: Certainly the case. The Overt narcissism subscale consists of nine items and Covert narcissism 17 items. High scores indicate more narcissism. The validity of the Dutch Narcissism Scale in both subscales was apparent from relations with self-esteem, burnout, and

empathy (Ettema & Zondag, 2002), meaning of life (Zondag, 2005), satisfaction with life and depression (Nauta & Derckx, 2007), and boredom (Zondag, 2007). In the Polish sample, the reliabilities (Cronbach α) for the subscales for Overt and Covert narcissism were .71 and .81, respectively. In the Dutch sample, they were .74 and .82, respectively.

Meaning of life.—Meaning of life was studied using the Life Regard Index (Battista & Almond, 1973; Debats, 1998), comprising two subscales, the Framework scale and the Fulfillment scale. The Framework scale measures whether people have a meaningful perspective for organizing their lives; the Fulfillment scale measures whether they succeed in achieving life goals that are important to them. An example of an item from the Framework scale is, "I have the feeling that I have found an important value worth striving for"; an example of an item from the Fulfillment Scale is, "Life gives me a great deal of satisfaction." For both scales, participants responded using a 7-point Likert-type scale with anchors of 1: Certainly not the case and 7: Certainly the case. Both the Framework scale and the Fulfillment scale consist of six items. High scores indicate the presence of a frame of reference and achieving important life goals. The validity of the Life Regard Index in both subscales was apparent from links with experienced meaningfulness and meaninglessness, anxiousness, life satisfaction, fear of dying, general psychological distress, depression, self-esteem, happiness (Debats, 1998), and overt and covert narcissism (Zondag, 2005; Nauta & Derckx, 2007). In the Polish sample the reliabilities (Cronbach α) for the Framework Scale and the Fulfillment Scale were .73 and .74, respectively. In the Dutch sample, they were .75 and .80, respectively.

Depression.—Finally, depression was studied using the VROPSOM lists (Van Rooijen & Arrindell, 1987; Arrindell & van Rooijen, 1999), which is a Dutch adaptation of the Depression Adjective Check List (Lubin, 1981). The VROPSOM lists come with two subscales, the Euphoria and Dysphoria scales, containing 12 and 22 adjectives, respectively. Examples of adjectives in the Euphoria scale are "healthy" and "cheerful," and examples in the Dysphoria scale include "down-hearted" and "sad." Respondents are asked to indicate for each of the adjectives whether it reflects how they generally feel. The Depression score is calculated by adding the number of checked adjectives on the Dysphoria scale to the number of unchecked adjectives on the Euphoria scale. This sum is then divided by the total number of adjectives on the VROPSOM lists to form a score. The higher the score, the stronger the depressive affect. The VROPSOM lists are a valid indicator of depression, as is also demonstrated by the interrelationships with psychosomatic complaints and phobic reactions, as well as with scores on other depression tests. Also, psychiatric patients score higher on the VROPSOM lists than nonpatients (Hoevenaars & van Son, 1984; Van

TABLE 1
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATION SCORES, AND COHEN *d* FOR
ALL MEASUREMENTS IN POLISH AND DUTCH SAMPLES

Measure	Polish		Dutch		Cohen <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Narcissism					
Overt	4.98	0.75	5.05	0.73	.09
Covert	4.33	0.86	4.07	0.84	-.31
Meaning of life					
Framework	5.54	0.87	5.31	0.85	-.27
Fulfillment	4.92	0.88	5.21	0.91	.33
Depression	0.25	0.12	0.19	0.11	-.52

Note.— Scale for Narcissism and Meaning of life was 1 (low score) to 7 (high score); for Depression 0 (low score) to 1 (high score). For Cohen *d* the Polish respondents were dummy coded as “0” and the Dutch respondents as “1.”

Rooijen & Arrindell, 1987). Relationships have also been observed with well-being (Kienhorst, de Wilde, van den Bout, & Diekstra, 1990), life satisfaction (Arrindell, Heesink, & Feij, 1999), meaning of life, and overt and covert narcissism (Nauta & Derckx, 2007). In the Polish sample, the reliability (Cronbach α) for VROPSOM lists was .79, in the Dutch sample .74.

Dutch-language versions of these measures were used to study the Dutch sample, and Polish translations were used to study the Polish samples. An initial translation into Polish was supplied by one of the authors of this article, a native speaker of Polish who is also fluent in Dutch and has a degree in psychology. This translation was then checked and improved by two other Polish native speakers who are also fluent in Dutch and trained as psychologists. Finally, their Polish version was translated back into Dutch by a Ph.D. in psychology who works as a translator of Polish into Dutch for a European Union agency in Brussels. This reverse-translation proved to be well-nigh identical to the original Dutch version. Prior to the survey, a pilot study was held among Polish respondents in order to check the Polish instruments for comprehensibility in terms of both content and language. The participants in this pilot study did not encounter any significant difficulties.

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of the variables are shown in Table 1. In the case of Overt narcissism, the mean differences between the Dutch and Polish samples were not significant ($p < .05$). The Polish sample scored higher on Covert narcissism than the Dutch sample ($p < .01$). In the Polish sample, the correlation between Overt narcissism and Covert narcissism was $-.13$ (ns) and in the Dutch sample $-.23$ ($p < .01$). The Polish sample also scored higher on Depression ($p < .001$) and Framework ($p < .05$), but lower on Fulfillment ($p < .01$) than the Dutch sample. When

TABLE 2
PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SCORES FOR OVERT AND COVERT NARCISSISM AND FOR
MEANING OF LIFE AND DEPRESSION IN POLISH AND DUTCH SAMPLES.

Scale	Overt		Covert	
	Polish	Dutch	Polish	Dutch
Meaning of life				
Framework	.46†	.35†	-.03	.03
Fulfillment	.45†	.40†	-.26* ^a	-.44† ^a
Depression	-.48†	-.36†	.28† ^a	.48† ^a

^aDifference between samples $p < .05$. * $p < .01$. † $p < .001$.

adjusted for age and sex, there is no change in the correlations between nationality and scores for the various indicators.

The Dutch and Polish correlations among Narcissism on the one side and Meaning of life and Depression on the other side are shown in Table 2. In both the Dutch and Polish populations, Overt narcissism correlates positively with Framework and Fulfillment and negatively with Depression. Overt narcissism correlates more strongly with Framework, Fulfillment, and Depression in Poland than in The Netherlands, but these differences were not significant ($p < .05$ level). As for Covert narcissism, both populations show no correlation with Framework, a negative correlation with Fulfillment and a positive correlation with Depression. Covert narcissism correlates more strongly with Fulfillment and Depression in the Dutch sample than in the Polish one ($p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis was that overt and covert narcissism would be more prevalent in an individualist culture (The Netherlands) and that relationships among overt and covert narcissism and meaning of life and depression would be stronger than in a collectivist culture (Poland). These expectations were based on the idea that a stronger self-focus is more prevalent in individualist cultures. The findings of this study partly support this hypothesis. However, in contrast to what was expected, mean scores on Overt narcissism were not higher in the individualist culture. Contrary to what was expected, mean Covert narcissism scores were higher in the collectivist culture; but as expected there was a stronger relationship among Covert narcissism scores and Meaning of life (Fulfillment) and Depression in the individualist culture.

It is also meaningful to distinguish between the overt and covert dimensions of narcissism in cross-cultural research. The pattern that Rose (2002) found intraculturally within the United States was also observed here, i.e., psychological well-being had a negative relationship with Covert narcissism and a positive relation with Overt narcissism.

Given the changes in nationhood and culture over the past decades, it is interesting to ask whether the differences between The Netherlands and Poland in individualism are as great now as they were in the past. Following the fall of the Berlin wall, Polish culture has evolved quickly, generally in an individualist direction. Students may have been the driving force in this change, since they are often in the vanguard of cultural change. If so, the comparison between an individualist and a collectivist culture will show less contrast than expected. However, this cultural swing is largely taking place in the political rather than the social or cultural spheres, which seem to have an undiminished collectivist slant (Skorowski, 2007). Cultural changes towards individualism remain limited to parts of the culture and it remains to be seen whether such partial change can give rise to changes in the prevalence of personality traits such as overt or covert narcissism. Such changes may not be likely to occur very swiftly. Narcissism develops in close connection with child-raising practices (Horton, Bleau, & Drwecki, 2006), which are unlikely to change in such a short period of time as a result of economic drives towards individualism, and equally unlikely to generate narcissistic personality traits so swiftly. Moreover, psycho-cultural characteristics such as individualism and collectivism are deeply rooted phenomena which can remain more or less constant for centuries, despite political upheaval (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This constancy of cultural difference is also borne out by research into the differences in overt narcissism between students coming from backgrounds with a greater penchant for either individualism or collectivism in the U.S. In studies focused on differences between Americans with an Asian background and those with a European background, students in the U.S. who have long been immersed in a thoroughly individualist culture regularly continue to show marked differences in overt narcissism (Morales, 1995). Such constant differences are not only borne out by research into narcissism, but also into such issues as well-being (Oishi & Diener, 2003), self-uniqueness (Kim & Markus, 1999), and intrinsic motivation (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

Another issue that is relevant to the interpretation of the research results is that of the equivalence of the translated scales. Scales measuring overt and covert narcissism may not have the same meaning for members of a collectivist culture that they have for members of an individualist culture. This is an issue that has not been given any attention in cross-cultural comparative research into narcissism and deserves to be put on the research agenda. The tests designed to study narcissism in an individualist culture can only be validly employed in a collectivist culture if narcissism and its dimensionality is identical in nature in both cultures. This is anything but self-evident. Campbell and Foster (2003) suggest that in collectivist cultures, narcissism may well be more strongly associated with in-

flated perspectives on the community one is a part of than with inflated perspectives of one's own personal qualities. They deem the latter to be more characteristic of narcissism in individualist cultures. Research into the equivalence or nonequivalence of narcissism measures may do well to draw inspiration from the cross-cultural comparative research into life satisfaction done by Vittersø, Røysamb, and Diener (2002).

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