

Relationship between Narcissism and Aggression in Male Bodybuilders

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between narcissism and aggression in male bodybuilders. This research was a descriptive correlational one in which the participants were all Tabrizian male bodybuilders who had regularly attended at least one sustained year and at least two days per week at the gym. The subjects were 161 volunteer athletes with an average age of 24.96 ± 6.528 . The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) Ruskin & Hall (1979) and Ahvaz Aggression Inventory (AAI) Zahedifar (1375) were used to collect the data. Regression analysis was used to analyze data. The results of hypothesis testing show that there is a significant positive relationship between narcissism and each dimension of aggression. In this relationship only self-sufficiency, one component of the adaptive narcissism scale had no significant association with aggression components. Finally, narcissism can be a particularly important factor in the occurrence of aggression in society.

Keywords: aggression, narcissism, male bodybuilder

Without doubt, all human activities can be considered from two physiological and mental aspects and considering the important role of mental aspects of human behavior and activities, the study and evaluation of psychological issues are very important (Jarviss, 1991). Over the past

few decades, personality disorders have provided a source of interest in the study of psychology because they give such strong stability to personality and behavior that continue over time and space (Rosenhan & Seligman, 1995). An example of a personality disorder is the narcissistic personality disorder. In the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSMMD-IV), the criteria for narcissistic personality disorder is characterized as: having a grandiose sense of self, a preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, and ideal love, a belief that one is “special”, a requirement for excessive admiration, a sense of entitlement, a pattern of exploiting others for personal gain, a lack of empathy, a tendency to envy others and a belief that one is envied, and the display of arrogant, haughty behaviors and attitudes (American Psychological Association, 1994). When they are criticized by the indifference of others, and their self-esteem is threatened, narcissists respond with exaggerated anger, shame or vanity (Rosenhan & Seligman, 1995).

Considerable evidence supports the proposition that there are two forms of narcissism (e.g., Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Gabbard, 2009, & PDM Task Force, 2006). These two types are referred to in various ways, often obscuring their meaning and making research less reliable (Miller & Campbell, 2008). In both overt and covert narcissism, self-absorption, and sensitivity to slights constitute dominant characteristics (Luchner, Mirsalimi, Moser, & Jones, 2008; Wink, 1996). So, narcissism may have adaptive aspects (Kohut, 1986) but the components found among bodybuilders’ exhibitionism, self-absorption, self-admiration, and exploitative–entitlement factors of the NPI¹ and lack of empathy (Carroll, 1989) overlap with the diagnostic criteria of narcissistic personality disorder according to the DSM-IV (APA², 1994).

Previous studies have revealed that narcissism can be predictive of various outcomes. For example, the link between narcissism measured by

¹ - Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

² - American Psychological Association (APA)

the NPI and aggression has been extensively documented (Okada, 2010). The term "Aggression" includes a large range of various behaviors, but it is mostly used for violent behaviors such as fighting or quarreling. The majority of psychologists define "aggression" as: a behavior that someone by using it tries to harm others by words or tools (i.e., body organs or instruments) (Allah Gholipour, 1999). Narcissistic people are likely to experience strong emotions and mood swings. On the other hand, narcissistic athletes are the people who admire themselves physically and mentally, see themselves above others, expect continuous appreciation, interest and approval, and expect to meet exclusive interest wherever they go and think that they deserve this superior place. Such intense narcissistic injuries and disappointments in expectations is also often the inevitable reality (Tazegül, 2011).

Although, there has not been any research on perceived narcissism in athletes, swimmers are seen as more extraverted, assertive, and competitive than nonathletes, but just as friendly, bright, and uninhibited (McMartin & Klay, 1983). While the research on measured narcissism in athletes is limited, Carroll (1989) found that bodybuilders scored higher than other athletes who in turn scored higher than nonathletes.

Bushman and Baumeister's (1998) research showed that perceived threat acts as a mediating variable to the relationship between narcissism and aggression in young athletes. Previous studies have also shown that aggression is positively associated with narcissism (Martinez, Zeichner, Reidy & Miller, 2008). Rhodewalt and Morf (1995) found a significant correlation between narcissism and hostility. In a subsequent work, Rhodewalt and Morf showed that, when initial success was followed by failure feedback, narcissists became exceptionally angry, in part because they made internal attributions for the success and then presumably believed that these flattering conclusions about themselves were jeopardized by the subsequent failure. Erol (2010) results indicated that narcissism (maladaptive factor) was the positive predictor of physical aggression, anger and hostility. Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt

& Caspi (2005) measuring narcissism on a sample of undergraduate students also found that narcissism was positively correlated with the total aggression scale and with all of the subscales except hostility. In a study of 75 bodybuilders, anabolic steroid users demonstrated greater somatic concerns, hostility, and aggression than did nonusers (Moss, Panzak, & Tarter, 1992). Male bodybuilders, using anabolic steroids, also reported more frequent, more intense, and lengthier episodes of anger with instances of violence and lack of control than nonusers (Rubinstein, 2003). Houlcroft, Bore & Munro (2012) in their study that examining the relationship between different forms of narcissism and aggression showed when the relationships with the forms of aggression were examined, PNI vulnerable narcissism was most strongly correlated with anger and hostility, whilst PNI grandiose narcissism was most strongly correlated with verbal aggression and physical aggression, and NACE grandiose narcissism was most strongly correlated with verbal aggression, physical aggression, and anger. However, research literature related to this issue is unstable (Locke, 2009). As regards research that has been done on the relationship between narcissism and aggression, there is no research between these variable relationships in athletes, especially male bodybuilding athletes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to answer this question that what link there is between narcissism and aggression in bodybuilders?

Method

Participants

This research is a descriptive–correlational one in which the participants were all Tabrizian male bodybuilders who had been attending regularly at least one sustained year and also two days per week at the gym. The participants of this research were 161 athletes with an average age of 24.96 ± 6.528 who participated voluntarily.

Measures

Demographic characteristics. To collect data about demographic features (age, weight, length, duration of activity, specific disease) questionnaires were distributed among athletes during exercise at the gym.

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Narcissism was assessed using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-40; Raskin & Terry, 1988), which consists of 40 forced choice items. For each item, participants are asked to choose one of two options (e.g., “I am more capable than other people” vs. “There is a lot that I can learn from other people”). The number of narcissistic options that each participant endorses is summed up to produce a total narcissism score, which can therefore range from 0 to 40. The internal consistency of the NPI in the present study was 0.81. The NPI has been used extensively and found to exhibit adequate reliability and validity (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

Ahvaz Aggression Inventory (AAI). The Ahvaz Aggression Inventory (Zahedifar, Najjarian & Shokrkon, 1375) includes 30 items, fourteen of which measure anger, eight measure offensive and insulting factor, and eight measure obstinacy and malice. The test-retest coefficient obtained between participants' scores on two occasions was 0.70. Also its Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.874.

Results

The Pearson correlation coefficients of narcissistic dimensions and aggression are presented in Table 1 for the athletes.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlation of Narcissism Dimensions and Aggression

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1 Authority | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Exhibitionism | .06 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Superiority | -.06 | .20** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 4 Exploitativeness | .11 | .18* | .13 | 1 | | | | | | |
| 5 Entitlement | .10 | .29** | .33** | .32** | 1 | | | | | |
| 6 Self-Sufficiency | .09 | .20** | .08 | .23** | .17* | 1 | | | | |
| 7 Vanity | .08 | .13 | .11 | .15 | .18* | -.04 | 1 | | | |
| 8 Anger | .21** | .23** | .10 | .21** | .32** | .14 | .16* | 1 | | |
| 9 Offensive and Insulting | .09 | .19** | .24** | .23** | .25** | .08 | .21** | .36** | 1 | |
| 10 Obstinacy and Malice | .10 | .21** | .28** | .19** | .24** | .02 | .27** | .39** | .27** | 1 |

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

The results of Table 1 show that the majority of aggression subscales (anger, offensive and insults, obstinacy and malice) are significantly positively correlated with narcissistic dimensions ($p < 0.01$). Since this study aimed at predicting aggression, stepwise regression analysis was used to analyze the data.

Table 2
Summary Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis of Anger on Narcissism Variables

| Variables | R | R ² | B | t | SE | ΔR^2 | F | df |
|-------------|-----|----------------|-----|------|-----|--------------|--------|-------|
| Authority | .46 | .21 | .17 | 2.40 | .72 | .03 | 6.49** | 157,1 |
| Entitlement | .48 | .23 | .17 | 2.17 | .71 | .02 | 4.70* | 156,1 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

As can be seen in Table 2, authority was predicted to be 3 percent and entitlement was predicted at 2 percent of changes in anger. The F ratios show the significant relationships between these variables and anger (Authority: $F = 6.49$, $P < 0.01$ and Entitlement: $F = 4.70$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3
Summary Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis of Offensive on Narcissistic Variables

| Variables | R | R ² | B | t | SE | ΔR^2 | F | df |
|-------------|------|----------------|------|------|------|--------------|-------|-------|
| Superiority | 0.57 | 0.33 | 0.15 | 2.26 | 0.44 | 0.02 | 5.13* | 156,1 |

* $p < 0.05$

As can be seen in Table 3 superiority was predicted at 2 percent of changes in offensiveness and insult. The F ratios show the significant

relationships between this variable and offensiveness and insult (Superiority: $F= 5.13$, $p<0.05$).

Table 4
Summary Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis of Obstnacy and Malice on Narcissistic Variables

| Variables | R | R² | B | t | SE | Δ R² | F | df |
|------------------|----------|----------------------|----------|----------|-----------|------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Vanity | .53 | .29 | .19 | 2.81 | .57 | .04 | 8.88** | 158,1 |
| Superiority | .56 | .31 | .16 | 2.38 | .56 | .02 | 5.68* | 157,1 |

***p<0.01, ** p<0.001**

As can be seen in Table 4 vanity was predicted at 4 percent and superiority was predicted at 2 percent of changes in obstnacy and malice. The F ratios show the significant relationships between these variables and obstnacy and malice (Vanity: $F= 8.88$, $P<0.001$ and Superiority: $F= 5.68$, $p<0.01$).

Discussion

The overall purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between narcissism and aggression in male bodybuilders. The results of hypothetical analysis showed that there is a significant positive relationship between narcissism and each dimension of aggression. So this result supports the prior research findings (Carroll, 1989; Bushman and Baumeister, 1998; Martinez et al, 2008; Donnellan et al, 2005; Erol, 2010; Houlcroft et al, 2012). In this relationship only self-sufficiency, one component of the adaptive narcissism scale, had no significant association with aggression components. These results suggest that people with a grandiose sense of self tend to demand others' attention and they are hypersensitive to others' evaluations. When these people cannot get the desired attention and are negatively evaluated, Tracey and Robbins (2003)

argue that they protect themselves against feelings of inferiority and shame by externalizing blame for their failures, which leads to feelings of hostility and anger towards people (Erol, 2010). Bushman and Baumeister (1998) explained the relationship between narcissism and aggression through the theory of boasting threatened. This theory suggests that aggression is a means to defend themselves against a favorable attitude toward a person who has an attitude that seeks to discredit or destroy. According to this theory, certain people are prompted by their inner self-doubts and self-dislike to lash out against other people, possibly as a way of gaining esteem or simply because they have nothing to lose.

Bodybuilding is a subculture of hyperbole. In its headlong rush to accrue flesh, everything about this subculture exploits grandiosity and excess. Personality traits of bodybuilders were directly investigated a few decades ago. Leithwood (1967), using a 16 factor personality test, found that weightlifters and bodybuilders differed from the general population on the following characteristics: intelligence (more), conscientiousness (less), adventurousness (less), shrewdness (less), and self-sufficiency (more). Another study revealed that bodybuilders and weightlifters using anabolic steroids scored significantly higher on Exhibitionism, Entitlement, and Exploitative factors of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1981) and significantly lower on empathy than their counterparts who did not use steroids. These studies generally agree that bodybuilding and strength building represent an overcompensation for inferiority feelings. Other researchers suggested that pathological narcissism may be a risk factor for both bodybuilding and the initiation of anabolic steroid use (Yates, Perry, Ellingrod, & Uzych, 1996). Studies have shown that the use of anabolic steroids can cause behavioral problems and aggression (Taylor, 2002). All of these findings suggest that aggression should be high among narcissists, particularly when their anger is provoked by criticism or any other esteem threat.

In summary it can be argued that aggressive feelings and reactions may be viewed as adaptive mechanisms to regulate mood, motivation, behavior in narcissistic young bodybuilders. So, it looks as though exposure preventive programs such as life skills training in which special emphasis is placed on awareness building of the positive and negative aspects of an athlete's personality, and also continuous and appropriate training on understanding the risks arising from the use of anabolic steroids will be effective in reducing the formation of behavioral problems. The demanding lifestyle of bodybuilders necessitates a high level of impulse control, the lack of which is included in Raskin and Hall's (1981) NPI, so often used in the study of bodybuilders. The partial support for this research in another culture during another period of time using different methodology is quite impressive. However, the results of the present study suggest that bodybuilders' personality profiles may be much more complicated than presented by the Leithwood (1967) study. Comparative studies of bodybuilders using nontrainee control groups and updated measures of personality and mental health measures are therefore needed. It also seems that offering continuous training and proper orientation of the extreme dangers arising from the use of anabolic steroids and also design and delivery of appropriate strategies to achieve athletic goals and fitness can be very useful. There are some limitations to the present research: First, reliance on self-report measures might be considered a limitation; second just by taking a sample of male bodybuilders' reduced the sample size and although these were sufficient for analyses, it is recognized that larger numbers (inclusion of women bodybuilders) would enhance statistical power. A recognized limitation of the descriptive–correlational nature of this study is the restriction of descriptive findings; therefore, determining causal relationships is not possible. However, this exploratory study has provided some interesting relationships that increased current understandings of self-presentation processes in exercise and the role of narcissism within these processes. Further, research is

needed to attend to the limitations discussed and examine the research questions concerning narcissism and aggression in male bodybuilders that have been identified for future inquiry.

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