

Narcissism And Forgiveness: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

Narcissism and forgiveness are two important psychological constructs that have received significant attention in the literature. Narcissism refers to a personality trait characterized by grandiosity, high self-importance, and a lack of empathy, while forgiveness is a complex process that involves letting go of negative feelings and emotions towards oneself or others. Despite their importance, the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness remains poorly understood. The present study reviewed the available literature in the field of narcissism and forgiveness and proposed a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness, and the potential mediating and moderating variables that may impact this relationship. It has become evident that the ability to forgive is impacted by a range of factors, including self-esteem, gratitude, repentance, and relationship closeness. Narcissism, which is characterized by feelings of entitlement, superiority, and lack of empathy, can make it difficult for individuals to forgive others who have wronged them. However, by understanding the mediating and moderating variables that impact this relationship, it may be possible to develop interventions that can increase forgiveness in individuals with high levels of narcissism.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Grandiosity, Gratitude, Narcissism, Repentance.*

Introduction

Narcissism and forgiveness are two important psychological constructs that have received significant attention in the literature. Narcissism is a personality trait that is characterized by grandiosity, self-importance, a sense of entitlement, and a lack of empathy towards others. On the other hand, forgiveness is a complex process that involves letting go of negative emotions and feelings towards oneself or others and may be associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as improved mental health and well-being, and better interpersonal relationships. The decision to forgive the situation or act is associated with happiness and satisfaction (Deurkar et al. 2021). Contrary, unforgiveness is a similar complex psychological construct represented by cold emotions and rumination (Singh et al. 2022b). It leads the individual to negative emotional experiences such as loneliness, guilt, fear, decreased self-worth, and feelings of betrayal (Singh et al. 2022c, 2023b).

Despite their importance, the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness remains poorly understood. Theoretical frameworks that have been proposed to explain the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness vary in their conceptualization of these constructs and their underlying mechanisms. Some researchers have proposed that narcissism is negatively associated with forgiveness because narcissists may prioritize their own needs and desires over those of others, and may struggle to empathize with the pain and suffering of others (Fatfouta et al., 2015). Others have suggested that narcissists may be more forgiving because they have a heightened sense of self-esteem and can therefore more easily forgive others without feeling that their own self-worth has been threatened (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). The tendency to forgive or not to forgive is also linked with personality traits such as narcissism and triguna personality dimensions (Singh et al. 2022a, 2023a).

To address this gap in the literature, this conceptual paper aims to present a framework for understanding the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness. By reviewing the existing literature, presenting a conceptual framework that integrates different theoretical perspectives, and discussing the implications of this framework for future research and

practice, this paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of this complex relationship. Specifically, this paper proposes that the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness is mediated by several psychological mechanisms, including self-esteem, empathy, shame, and guilt. This framework has important implications for research and practice, as it can help to identify the factors that influence forgiveness and inform the development of interventions to promote forgiveness in individuals who struggle with this process.

Review of Literature

The relationship between narcissism and forgiveness has been the subject of considerable research in the psychological literature. While some studies suggest that narcissism is negatively associated with forgiveness, other studies propose that narcissists may be more forgiving than non-narcissists due to their ability to maintain positive self-regard.

One of the earliest studies to investigate the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness was conducted by Campbell et al. (2004), who found that individuals with high levels of narcissism were less likely to forgive others for their transgressions. This finding was replicated by other researchers, including (Exline & Baumeister, 2000a) and (Strelan & Covic, 2006), who also found that narcissism was negatively associated with forgiveness.

However, some researchers have challenged the idea that narcissists are inherently less forgiving than others. For example, Rose et al. (2001) found that individuals with high levels of narcissism were more likely to forgive transgressions committed by a romantic partner, possibly because forgiving can help them maintain positive self-regard. Similarly, Krizan & Johar. (2012) found that individuals who scored high on measures of vulnerable narcissism (i.e., those who were highly sensitive to criticism and prone to feelings of shame) were more forgiving than those who scored high on measures of grandiose narcissism (i.e., those who were highly confident and entitled).

Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness. One perspective suggests that narcissism is negatively associated with forgiveness because narcissists may prioritize their own needs and desires over those of others, and may struggle to empathize with the pain and suffering of others (Campbell et al., 2004; Strelan & Sutton, 2013). Another perspective suggests that narcissists may be more forgiving because they have a heightened sense of self-esteem and can therefore more easily forgive others without feeling that their own self-worth has been threatened (Krizan & Johar, 2012; Rose et al., 2001).

Several studies have also suggested that specific aspects of narcissism may be related to forgiveness. For example, (Kaczkurkin et al., 2017) found that the narcissistic trait of exploitativeness was negatively associated with forgiveness, whereas the trait of entitlement was not significantly related to forgiveness. Similarly, Lambert et al. (2009) found that grandiose narcissism was negatively associated with forgiveness, whereas vulnerable narcissism was positively associated with forgiveness.

Overall, the literature on the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness is complex and multifaceted. While some studies suggest that narcissism is negatively associated with forgiveness, others propose that the relationship is more nuanced and depends on the specific aspects of narcissism being considered. Thus, it is proposed that a conceptual framework that integrates these different theoretical perspectives and mechanisms can help to shed light on this relationship and guide future research in this area.

Proposed conceptual model illustrating the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness:

Based on the literature review, we propose a conceptual model to illustrate the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness. This model highlights the possible mediating factors that could explain the relationship between the two constructs.

The proposed conceptual model suggests that there is a negative relationship between narcissism and forgiveness. Individuals with high levels of narcissism may struggle to forgive others due to their inflated self-views and lack of empathy. However, several mediating factors can influence this relationship:

Self-esteem: Self-esteem is proposed as a mediator between narcissism and forgiveness. Individuals with high levels of self-esteem tend to have positive self-views and are less likely to feel threatened by others, which may increase their ability to forgive (Hyatt et al., 2018). On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem may be more prone to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which may exacerbate their negative emotions and decrease their ability to forgive (Eaton et al., 2006).

Gratitude: Gratitude is proposed as another mediator between narcissism and forgiveness. Research has shown that gratitude can have a positive impact on narcissism and entitlement, leading to an increase in the ability to forgive others (Lambert et al., 2009). Grateful individuals may be less likely to feel entitled or hostile toward others and may be more willing to forgive those who have wronged them.

Repentance: The model also includes repentance, which refers to the actions taken by the offender to express remorse and seek forgiveness, as a mediating variable. Research suggests that repentance can have a positive impact on the ability of the victim to forgive the offender. Repentance can be seen as a mediator between narcissism and forgiveness (Exline & Baumeister, 2000), as narcissistic individuals may be less likely to forgive others who do not apologize or show remorse.

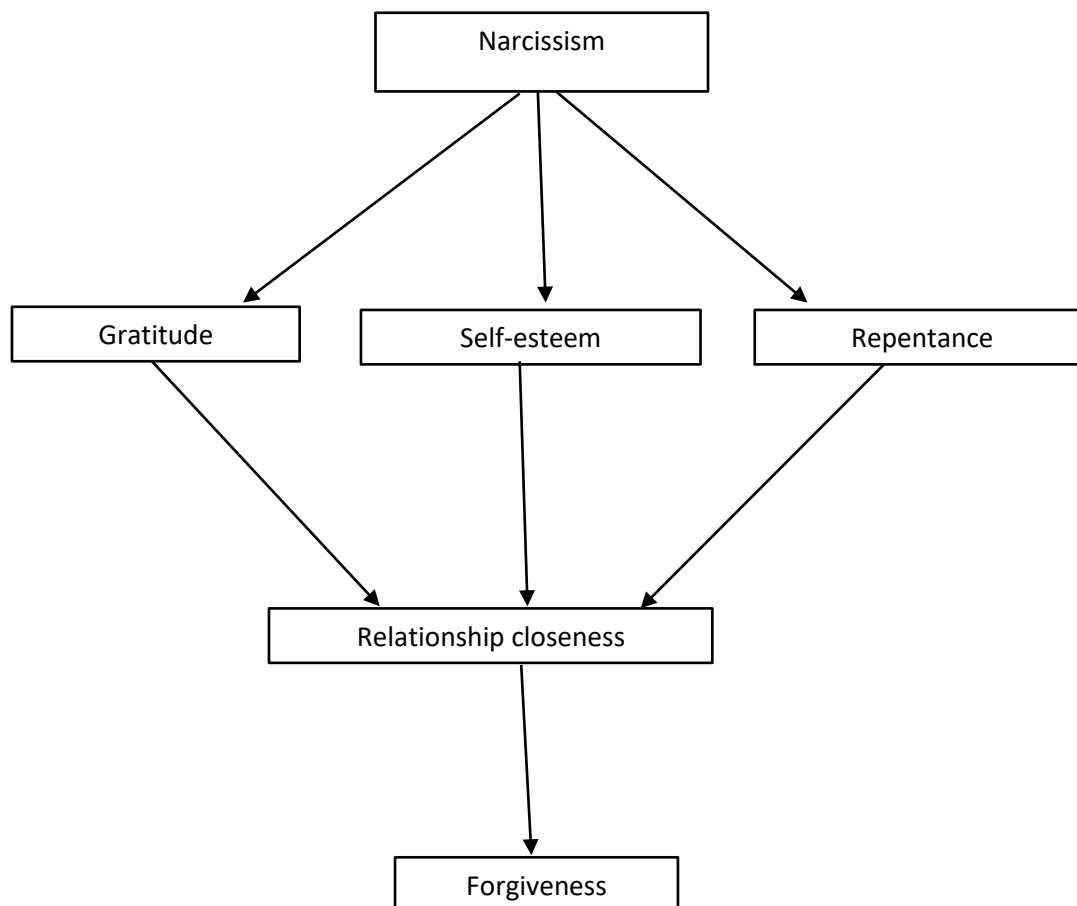


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model illustrating the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness.

Relationship closeness: Another variable affecting the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness is relationship closeness, the degree of emotional and psychological connection between the victim and the offender. Research suggests that forgiveness is more likely to occur in close relationships, as individuals may be more motivated to preserve the relationship and work toward reconciliation. Relationship closeness can be seen as a moderator of the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness, as the impact of narcissism on forgiveness may vary depending on the closeness of the relationship (Tsang et al., 2006).

Narcissism and Forgiveness:

Research has shown that individuals with high levels of narcissism may have difficulty forgiving others (Fatfouta et al., 2015). Narcissistic individuals tend to have inflated self-views, which can lead to feelings of entitlement, hostility, and a lack of empathy towards others. These traits can make it difficult for narcissistic individuals to forgive others who have wronged them, as they may perceive forgiveness as a sign of weakness or as an affront to their sense of superiority. This is consistent with the first part of the proposed model, which suggests a negative relationship between narcissism and forgiveness.

Self-esteem and Forgiveness:

Self-esteem is proposed as a mediator between narcissism and forgiveness in the model. This is supported by research that suggests that individuals with high levels of self-esteem tend to have positive self-views and are less likely to feel threatened by others, which may increase their ability to forgive (Hyatt et al., 2018). On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem may be more prone to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which may exacerbate their negative

emotions and decrease their ability to forgive (Eaton et al., 2006). This is consistent with the second part of the proposed model, which suggests that self-esteem can increase forgiveness.

Gratitude and Forgiveness:

Gratitude is proposed as another mediator between narcissism and forgiveness. Research has shown that gratitude can have a positive impact on narcissism and entitlement, leading to an increase in the ability to forgive others (Lambert et al., 2009). Grateful individuals may be less likely to feel entitled or hostile towards others and may be more willing to forgive those who have wronged them. This is consistent with the third part of the proposed model, which suggests that gratitude can increase forgiveness.

Repentance and Forgiveness:

Repentance is proposed as a mediator between narcissism and forgiveness in the present model. Research suggests that repentance can have a positive impact on the ability of the victim to forgive the offender. Repentance can be seen as a mediator between narcissism and forgiveness, as narcissistic individuals may be less likely to forgive others who do not apologize or show remorse (Exline & Baumeister, 2000). This is consistent with the fourth part of the proposed model, which suggests that repentance can increase forgiveness.

Relationship Closeness and Forgiveness:

Relationship closeness is proposed as a moderator of the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness in the model. Research suggests that forgiveness is more likely to occur in close relationships, as individuals may be more motivated to preserve the relationship and work towards reconciliation (Tsang et al., 2006). Relationship closeness can be seen as a moderator of the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness, as the impact of narcissism on forgiveness may vary depending on the closeness of the relationship. This is consistent with the final part of the proposed model, which suggests that relationship closeness can impact the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness.

Overall, the proposed model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness, and the potential mediating and moderating variables that may impact this relationship. It is important to note that the proposed model is not exhaustive and there may be other variables that impact this relationship, which future research could explore. Nevertheless, the proposed model provides a useful starting point for future research in this area.

Conclusion

The relationship between narcissism and forgiveness is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Through the literature review and proposed model, it has become evident that a range of factors, including self-esteem, gratitude, repentance, and relationship closeness impact the ability to forgive. Narcissism, which is characterized by feelings of entitlement, superiority, and lack of empathy, can make it difficult for individuals to forgive others who have wronged them. However, by understanding the mediating and moderating variables that impact this relationship, it may be possible to develop interventions that can increase forgiveness in individuals with high levels of narcissism.

Limitations

Although, the present study presents an exclusive model of the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness and helps understand the factors affecting the relationship, the proposed model is limited by the fact that it is based on existing research, which may have limitations in terms of sample size, methodology, and generalizability. Furthermore, the proposed model does not account for all potential variables that may impact the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness. Therefore, future research is needed to explore other variables and factors that may impact this relationship.

Future Directions

Future research could focus on developing and testing interventions that increase forgiveness in individuals with high levels of narcissism. This could involve interventions that promote self-esteem, gratitude, and repentance, as well as interventions that increase relationship closeness. In addition, future research could explore the impact of cultural and social factors on the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness, as these factors may impact the way in which individuals perceive forgiveness and how they respond to situations in which forgiveness is needed. Finally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to better understand how the relationship between narcissism and forgiveness changes over time, and how interventions may impact this relationship.

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