

Narcissism and wellbeing in midlife and beyond

Alan Piper (Economics Department, University of Leeds, UK)

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Abstract:

Lauded psychotherapist and narcissism expert Otto Kernberg claimed that midlife crises were almost solely a narcissistic phenomenon. This article, in part, takes this claim as inspiration and investigates the relationship between grandiose narcissism and wellbeing. Importantly, and following previous research, this work considers grandiose narcissism in two distinct ways: an agentic admiration aspect (example statement: “Being a special person gives me strength”) and an antagonistic rivalry aspect (“Most people are basically losers”). The results, obtained from an assessment of life satisfaction with a large nationally representative dataset, offer support to the previous small and largely homogenous sample investigations regarding wellbeing and narcissism. The agentic aspect of grandiose narcissism being positive for wellbeing and the antagonistic aspect negative. Additionally, the results highlight the possibility that the midlife low is substantially deeper (shallower) and longer (shorter) for those who exhibit the rivalry (admiration) aspect of grandiose narcissism. Of particular note and novelty is the longitudinal evidence that suggests males who exhibit the rivalry trait in older age experience almost no recovery from the common midlife low. This is a result that aligns well with several discussed theories.

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