



Facebook Me: Narcissism, Social Media, and Infidelity

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Introduction

Current research demonstrates that highly narcissistic individuals are more likely to use social media sites such as Facebook.com and have profile photos that tend to be self-promoting (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Additionally, compared to those who score low on narcissism, highly narcissistic individuals are more likely to commit acts of infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Social media sites have opened new avenues for individuals in terms of both narcissism and infidelity. Sites such as Facebook.com have enabled individuals to promote themselves on an international stage, and be able to seek out romantic relationships without geographic boundaries. In this study, we sought to examine how narcissism relates to social media usage, as well as infidelity.

Research Questions

- 1) Do individuals who score high on the trait of narcissism spend more time using social media sites compared to individuals who score low on this trait?
- 2) Do individuals who score high on narcissism use social media sites to connect with extradyadic partners, including former partners?

Method

Target Population: Individuals who were 18 years and older and currently involved in a couple relationship

Recruitment: Web sites (e.g., Craigslist.org) and university students who received extra credit for their participation

Online surveys:

- Narcissism (Narcissistic Personality Inventory [NPI]; Raskin & Terry, 1988)
- Questions to assess social media usage (e.g., “Do you use social networking web sites such as Facebook?”; “On average, how many hours per day do you spend using social networking web sites?”; written by the researchers)
- Infidelity (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999)
- Demographic characteristics

Participants

- 884 women, 155 men
- Mean age = 25 years (SD = 8.14 yrs.; Range = 18 – 67 yrs.)
- 45% Hispanic American/Latino
- 38% European/White
- 11% African American/Black
- 8% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander
- 91% Heterosexual
- 77% Christian
- Living in regions across the U.S.

Results

Do individuals who score high on the trait of narcissism spend more time using social media sites and report higher rates of infidelity compared to individuals who score low on this trait?

<u>Dependent Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
Time spent online	.012	.006	.074*
Infidelity	.488	.118	.146**
Using social networks to search for potential romantic partners	.000	.001	-.003
Using social networks to reconnect with former relationships	.009	.002	.158**

**p < 0.01 *p < 0.05

Adjusted R² for 4 regression analyses = .039**, .051*, .093**, .049

Interpretation of Results

NOTE: Hierarchical regression analyses were used in which narcissism was examined as a predictor, controlling for the other three outcome variables; only part correlations were analyzed.

Time spent online: Narcissism had a positive linear relationship with time spent online (on social media sites). That is, for every one unit increase in the NPI score, we would predict that the time spent online would increase by .012 units.

Infidelity: Narcissism had a positive linear relationship with infidelity. That is, for every one unit increase in the NPI score, we would predict that the infidelity score would increase by .488 units.

Searching for potential romantic partners: There was no linear relationship between the total NPI score and using social media sites to search for potential romantic partners.

Reconnecting with former relationships: Narcissism had a positive linear relationship with reports of using social media sites to reconnect with former partners. That is, for every one unit increase in the NPI score, we would predict that reports of using social media sites to reconnect with former partners would increase by .009 units.

Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, social networking sites have provided a platform for self-promotion and romantic connections. We found a positive relationship between narcissism and time spent online, infidelity, and using social media sites to reconnect with former partners. However, narcissism alone did not account for individuals' use of social media sites for locating new romantic partners.

Most social media sites are organized to encourage (re)connecting with current or former relationships, not forming new ones. This format is particularly suited to the needs of narcissistic individuals, who prefer to connect with familiar others who can provide them with the praise and attention they seek (Campbell et al., 2001). Narcissists are also more inclined to reconnect with previous partners, with whom they were once successful in exploiting (Emmons, 1987). Their desire to be on display and envied by others (Buss & Chiodo, 1991) may motivate them to show, through these sites, how much former partners are “missing out” on the current life of the narcissist.

Clinicians can use this information to help highly narcissistic clients who struggle with attention to alternative partners and infidelity or to help the “victims” of narcissistic relationships transition back into healthy, fulfilling ones. Additionally, this information can provide a warning to those who are in relationships with a narcissistic individual or may become involved with one. The threat of connecting with former romantic partners, and committing acts of infidelity, is particularly high for narcissistic individuals.

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