

How do I Love Me? New Study Presents a Twist on the Conventional Narcissist.

February 27, 2007

A brush with a narcissist's inflated ego often leaves one reeling with resentment. Whether it is their constant need for attention or their unfounded sense of entitlement, we are often quick to attribute their shallow behavior to an unconscious self-loathing. However, new research from Keith Campbell at the University of Georgia, Jennifer Bosson at the University of South Florida and colleagues suggests that narcissists actually view themselves the same on the outside as on the inside.

Previous studies have shown that narcissists' conscious self-views are not uniformly positive. Narcissists see themselves as being above average in areas such as status, dominance and intelligence (what are referred to as agentic domains), but not in areas such as kindness, morality, and emotional intimacy (what are referred to as communal domains).

Following that line of thought, the researchers in this study tested the link between narcissism and unconscious self-views in these agentic and communal domains. Conventional wisdom suggests that narcissism would have negative self-views. In other words, narcissists' should unconsciously dislike themselves equally from their intelligence to their level of intimacy in relationships. Narcissists, however, had positive unconscious self-views on the agentic (but not communal) domains.

Campbell, Bosson and colleagues used an Implicit Association Test to assess the participant's underlying views on their self-esteem. Essentially, the test works by recording reaction times to computer-based word associations and relies on the notion that the participants are not aware that their self-esteem is being assessed while they are taking the test. This test was tailored to measure narcissism as it relates to agency, communion, and self-esteem.

The results, which appear in the March issue of *Psychological Science*, show that narcissists do not uniformly dislike themselves "deep down inside." Rather, narcissists reported positive unconscious self-views in agentic domains and not in communal areas. This study provides new evidence that narcissists exhibit a somewhat imbalanced self at both conscious and unconscious levels.