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Review of the Dissertation by Artur Sawicki

Agency-Communion Model of Narcissism in the Context of Romantic Relationships

The dissertation by Artur Sawicki entitled „Agency-Communion Model of Narcissism in the Context of Romantic Relationships" investigates the role of different forms of narcissism on relationship quality in couple relationships. Across a total of 7 studies, comprising data from cross-sectional self-reports, partner reports, longitudinal data, and a laboratory study with couples and building on the recently developed Circumplex Model of Narcissism (CMN; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2019) the author of this dissertation sets out to investigate the implications of different forms of narcissism for relationship functioning. At the outset of the thesis, a very thorough introduction into different narcissism models including their history and interconnections is presented. In the empirical part of the dissertation, a host of sophisticated analytical techniques such as latent profile analyses, actor partner interdependence models, and latent growth curve modelling are employed. In the concluding chapter findings are discussed in light of the three key research problems that had guided the overall project.

Let me begin with saying that there is very much to like about the current dissertation. By clearly situating the project within the context of the Circumplex Model of Narcissism and putting an emphasis on communal forms of narcissism as well as the distinction between avoidant and antagonistic forms of self-protection, the current thesis clearly explores unchartered territory. The questions asked are novel and address an important gap in the literature. In the introductory part of the thesis, the author does an impressive job in reviewing the different narcissism models proposed over the years, while clearly carving out where these models diverge, linking them to other relevant areas of psychology (such as attachment theory) and then integrating them into an overarching framework. Over the course of the thesis, the author has collected an extraordinarily large amount of research data, and the analyses are carried out competently.

Despite this praise, I do have some questions and remarks for the author of the dissertation. In the following, let me outline these, in the hope of stimulating a nice discussion during the defence and perhaps injecting some further thoughts into this fascinating line of research. The first set of comments broadly revolves around making the research as open and transparent as possible; the second set of comments is concerned with aspects of the dyadic studies that may merit further reflection.

First, while the author of the present dissertation should be commended for the concise summary of the methods provided at the outset of the thesis, on several occasions I found myself wondering about the exact details of the methodology. To provide an example, throughout the thesis, a lot of emphasis is placed on the communal aspects of sanctity and saviourism (occasionally, the term "heroism" is used as well). On p. 63, one example item is

provided for each of those dimensions. Yet the reference list does not contain the 2023 paper that is listed in the main text and I was unable to track down the entire questionnaire. At first glance, this might appear like a minor detail. But given that there are some controversies around whether we should include communal aspects in the narcissistic personality construct at all and that differentiating the communal dimensions also appeared to be an issue in the present work this strikes me as a missed opportunity. To propel the field forward, it would be vital for experts to further think through these constructs; yet a prerequisite for this would be to make it easy enough for recipients of the research to inspect the content of those scales.

Similarly, while the analyses employed in the current thesis seem impressive, I was occasionally missing detail here. For instance, while I found the latent profile analyses very informative, for the reader, more detail could have been provided. E.g., readers may wonder what it means if the scores depicted in Figure 13 "are not manifested" as opposed to the observed scores presented in Table 5. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to know how the ns reported in Table 5 come about – that is, the reader would want to know what the criterion was for assigning someone to a specific class. This information would also make the 263 observations "not assigned to any profile" (table note) less of a mystery. Put differently, for a reader who is not a regular user of LPAs, it would be vital to provide details such that participants are assigned their profile memberships based on the highest probability. For readers who are more familiar with or even experts in LPAs, it would further have been helpful if the respective analysis code had been provided (e.g., in an OSF project).

The latter point leads me to another question that I had: The data seem to have been collected over an extended period, and while most of the hypotheses seem well thought through, I was not always sure if I could understand them as a-priori predictions. Looking ahead to the eventual publication of the findings in the form of journal articles, if there is a preregistration or protocol available detailing on those predictions, I would recommend to make this available. The same is true for the materials for the different data collections (items, instructions), the analysis code and (where possible) the data itself. While sharing of materials would allow replication and extension of the current work, I believe that the data on which the current thesis is based could be become a highly valuable resource for the field in itself: It would allow others to specify and test alternative models, making it possible to learn from the data and holding the potential to crucially inform future work on the conceptualisation of narcissism.

To sum up, while I believe that the current work and the data of this project have great potential to advance the field of narcissism research, whether it will or not will likely depend on the degree of transparency and openness achieved upon publication of the work.

Second, with respect to the dyadic studies, the results attained (or not attained) regarding homophily deserve further reflection. The question of whether people who are narcissistic tend to be with partners who are also high on this trait is a classical yet interesting one. In the literature, there is some evidence for homophily in narcissism, even though it is typically small (e.g. Lavner et al., 2017) and not always consistent across different narcissism dimensions (Lamkin et al., 2015). The within-couple correlations for the different narcissism dimensions in this dissertation align well with this pattern. Of note, there is a parallel literature on similarity in Big Five traits in romantic partners (and friends), often finding no or only very small within-couple associations. Some years ago, these findings have been called into question by studies suggesting that these absent or very low within-couple associations might at least partially be attributed to reference group effects. That is, when people are asked what they are like, they naturally end up comparing themselves to those around them. Now when thinking about data

that was gathered as part of couple study, it is very plausible that one of the strongest points of reference when answering questions about what you are like would be your own partner. Crucially, this mental contrasting with the significant other might push apart partners' personality scores. It could be speculated that something similar might be going on for the different narcissism dimensions here, potentially leading to an underestimation of homophily effects. I would be curious to hear the author's thoughts on this possibility and potential ways to prevent this (other than letting a close other rate both partners, which might lead to a similar contrast effect). Given that for the profile assignment, partner homophily seemed to be apparent for at least the agentic and communal narcissism profiles (of note, I missed a formal statistical test here), I would also be interested to hear what the author thinks about the potential implications of such reference group effects for profile homophily.

Finally, while I liked the idea to conclude the thesis with a couple study conducted in the lab, the last study of the thesis struck me as the least informative. One reason for this – and I believe the author of the current dissertation is well aware of it – is the relatively small sample size. With 50 couples only (and operating within a frequentist framework), it is very unclear what to make or not make of the absence of effects. Observational research on couples is very resource intensive. Unfortunately, there is not much that can be done about it except for trying to get more funding to run samples sizes that allow for more informative analyses. Given the current project's embedding in the Circumplex Model of Narcissism with its emphasis on more agentic/assertive vs. more withdrawn/avoidant forms of narcissism, the decision to code for positive and negative emotional communication only – that is, valence – did also not strike me as optimal. Coding schemes that not only take into count valence (positive-negative or cooperation-conflict, respectively) but also capture how direct vs. indirect the communication is (e.g., Overall et al., 2009; Overall & McNulty, 2017) might be more suitable and could provide intriguing insights into the relational implications of the different narcissism forms. If the author (or their team) were to do a similar study again in the future, I would recommend to significantly increase the sample size and go with a more informative coding scheme. Potentially, the video recordings of the current couple study can be used to ascertain the coding scheme's suitability before running another such labour- and resource intensive study.

These few critical comments should not distract from the fact that the author delivered an insightful, creative, and methodologically sound dissertation. I am convinced that the current studies and the attained results will make a very valuable contribution to this research area. Together with the impressive amount of data gathered within this dissertation, they have the potential to crucially inform ongoing debates in the field.

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Artur Sawicki's doctoral thesis meets the conditions arising from the Act on academic degrees and academic titles specified in Art. 187 of the Act of 20 July 2018 Law on higher education and science (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 1688).