

## Narcissism and Moral Identity: A Study of Undergraduate Learners

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### ABSTRACT

*Narcissism and moral identity are crucial components in shaping attitudes and personalities. The current study explored the relationship between narcissism and moral identity among Undergraduate students. A cross-sectional study design was used to collect data from Undergraduate students. Data were collected from various departments of the Government Postgraduate College for Boys and the University of Haripur using a purposive convenient sampling technique. The sample consisted of 300 students, including both male and female participants from the first and eighth semesters. Two reliable instruments were used: the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 and the Moral Identity Questionnaire. The main findings of the study revealed a significant negative correlation between moral identity and narcissism. Results showed that female students scored higher on moral identity and lower on narcissism compared to male students. Additionally, eighth-semester's students scored significantly higher on moral identity and lower on narcissism than first-semester students. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of organizing programs and seminars aimed at enhancing students' moral identity and reducing narcissistic behaviors. In this way, students can better internalize moral values and engage in positive actions, contributing to the development of a more civilized society.*

**Keywords:** Undergraduate students, Moral Identity, Moral Values, Haripur, Narcissism

### INTRODUCTION

Individual identity of students and their attitudes towards each other's affect their lives and society. According to Aquino & Reed (2002) moral identity is characterized by a self-concept centered on a collection of moral attributes. It involves a commitment, consistent with one's sense of self, to engaging in actions that safeguard and promote the well-being of others, as outlined by Hart et al. (1998).

### Moral Values

Moral values are an integral part of what makes us human. They serve as norms that help a person choose right from wrong. Therefore, moral identity holds significant importance in its

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potential to anticipate moral judgments, intentions, and ethical behaviors (Trevino et al., 2011). In earlier times, moral values and maxims were prevalent among the most teenagers. Most young people at that time acquired qualities such as respect, integrity, courtesy, uprightness, and possessed sufficient self-discipline to adhere to these values. However, over the years, there has been a decline in these moral maxims and self-discipline among younger generations, as many are increasingly disregarding these moral values.

### **Narcissism**

Narcissism simply means extreme self-love and desire to be acknowledged. Narcissism is a personality trait marked by a sense of inflated self-image and expect privileged treatment (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). They are preoccupied with getting attention, expect exceptional treatment from others, disrespect others' rights, and are unable to take the viewpoint of others. Basically, those high in narcissism display a persistent pattern of grandiosity, self-centered, and self-importance (Millon & Davis, 1996).

### **Self-Identity Theory**

In the context of moral identity, self-identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that people integrate moral traits like honesty and compassion adding up to their self-concept when these values are affirmed by important social groups. A strong moral identity is thus linked to a stable and prosocial self-view. In contrast, narcissistic individuals mainly focused on self-definition often prioritize their identity on superficial or externally validated attributes (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), which highlight conflict with the humility and empathy required for moral identity development.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

It emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as important psychological needs for wellbeing and personal growth. When these needs are met, individuals are more likely to internalize societal norms and moral values into their self-concept if met these needs which in turn leads to a stronger moral identity (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Recent studies have shown that adolescents exhibiting narcissistic traits tend to maintain an inflated yet insecure self-concept, experience difficulty in regulating their self-esteem, and depend heavily on external validation to reinforce their sense of worth. At the heart of narcissism lies the illusion of being superior to one's actual self. Alarming, there is a growing trend of narcissistic students, with many exhibiting symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Dr. Twenge (2006) found that this phenomenon is particularly prevalent among college students, who are more likely to display narcissistic traits than other age groups.

Zuo et al. (2016) investigated The Dark Triad traits including narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy assuming to link with poor personal morality. Chopik and

Grimm (2019) conducted a study involving nearly 750 individuals to examine the trajectory of narcissism from age 13 to 70. The research findings demonstrated that traits commonly associated with narcissism such as self-love, grandiosity, and assertiveness decline gradually over time and with advancing age. Ruegger and King (1992) aimed to determine if a person's view of appropriate ethical behavior was influenced by their age and gender. The findings indicated that gender significantly influences ethical perceptions, with women generally holding higher moral standards than men. Additionally, the results imply that age also influences moral judgments.

Students are the important assets for any nation. In today's competitive and fast-paced world, students can be enrolled in different behaviours that can positively or negatively affect their lives. Behaviorally, because of weak self-esteem, narcissists tend to react with anger, shame, or humiliation when their self-image is in danger (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), and they are more likely to blame situational factors when they do not achieve something. Narcissism are associated with problematic outcomes in social, professional, and interpersonal domains. Narcissism centers on self enhancement and external validation whereas moral identity emphasizes internalized ethical values highlighting a potential area of conflict between the two constructs.

Moral identity help to build a positive character with traits such as respect, kindness compassion, and humbleness. Without moral identity, we will have an ego-driven world, devoid of morality, and full of self-centered behavior. Moral identity plays a significant role in lives of students.

Current study explores the relationship between narcissism and moral identity among Undergraduate students and their comparison on demographic variables (gender, age and educational level etc.

## **Objectives**

1. To investigate the relationship of narcissism and moral identity in Undergraduate students.
2. To compare the level of narcissism and moral identity in Undergraduate students in gender.
3. To compare the level of narcissism and moral identity in Undergraduate students in educational level.

## **Hypotheses**

**H 1:** There will be significant relationship between narcissism and moral identity among Undergraduate students.

**H 2:** Males and females will be significantly different on their narcissism.

**H 3:** There will be significant gender difference in moral identity.

**H 4:** Last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students will significantly score higher on moral identity as compared to first (1<sup>st</sup>) semester students.

**H 5:** First semester students will significantly score higher on narcissism than last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In current study cross sectional survey design is employed to gather data from Undergraduate students for measuring the relationship of narcissism and moral identity.

### Sample

Sample of 300 students from University of Haripur and Government Postgraduate College for Boys Pania were requested to answer the self-administered questionnaire that measures narcissism and moral identity by using convenient sampling. The participants are selected with the age range of 19-25 years old. The study involves students of BS both males and females from first (1<sup>st</sup>) semester to last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester.

### Instruments

#### *Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (Ames et al., 2006)*

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (NPI-16) is a condensed version of the NPI-40, designed for assessing narcissism and was developed by Daniel Ames, Paul Rose, and Anderson in 2006. The confirmed remarkable internal consistency and stability of the scale is .72. It has 16 paired items, consists of 2 responses.

#### *Moral Identity Questionnaire (Black & Reynolds, 2016)*

The Moral Identity Questionnaire (MIQ) was developed by Black and Reynolds in 2016 as a tool for assessing moral identity, the confirmed remarkable internal consistency and stability of the scale is .87. It consists of 20 items, each offering 6 response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

A demographic questionnaire is also used to gather information about demographic characteristics (age and gender etc.).

### Procedure

The procedure commenced with obtaining approval for the research topic, followed by data collection. Permission was taken from authorities of universities and colleges. Research briefing and rapport building took place before receiving informed consent, then undergraduate students who volunteered were invited to complete the questionnaires according to the instructions provided by researcher. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential

and would only be used for research purposes. Upon collection of the data, it was subjected to analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1**

*Demographic Statistics of Students (N=300)*

Characteristics of Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Males	150	50.0
Females	150	50.0
Educational Level		
First semester	150	50.0
Eight semester	150	50.0

Table 1 shows the distribution and percentage of a sample on the basis of demographics (gender and educational level). Females ( $n = 150$ , 50.0%) and males ( $n = 150$ , 50.0%) are equal in number. Participants from first semester ( $n = 150$ , 50.0%) and participants from eight semester ( $n = 150$ , 50.0%) both are equal in number.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for Study Variables*

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Moral Identity	300	89.31	11.59	-	-
2. Narcissism	300	6.62	2.30	-.74***	-

*Note.* *N* = Total no of sample, *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation among studied variables. Finding shows moral identity has significant negative correlation with narcissism ( $r = -.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3**

*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Value of Males and Females on Narcissistic Personality Inventory 16 (N=300)*

Logistic parameter	Male		Female		<i>t</i> (298)	ρ	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S</i>			
	<i>D</i>		<i>D</i>				
N	7	1	5	2	8		
PI-16	.64	.94	.60	.17	.51	.000	.99

*Note.* Narcissistic Personality Inventory 16 (NPI-16),  $p$ = level of significance,  $M$ =mean,  $SD$ = standard deviation.

Table 3 shows mean, standard deviation and  $t$ -value for male and female students on narcissistic personality inventory 16 (NPI-16). Results indicate that there is significant mean difference on narcissism with  $t(298) = 8.51, p < 0.001$ . The finding shows that male students significantly scored higher on narcissism as compared to the female students. The value of Cohen's  $d$  is .99 ( $> .80$ ) which indicated large size effect.

**Figure 1**

*Mean Differences between Male and Female Students on Narcissistic Personality Inventory 16 (N=300)*

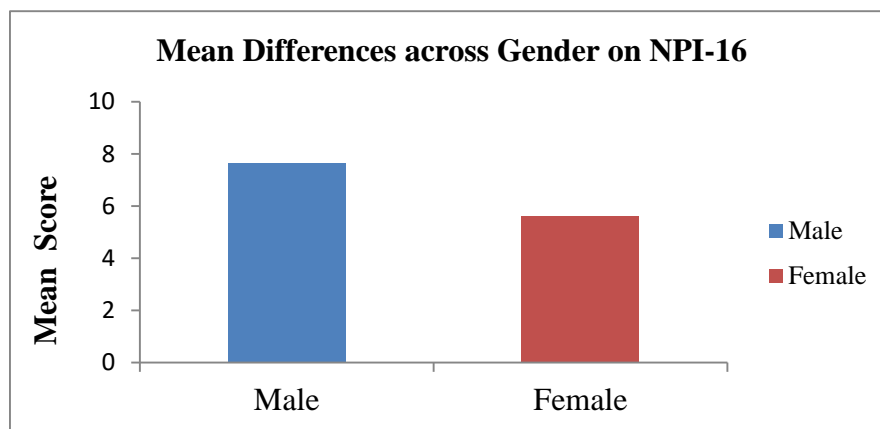


Figure 1 shows significant mean differences between male and female students on narcissistic personality inventory 16 (NPI-16). Male students ( $M = 7.64, p < 0.001$ ) significantly scored higher on narcissistic personality inventory 16 as compared to the female students ( $M = 5.60, p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 4**

*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Value of Males and Females on Moral Identity Questionnaire (N=300)*

Logistic parameter	Male			Female			$t(298)$	$\rho$	Cohen's $d$
	$M$		$S$	$M$		$S$			
	$D$			$D$					
IQ	M	8	1	9	1				
	4.11	0.69	4.52	0.03			8.69	.000	.01

*Note.* Moral Identity Questionnaire (MIQ),  $\rho$ = level of significance,  $M$ = mean,  $SD$ = standard deviation.

Table 4 shows mean, standard deviation and t-value for male and female students on moral identity questionnaire (MIQ). Results indicate that there is significant mean difference on moral identity with  $t(298) = -8.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The finding shows that female students significantly scored higher on moral identity than male students. The value of Cohen's  $d$  is 1.01 ( $> .80$ ) which indicates large size effect.

**Figure 2**

*Mean Differences between Males and Females on Moral Identity Questionnaire (N=300)*

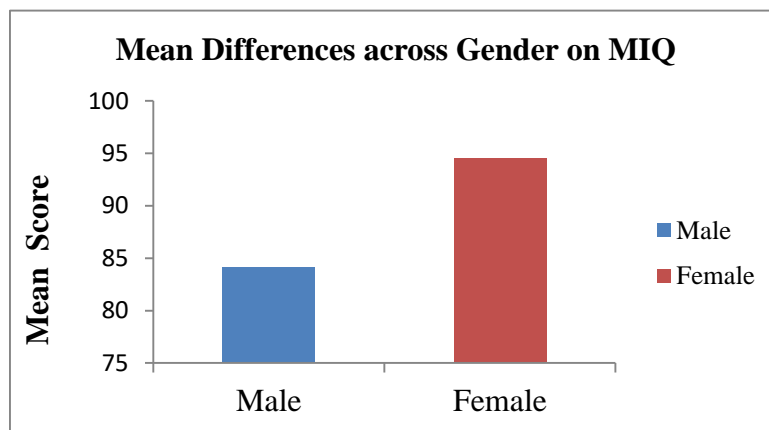


Figure 2 shows significant mean differences between male and female students on moral identity questionnaire (MIQ). Female students ( $M = 94.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly scored higher on moral identity questionnaire (MIQ) as compared to the male students ( $M = 84.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 5**

*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Values of First (1<sup>st</sup>) and Last (8<sup>th</sup>) Semester Students on Moral Identity Questionnaire (N=300).*

Logistic parameters	First Semester			Last Semester			t(298)	p	Cohen's d		
			S			S					
	M	D		M	D						
IQ	.58	.87	.89	.12	.04	.91	.03	10	2.61	.01	.29

*Note.* Moral Identity Questionnaire (MIQ),  $\rho$  = level of significance = mean, SD= standard deviation.

Table 5 shows mean, standard deviation and t-value for first semester and last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students on moral identity questionnaire (MIQ). Results indicate significant mean differences on moral identity between first (1<sup>st</sup>) and last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students with  $t(298) = -2.61$ ,  $\rho < 0.05$ . The finding shows that last semester (8<sup>th</sup>) students significantly scored higher on moral identity as compared to the 1<sup>st</sup> semester students. The value of Cohen's d is .29 (<.50) which indicates small size effect.

**Table 6**

*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Value of First (1<sup>st</sup>) and Last (8<sup>th</sup>) Semester Students on Narcissistic Personality Inventory 16 (N=300)*

Logistic parameter	First Semester		Last Semester		<i>t</i> (298)	$\rho$	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S</i>			
	<i>D</i>		<i>D</i>				
N	7	1	5	2	6	.	0
PI-16	.43	.99	.81	.31	.5	.000	.75

*Note.* Narcissistic Personality Inventory 16 (NPI-16),  $\rho$ = level of significance,  $M$ =mean,  $SD$ = standard deviation.

Table 6 shows mean, standard deviation and t-value for first (1<sup>st</sup>) semester and eighth semester students on narcissistic personality inventory 16 (NPI-16). Results indicate significant mean differences on narcissism between first (1<sup>st</sup>) and last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students with  $t(298) = 6.5$ ,  $\rho < 0.001$ . The finding shows that first semester students significantly scored higher on narcissism as compared to the last semester students. The value of Cohen's d is .75 (<.80) which indicated medium size effect.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the current investigation is to evaluate the quantitative survey on the relationship and demographic differences on the narcissism and moral identity among Undergraduate students. Narcissism means extreme self-love, lack of empathy, and grandiose feelings. Moral identity means having set of goals, rules, and standards about right and wrong.



First hypothesis proposed that there will be significant relationship between narcissism and moral identity. Results from the table 2 showed that moral identity has positive significant negative correlation with narcissism. Zhang et al. (2018) founded in their research that the perceive narcissism is negatively correlated with moral identity which cause moral disengagement. These findings are consistent with results of the present study.

Second hypothesis proposed that males and females will be significantly different on their narcissism. Results from the table 3 showed that male students significantly scored higher on narcissism than female students. The results are aligned with the findings of Foster et al. (2003). They explored that males are more narcissistic than females. Similarly, Grijalva et al. (2015) and Hoertel et al. (2018) suggested that males are higher in narcissism than females.

Third hypothesis proposed that there will be significant difference in moral identity of males and females. Results from the table 4 showed that female students significantly scored higher on moral identity than male students. Luqman et al. (2015) and Nunner-Winkler et al. (2007) founded marked gender differences in moral identity. Kennedy et al. (2017) discovered a notable gender disparity in moral identity in their study, revealing that women were roughly 66% more inclined to possess a deeply internalized moral identity compared to men.

Fourth hypothesis proposed that last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students will significantly score higher on moral identity as compare to first semester students. Results from the table 5 showed that last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students significantly scored higher on moral identity as compared to the first semester students. Ruegger and King (1992) concluded that age plays a crucial role in shaping moral decision-making processes. Similarly, Krettenauer et al. (2016) found that moral identity development is a lifelong progression, initiating in adolescence and extending into middle age. It means that with the increase in age moral identity will increase, that's why last semester students scored high moral identity.

Fifth hypothesis proposed that first (1<sup>st</sup>) semester students will significantly score higher on narcissism than last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester. Results from the table 6 showed that first semester students significantly scored higher on narcissism as compared to the last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students. As age factor is involved, with the age narcissism declines. The findings of the research, by Chopik and Grimm (2019) and Foster et al. (2003) showed that qualities associated with narcissism decline over time and with age. As the individual grow up narcissism decreases so last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students will be lower on narcissism because they are elder than first semester students.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The following are some shortcomings of research:

1. Sample size (N=300) was not standard sample size so, results cannot be generalized to the whole population. For generalization large population should have been used.
2. The present study is conducted in Haripur, sample should be taken from other cities.

3. The study's findings may be limited in their applicability to other cultural contexts, as the research was conducted in Pakistan with a predominantly Muslim student population. Previous cross-cultural studies have highlighted significant differences in moral identity and narcissism across various cultures, suggesting that the results may not be generalizable to other cultural settings.

## CONCLUSION

Narcissism can lead to substantial inner conflict due to grandiose delusions and an unrealistic outlook on life, causing distress and discontent. However, Individuals having moral identity tend to exhibit high standards of personal moral behavior and demonstrate a positive and caring attitude toward others. The current present aimed to investigate “Relationship between narcissism and moral identity among Undergraduate students”. The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between moral identity and narcissism. Values of t-test indicated that females scored higher on moral identity and male scored higher on narcissism. Results also indicated that last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester students significantly scored higher on moral identity lower on narcissism as compared to first (1<sup>st</sup>) semester students.

## Implications

The findings of the current study hold significant importance for educators, counselors, and researchers as it suggests that development of moral identity is very crucial for the healthy personality development and character building otherwise without a strong moral foundation, this world will become ego driven place and plagued by narcissism leading to no peace of mind and harmony. To counteract this trend, it is essential to implement programs and seminars aimed at bolstering students' moral identity while reducing narcissistic traits. This approach fosters optimism, promotes civilized conduct, and encourages active engagement in societal well-being.

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