

82:449 Honours Thesis Summary

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Narcissism and Behaving Altruistically: The Case of the Helpful Narcissist

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This study sought to investigate the influence of empathy (present or absent), evaluation (positive or negative) and narcissism on altruism. The purpose of this study was to explore whether narcissists would use non-negative means (altruism) to restore their self-image after it has been damaged. Two main hypotheses were made. First, it was hypothesized that those scoring high on narcissism would be more likely than low narcissism scorers to behave altruistically after incidents of failure (negative evaluation). Additionally, it was hypothesized that those scoring high on narcissism would be less likely to behave altruistically than low narcissism scorers after incidents of success (positive evaluation). In the study, participants were exposed to failure or success feedback after participating in a writing task where they were instructed to give and support their stance on a controversial topic. After being exposed to the feedback, participants were given the opportunity to volunteer for a company program. Before indicating their intent to volunteer, participants were exposed to an empathy eliciting appeal describing the program, or an appeal about the program with no empathy eliciting words or phrases. In order to assess the results of the study a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with “helping” entered as the dependent variable. The results of the regression analysis found no significant relationship between how narcissistic one

is and their likelihood of behaving altruistically after incidents of success or failure, which means neither hypothesis was supported. Furthermore, altruistic behavior among high scorers of narcissism was not significantly related to receiving positive or negative evaluation, nor was it related to the presence or absence of empathy. The study demonstrated that although narcissists seem to go to great lengths to restore their self-image and the image of them held by others in the face of criticism, they will not engage in altruistic behavior as a means to do so.