

Job interviews reward narcissists, punish applicants from modest cultures

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A UBC study found that people who rated as narcissists were viewed as more attractive job candidates. Credit: Imilian, iStock

A University of British Columbia study finds that narcissistic applicants are more successful in job interviews than equally qualified candidates who act more modestly.

The findings suggest that applicants from cultures that place greater emphasis on humility, including some Asian cultures, may have a harder time landing a job in North America.

"A job interview is one of the few social situations where narcissistic behaviours such as boasting actually create a positive impression," says UBC Psychology Prof. Del Paulhus, the lead author of the study. "Normally, people are put off by such behaviour, especially over repeated exposure."

Before placing participants in job interview scenarios, researchers used questionnaires to measure their levels of narcissism. The study found that people who rated as narcissists were viewed as more attractive [job candidates](#).

Videotapes of the interviews were later scored by a team of raters. Narcissists tended to talk about themselves, make eye contact, joke around and ask the interviewers more questions. As a result,

the study found that people rated narcissists as more attractive candidates for the position.

The researchers also found that participants of Japanese, Chinese and Korean heritage exhibited lower levels of narcissism, and were less likely to receive "definitely hire" ratings as a result. "The pro-narcissism bias results in an indirect cultural bias – particularly against East Asians," says Paulhus.

Paulhus says the study offers important lessons for job candidates and interviewers alike. "Candidates should engage with the interviewer while continuing to self-promote," he says. "Interviewers should look beyond cultural style and assess individual qualifications. Instead of superficial charm, interviewers must analyze candidates' potential long-term fit in the organization."

More information: Paulhus, D. L., Westlake, B. G., Calvez, S. S. and Harms, P. D. (2013), "Self-presentation style in job interviews: the role of personality and culture." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43: 2042–2059. [DOI: 10.1111/jasp.12157](https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12157)

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