

The Differential Effects of Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism on Justice Orientation

Abstract

We examine the role of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on individuals' justice orientation using a sample of 253 undergraduate and MBA students. Using multiple linear regression, we found that grandiose narcissism was negatively related to internalization and overall justice orientation. Vulnerable narcissism was significantly positively related to internalization but was not significantly related to overall justice orientation. Neither grandiose nor vulnerable narcissism was related to attentiveness. We also discuss directions for future research, such as an integration of psychopathy and Machiavellianism, an examination of the differences between the existing narcissism measures, and the use of experimental methods.

Keywords: Grandiose Narcissism, Vulnerable Narcissism, Justice Orientation

1. Introduction

Narcissism is a personality trait that includes thinking very highly of oneself, entitlement, antagonism, and lacking empathy for others (Campbell et al., 2011). Along with Machiavellianism and psychopathy, narcissism is part of the dark triad of personality traits. “Dark” because they share some common malevolent features and can be toxic and damaging in the workplace (Jonason et al., 2012; Meurs et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2017; Spain et al., 2014). However, there is evidence that narcissism can be, in some ways, a beneficial trait. A narcissist will often have a higher sense of self-worth, and this can make them more motivated and successful, and they often emerge as leaders in the organization (Brunell et al., 2008; Nevicka et al., 2011). Narcissists have also been shown to be positively associated with emotional and social intelligence (Delić et al., 2011; Petrides et al., 2011). A recent study showed that narcissists appear to be aware of the contextual situations (i.e., severity of the outcome and the situational knowledge of others) in which interactions are taking place and adjust their perceptions accordingly (Macenczak et al., 2021). From the research, narcissists can have some positive impacts on the organization; it is not all negative, and in fact, not all narcissists are the same. Recent organizational research has started to distinguish between two different types of narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

In recent years, research psychologists and clinical therapists have developed a more cohesive model of narcissism, called the Trifurcated Model of Narcissism (Campbell & Miller, 2017; Miller et al., 2017), that connects grandiose and vulnerable narcissism as two related but separate traits. Both share a core ingredient of low agreeableness (or high antagonism), which explains the narcissist’s sense of entitlement, lack of empathy, and belief in their superiority, but they differ in what other personality traits blend with this core. With grandiose narcissism, the

core component of antagonism combines with high extraversion (Macenczak et al., 2016), which explains the sociability, charisma, boldness, and drive, that often enables these grandiose narcissists to move into positions of power (Campbell & Crist, 2020). With vulnerable narcissism, the core component of antagonism combines with high neuroticism, which explains the anxiety, depression, and hypersensitivity (Campbell & Crist, 2020). The vulnerable narcissist is introverted, easily hurt by criticism and despite reporting low self-esteem, still believe, like the grandiose narcissist, that they deserve special treatment. By looking at narcissism through this new model, we can get a clearer understanding of how narcissism operates in society.

Recently, research has begun to focus on how narcissism, and specifically grandiose narcissism, impacts an individual's view of fairness (e.g., Macenczak et al., 2021). These studies indicate that increased levels of grandiose narcissism negatively influence how individuals view situations and react to perceived injustices. It is now a good opportunity to begin examining the narcissism topic with the inclusion of vulnerable as well as grandiose narcissism traits as it relates to fairness perceptions. There is little organizational research that includes both types of narcissism and we believe this has limited the ability to explain the full story of how these two types of narcissism influence differentially impact perceptions and outcomes.

The current study examines how both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are related to an individual's justice orientation or the extent to which individuals *internalize* justice as a moral virtue and are *attentive* to fairness issues around them (Rupp et al., 2003). Thus, it is an antecedent to justice perceptions and can shed some light on how justice perceptions are formed and the differential impacts of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on these perceptions. In showing these differential effects, we hope to show the importance of measuring both grandiose

and vulnerable narcissism in organizational research and their utility in making differential predictions.

1.1 Justice Orientation

Liao & Rupp (2005) described the need to expand how justice perceptions are formed by considering the source of justice perceptions. Most justice research has focused on situational approaches measuring the reactions to events or their environments. Liao & Rupp (2005) recommended expanding the research to include individual justice orientation as a way to expand our knowledge of how justice perceptions are formed. Justice orientation is a related individual difference that plays a role in our reactions to perceived injustices (Rupp et al., 2003).

Individuals vary in how they view justice issues and specifically how they *internalize* justice as a moral virtue to live by and how *attentive* they are to justice issues surrounding others around them. Thus, understanding how grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are related to justice perceptions is beneficial to understanding how people respond to different justice-related situations they encounter.

1.2 The Relationship between Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism and Justice Orientation

Individuals high in grandiose narcissism are overconfident, manipulative, and feel superior to those around them (Krizan & Bushman, 2011; Macenczak et al., 2016). Grandiose narcissists are chronic self-enhancers who are socially charming, have a strong desire for power and status, and believe they are superior and deserve to be treated better than others whom they perceive as less special. Thus, it is predicted that grandiose narcissism would have a negative relationship with justice orientation. That is, higher grandiose narcissism would be associated with lower attentiveness, lower internalization, and lower overall justice orientation.

H1a: Grandiose narcissism will be negatively related to internalization

H1b: Grandiose narcissism will be negatively related to attentiveness

H1c: Grandiose narcissism will be negatively related to overall justice orientation

In comparison, individuals high in vulnerable narcissism are still manipulative and feel different from others, but are hypersensitive, anxious, and lack self-confidence (Kealy et al., 2017) due to their neurotic nature. Vulnerable narcissists are prone to feeling like others have failed to recognize their importance (Given-Wilson et al., 2011) and may harbor feelings of envy (Krizan & Johar, 2012) and rage towards others (Krizan & Johar, 2015). Research has shown that after feedback, people high in vulnerable narcissism tend to internalize shame and anxiety (Freis et al., 2015); it is likely that they will internalize the moral virtue of justice as they perceive others' successes as unjust or a personal threat to their ego (Krizan & Johar, 2012). Due to the anxious nature of the vulnerable narcissist, it is predicted that it will have a positive relationship with justice orientation. That is, higher vulnerable narcissism would be associated with higher attentiveness to fairness situations, higher internalization of justice, and higher overall justice orientation.

H2a: Vulnerable narcissism will be positively related to internalization

H2b: Vulnerable narcissism will be positively related to attentiveness

H2c: Vulnerable narcissism will be positively related to overall justice orientation

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedures

Cross-sectional data were collected from 253 students in the undergraduate and MBA programs at a university in the southeastern United States in exchange for course extra credit. 109 participants (43.1%) were between the ages of 18-25, 82 participants (32.4%) were between the ages of 26-35, 40 participants (i.e., 15.8%) were between the ages of 36-45, 20 participants

(7.9%) were between the ages of 46-55, and 2 participants were older than 55 (0.8%). 135 participants (53.4%) identified as female, 116 participants (45.8%) identified as male, one participant (i.e., 0.4%) identified as non-binary, and one participant (0.4%) preferred not to say their gender.

2.2. Measures

Narcissism. Grandiose and vulnerable narcissism were measured using the 60-item Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory–Short Form (FFNI-SF; Sherman et al., 2015). Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item for grandiose narcissism is “I like being noticed by others” ($\alpha = .90$). A sample item for vulnerable narcissism is “I feel ashamed when people judge me” ($\alpha = .80$).

Justice Orientation. Justice Orientation measured using the 16-item justice orientation scale created by Rupp et al. (2003). Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item for the internalization subscale is “I hurt for people being treated unfairly” ($\alpha = .85$). A sample item for attentiveness subscale is “I tend to notice even the smallest injustice” ($\alpha = .74$). When these subscales are combined, the overall scale is also reliable ($\alpha = .88$).

3. Results

In Table 1, we present all means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables. There was a significant negative correlation between grandiose narcissism and internalization; however, there was a positive correlation between vulnerable narcissism and internalization. Neither dimension of narcissism had a significant correlation with attentiveness. There was a negative correlation between grandiose narcissism and overall justice orientation,

but the correlation between vulnerable narcissism and overall justice orientation was not significant.

We used multiple linear regression to test the effects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on internalization, attentiveness, and overall justice orientation (see Table 2 for the results presented below in table format). Standardized betas (b^*) are reported. When regressing internalization on the dimensions of narcissism, we found that grandiose narcissism negatively predicted internalization ($b^* = -.26, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.772, -0.261]$) and vulnerable narcissism positively predicted internalization ($b^* = .16, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.066, 0.479]$). Thus, Hypothesis 1a and 2a were supported.

When regressing attentiveness on the dimensions of narcissism, we found that neither grandiose narcissism ($b^* = .01, p = .838, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.223, 0.274]$) nor vulnerable narcissism ($b^* = .02, p = .809, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.174, 0.222]$) significantly predicted attentiveness. Thus, Hypothesis 1b and 2b were not supported. When regressing the justice orientation overall score on the dimensions of narcissism, we found that grandiose narcissism negatively predicted the overall justice orientation score ($b^* = -.18, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.545, -0.096]$). The effects for vulnerable narcissism were not a significant predictor of ones' overall justice orientation score, but results were approaching significance ($b^* = .12, p = .060, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.007, 0.350]$). Thus, hypothesis 3a was supported, but Hypothesis 3b was not supported ($p = .060$).

4. Discussion

Our study demonstrates the uniqueness and utility of these two dimensions of narcissism by showing their differential effects. We found that grandiose narcissism has a negative effect on internalization and overall justice orientation. In contrast, vulnerable narcissism has a positive

effect on internalization and an approaching significant ($p = .060$) positive effect on overall justice orientation.

One explanation for the negative effect of grandiose narcissism on internalization is the fact that grandiose narcissists often believe they are special and entitled to unique treatment. Whereas vulnerable narcissists' tendencies to experience anxiety and hypersensitivity may make them more prone to perceptions that they have been victims who were robbed of the praise they deserved and are thus, more sensitive to justice-related issues. In doing so, this study addresses the call for more work to examine the differential effects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Miller et al., 2017) and highlight their utility in theory building.

When examining the role of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, we found that internalization was the main driver of the effects for overall justice orientation. The regression results for attentiveness were non-significant for both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. One explanation for this unexpected finding is the fact that the internalization items are more relevant to the self, whereas the attentiveness items focus on fairness issues that are more external or witnessed (e.g., being upset when you witness someone else being treated unfairly). Thus, narcissists' tendency to be inward-focused and experience narcissistic rage (Krizan & Johar, 2015) may make them more susceptible to the internalization items related to personal injustice, rather than witnessed injustice toward others.

4.1. Implications

Our study addresses the call for more research to examine grandiose and vulnerable narcissism's unique and differential effects on outcomes (e.g., Macenczak et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2021). Our finding that the two dimensions of narcissism tended to have opposite effects on internalization and overall justice orientation highlights the uniqueness of these dimensions and

the utility of measuring both dimensions so that you have greater theoretical and practical precision when making predictions (Holmes et al., 2020).

We also contribute to the justice orientation research. Our use of the FFNI allowed us to take a more fine-grained look at how the dimensions of narcissism uniquely impact justice orientation. Prior research in the justice space (e.g., Woodley & Allen; 2014) found significant effects between narcissism and equity sensitivity when using the unidimensional narcissism subscale of the Short Dark Triad (Jones et al., 2014) and non-significant effects of narcissism on equity sensitivity when using the unidimensional narcissism subscale of the Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010). These unidimensional short form measures have made huge contributions to the psychological and organizational sciences, but their brevity is not without drawbacks. The exclusive use of unidimensional short form measures may limit researchers' ability to at how the various grandiose and vulnerable narcissism items are differentially impacting justice outcomes if one dimension is driving effects and the other dimension has an opposite effect.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research

Our study is not without limitations. First, we focused narrowly on narcissism as our primary trait of interest, but it would be interesting for future research to look at other personality traits. For example, there is also a triarchic model of psychopathy, which consists of disinhibition, boldness, and meanness (Patrick et al., 2009). Likewise, Dahling et al.'s (2008) Machiavellian Personality Scale contains four dimensions: distrust of others, amoral manipulation, desire for control, and desire for status. Integrating this work on psychopathy and Machiavellianism and seeing how other "dark" personality elements interact with justice orientation to influence workplace work/social outcomes would be interesting.

Second, we relied solely on the FFNI-SF (Sherman et al., 2015) to measure narcissism. Future studies may also want to include other narcissism measures such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Hendin et al., 1997), and the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; Back et al., 2013). Using multiple measures would allow researchers to better understand how these measures relate to each other and the generalizability of findings across measures.

Third, researchers may also want to do a deeper examination of the similarities and differences between these measures so that researchers can make the most informed decisions on which measure should be used and how the factors should be structured (e.g., unidimensional vs. multi-dimension). Furthermore, many contemporary studies use unidimensional short form measures of narcissism, such as the narcissism subscale of the Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) and Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010). These short form measures have played a crucial role in expanding narcissism research across the social and organizational sciences. However, it would be ideal if the next generation of short form measures choose items that represent each of the main dimensions of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy so that researchers using these short form measures can still theorize about and test the unique role that trait dimensions such as grandiose narcissism vs. vulnerable narcissism play in predicting relevant outcomes.

Lastly, the present study only focused on justice orientation, not actual reactions to justice-related outcomes. Future research may want to build on this work to see how grandiose and vulnerable narcissists react to various justice decisions/outcomes. For example, work could use vignettes or experiments where participants feel they have been treated unfairly by a competitor or judge to see their reaction and behavioral response to this perceived slight.

Likewise, how do the dimensions of narcissism impact other justice-related outcomes such as anticipatory justice (Colquitt et al. 2015), and do vulnerable and grandiose narcissists anticipate they will be treated differently by others?

4.3. Conclusion

In summary, we found that grandiose narcissism negatively impacted overall justice orientation primarily through internalization. Vulnerable narcissism had a positive effect on internalization and a non-significant ($p = .06$) positive effect on overall justice orientation. We found that neither vulnerable nor grandiose narcissism had an impact on attentiveness. We hope this study will encourage further inquiries into the differential effects of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism on perceptions and behavior.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Grandiose Narcissism	2.76	.49	(.90)						
2. Vulnerable Narcissism	2.78	.61	.09	(.80)					
3. Justice Orientation Internalization	5.18	.99	-.25***	.14*	(.85)				
4. Justice Orientation Attentiveness	4.88	.97	-.01	.02	.62***	(.74)			
5. Overall Justice Orientation	5.06	.89	-.16**	.10 [†]	.95***	.84***	(.88)		
6. Gender ^a	.45	.50	-.37**	-.01	.28***	.13*	.24***	--	
7. Age ^b	1.81	.99	-.18**	-.21**	-.07	-.09	-.08	.04	--

Note. *N* = 253. Values in parentheses and on the diagonal, represent coefficient alpha.

^a Gender male = 0; Female, Non-binary, and other = 1.

^b = Age was collected in the following ranges 18-25 = 1; 26-35 = 2; 36-45 = 3; 46-55 = 4; and 55+ = 5.

[†] $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Table 2

Regression Results

Effect	<i>b</i> *	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i> <i>LL</i>	95% <i>CI</i> <i>UL</i>
Internalization						
Grandiose Narcissism	-.26	.124	-4.28	< .001	-0.772	-0.261
Vulnerable Narcissism	.16	.099	2.64	.009	0.066	0.479
Attentiveness						
Grandiose Narcissism	.01	.126	.20	.838	-0.223	0.274
Vulnerable Narcissism	.02	.101	.24	.809	-0.174	0.222
Overall Justice Orientation						
Grandiose Narcissism	-.18	.114	-2.81	.005	-0.545	-0.096
Vulnerable Narcissism	.12	.091	1.89	.060	-.007	0.350

Note. *N* = 253. *b** = standardized beta; *SE* = Standard error; *t* = t-statistic; *CI* = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.