



Grandiose narcissism versus vulnerable narcissism and impulsivity

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ABSTRACT

Correlations between the grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism with two self-report personality measures (i.e., BIS-11 and I-7) and two behavioral tasks (i.e., Stop-Signal Task and Delay-Discounting task) of impulsivity in 338 students were examined. As one of the first studies to apply a two-dimensional approach to narcissism (i.e. grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism) in different self-report and behavioral impulsivity measures, the present results have reported that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism showed a significant positive correlations with the self-reported impulsivity. Moreover, the grandiose narcissism has shown significant associations with both behavioral tasks of impulsivity. Contrary, vulnerable narcissism was negatively related to the stop reaction time – people high in vulnerable narcissism scored shorter stop reaction time values and, consequently, presented less impulsive responding.

1. Introduction

The definition of “impulsivity” varies widely and have included many concepts such as an insensitivity to consequences, an inability to wait or to inhibit inappropriate behaviors, and cognitive or motor impulsivity (e.g., [Madden & Bickel, 2010](#); [Reynolds, Ortengren, Richards, & de Wit, 2006](#)). In order to assess behaviors that are considered impulsive, a variety of measurement methods have been developed. These methods can be categorized as (1) self-report questionnaires, that assess an individual's self-perception of their own behaviors across a variety of contexts, and (2) laboratory behavioral tasks, which assess specific behavioral processes ([Reynolds et al., 2006](#)). Moreover, some recent studies indicate that self-report and behavioral assessments are not, or are only weakly correlated (e.g., [Lane, Cherek, Rhodes, Pietras, & Techeremissine, 2003](#); [Reynolds et al., 2006](#); [Reynolds, Richards, Horn, & Karraker, 2004](#)). Consequently, these findings indicate that the tendency for impulsive behaviors assessed by laboratory behavioral procedures may not be the same as those detected by self-report assessments.

1.1. Grandiose vs. vulnerable narcissism

It is increasingly recognized that there are at least two forms of narcissism, which might be most aptly titled “grandiose narcissism” and “vulnerable narcissism” (e.g., [Dickinson & Pincus, 2003](#); [Fossati et al., 2005](#); [Miller & Campbell, 2008](#); [Miller et al., 2011](#); [Russ, Shedler, Bradley, & Westen, 2008](#); [Wink, 1991](#); [Wright, Lukowitsky, Pincus, &](#)

[Conroy, 2010](#)). Grandiosity is characterized by dominance, aggression, self-assurance, arrogant attitudes, inflated self-esteem, exploitativeness, entitlement, and a strong need for the admiration of others. Vulnerability, in contrast, is characterized by fragile self-esteem, emotional instability, introversion, negative affect, hostility, need for recognition, entitlement, egocentricity, and preoccupation with grandiose fantasies, oscillation between feelings of superiority and inferiority ([Hendin & Cheek, 1997](#); [Miller et al., 2011](#)). Factor and cluster analyses denoted grandiose and vulnerable narcissism as separate constructs (e.g., [Lapsley & Aalsma, 2006](#)). However, the two forms share the core traits of narcissism, such as grandiose fantasies about the self, feelings of entitlement, and a willingness to exploit others for one's own gain ([Dickinson & Pincus, 2003](#); [Pincus et al., 2009](#)).

1.2. Narcissism and impulsivity

Researchers have found some evidence of a link between narcissism and impulsivity. Given the pattern of associations with the self-reported impulsivity (e.g., Barratt Impulsiveness Scale-11, Impulsiveness-Venturesomeness-Empathy questionnaire; Dickman's measures of functional and dysfunctional impulsivity), previous studies concluded that grandiose narcissism moderately correlated with self-report measures of impulsivity ($r = 0.13$ – $.55$; [Crysel, Crosier, & Webster, 2013](#); [Jones & Paulhus, 2011](#); [Malesza & Ostaszewski, 2016](#)). Furthermore, in case of behaviorally assessed impulsivity, the grandiose narcissism component was positively related to steeper delay discounting ($r = 0.17$; [Crysel et al., 2013](#)). Delay discounting is recognized as a

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possible mechanism of impulsive behavior (for a review, see Madden & Bickel, 2010), where individuals are asked to make a series of choices between a smaller sooner reward and a larger but more delayed reward (Reynolds et al., 2006). Thus, people with a high level of grandiose narcissism preferred less money immediately to more money later (Crysel et al., 2013). Furthermore, Malesza and Ostaszewski (2016) observed that grandiose narcissism was weakly significantly correlated with the stop reaction time (people high in narcissism scored longer stop reaction time value and, consequently, presented more impulsive responding; $r = 0.12$).

Despite the research linking the grandiose narcissism with both types of impulsivity (Crysel et al., 2013; Jones & Paulhus, 2011; Malesza & Ostaszewski, 2016), there is no systematic research linking the vulnerable narcissism with the self-reported impulsivity (i.e. Barratt Impulsiveness Scale-11 and Impulsiveness-Venturesomeness-Empathy questionnaire) and two forms of behavioral impulsivity (i.e. steeper discounting rate of delayed outcomes and behavioral inhibition of impulsivity). Following the stream of research suggesting that narcissism should the existence of two orthogonal constructs of narcissism, the present study fill this gap by examining the relations between measures of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and their associations with two self-reported measures of impulsivity and two behavioral tasks of impulsivity.

1.2.1. The present study

Grandiose narcissists are generally described as aggressive (Wink, 1991). Knowing that grandiose narcissism primarily reflects traits related to aggression (Miller et al., 2011), and that impulsivity is linked to aggression (Lesch & Merschdorf, 2000), it is reasonable to suppose that narcissists' aggression is due in part to their impulsive influences on behavior. Moreover, given the pattern of associations between the grandiose narcissism and self-report impulsivity (e.g., Jones & Paulhus, 2011; Malesza & Ostaszewski, 2016), research has shown that grandiose narcissists are inclined to exhibit many impulsive behaviors (e.g., gambling) that are likely to make a good first impression (e.g., socializing), and to engage in behaviors that provide immediate gratification of their desires for social status, positive affect, and ego-involvement in achievement domains, but they do so at the cost of fulfilling these desires in the negative long-term (Vazire & Funder, 2006). Individuals high in grandiose narcissism also claim for immediate rewards (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003). Thus, it was predicted that grandiose narcissism would be significantly associated with both self-report (i.e., BIS-11 and I_7) and both behavioral impulsivity (i.e., Stop-Signal and Delay-Discounting) measures.

On the other hand, limited information is available about the association between vulnerable narcissism and both self-report and behavioral impulsivity. Theoretically, vulnerable narcissists are also described as defensive, hostile, and insisting upon having their own way (Wink, 1991). Thus, the vulnerable narcissism should be also significantly associated with the self-reported impulsivity. However, the same may not be true for the behavioral impulsivity. Although, individuals high in vulnerable narcissism are willing to exploit others for one's own gain, they also present shyness, inhibited behaviors, and are introverted in social interaction, but covertly possess unrealistic fantasies about success and entitlement from others (Miller et al., 2011). Therefore, we hypothesized that individuals high in vulnerable narcissism would show stronger behavioral inhibition and, consequently, less impulsive responding. Thus, negative correlation between the vulnerable narcissism and Stop-Signal Task was expected. In case of the second behavioral impulsivity measure, only the grandiose narcissism should be significantly associated with the Delay-Discounting task, because only individuals high in grandiose narcissism claim for immediate rewards (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003).

Finally, the two forms share the core traits of narcissism, such as sense of entitlement, disregard of others, and grandiose self-relevant fantasies (Besser & Priel, 2010). However, they differ in many other

constructs, each having unique characteristic. That is, individuals high on either dimensions behave similarly, but motivation behind their behaviors are completely different (Miller et al., 2011). Thus, grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism should be significantly correlated because they both reflect the narcissism construct. However, the correlation between both narcissism instruments should be weak, supporting the distinction between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

2. Methodology

The experiment was conducted using WebExp (Keller, 1999), a software package for running psychological experiments online. WebExp is implemented in Java and uses a client-server architecture which gives the experimenter maximal control over stimulus presentation and collection of responses. A strong point is WebExp's timing component, which includes both the timing of the presentation of stimulus, and the measurement of response times. The web-based data collected previously in several experiments provided a close match with the data collected under controlled laboratory conditions (Keller, 1999).

2.1. Participants and procedure

338 German university students participated in the experiment (147 men and 191 women, ranging in age from 19 to 26 years, $M = 23.1$, $SD = 1.05$). Individuals were recruited through advertisements posted on social media (i.e., Facebook). Inclusion criteria included being over 18-years-old, and having no history of psychological illness. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Subjects were not compensated in any way. All participants provided a consent which was obtained online after a detailed instruction describing main purpose and approximate duration of the study. All individuals were offered feedback on general results of the study.

At the beginning of the experiment, participants were provided the following instructions: "For this study, you will be asked a series of questions and you will be given a series of choices. There are no right or wrong answers." Individuals were simply instructed to follow the instructions that appeared on the screen. Participants were assured that the computer would present all of the information they required to conduct the study. Before the individuals could send their answers over the net, the data were checked for completeness.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Narcissism measures

Grandiose narcissism was measured with the 37-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; German translation; Raskin & Hall, 1979). Items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ($\alpha = 0.83$). Vulnerable narcissism was assessed using the 10-item Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; German translation; Hendin & Cheek, 1997), that required rating on a 1–5 Likert scale. Participants' responses were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *very uncharacteristic of me/strongly disagree*; 5 = *very characteristic of me/strongly agree*; $\alpha = 0.80$).

2.2.2. Barratt impulsiveness Scale-11

The BIS-11 is a widely used personality test of impulsivity (German version by Hartmann, Rief, & Hilbert, 2011). It comprises 30 items (with an answer format on a four-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *rarely/never* to 4 = *almost always/always*), which constitute six factors: self-control, attention impulsivity, motor impulsivity, cognitive instability, cognitive complexity, and perseverance (α ranged from .76 to .85).

2.2.3. I_7

The I_7 was developed to measure impulsivity within the framework

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