



Grandiose and vulnerable narcissism from the perspective of the interpersonal circumplex

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ABSTRACT

A growing empirical literature documents the existence of two distinct dimensions of narcissism, grandiose and vulnerable. In order to better understand the nature of these dimensions, we examined them in the context of the interpersonal circumplex (IPC). Using a sample collected on-line ($N = 277$), we examined the relations between these two narcissism dimensions – generated as a result of an exploratory factor analysis of 15 narcissism and narcissism-related scales – and two measures of the IPC. GN was most strongly linked with high agency and low communion. Conversely, vulnerable narcissism was most strongly linked with low communion. The data also suggest that the assessment of IPC can substantially influence the pattern of findings for vulnerable narcissism.

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1. Introduction

There appear to be two dimensions of narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable (e.g., Miller et al., 2011; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Vulnerable narcissism (VN) is characterized by introversion, negative emotions, interpersonal coldness, hostility, need for recognition, entitlement, and egocentricity. Grandiose narcissism (GN) is characterized by dominance, self-assurance, immodesty, exhibitionism, and aggression. From a general trait perspective, the two dimensions overlap primarily in their use of antagonistic interpersonal strategies. But even here, the two differ. GN is more strongly associated with traits such as immodesty, deceitfulness, and a refusal to comply with authority figures; whereas VN appears to be more strongly related to a distrustful, hostile interpersonal style likely driven by increased negative emotionality, problematic attachment styles, and childhood abuse/neglect associated with this narcissism dimension (Miller et al., 2010, 2011). The recognition of these differences is critically important because the two narcissism dimensions are associated with different symptoms and behaviors (e.g., internalizing and externalizing symptoms; Miller et al., 2010, 2011), as well as the differential utilization of clinical resources (Pincus et al., 2009).

Until recently, little empirical work has been dedicated to the study of VN, particularly in comparison to studies on GN (see Miller et al., 2011; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Given that GN and VN are

associated with significant interpersonal impairment, the interpersonal circumplex model of personality (IPC) may be helpful for elucidating the nature of these two narcissism dimensions. First developed in the 1950s, the IPC is a two-dimensional, circular model of individuals' relationships with others (Leary, 1957). Traits are plotted on two orthogonal axes of agency and communion, reflecting status/power, and friendliness/warmth, respectively. The IPC provides a framework for understanding interpersonal constructs (Gurtman, 1992), including certain personality disorders and related traits (Wiggins & Pincus, 1989) such as narcissism and dependency.

The IPC has been a useful tool for the examination of GN-related constructs (such as narcissistic personality disorder [NPD]), in part, because it is a construct with significant interpersonal components and consequences (Miller, Campbell, & Pilonis, 2007; Ogronczuk, Piper, Joyce, Steinberg, & Duggal, 2009). For example, Wiggins and Pincus (1989) examined the relations between measures of NPD and the IPC. As expected, NPD scales were characterized by high agency and low communion. Other studies have examined the relations between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and the IPC. Gurtman (1992), Bradlee and Emmons (1992), and Ruiz, Smith, and Rhodewalt (2001) found that most of the NPI scales were strongly related to agency but only weakly related to communion.

Despite a long tradition of using the IPC to understand certain personality disorders, it has not been applied to VN. Although measures of GN appear to be well-represented by the IPC framework, it is unclear if the same can be said for VN, as only one study has examined this construct from the perspective of the IPC. Pincus and colleagues (2009) plotted the seven subscales of the

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Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI), four of which are thought to assess VN, on the IPC and found that two of the vulnerable subscales projected onto the Vindictive octant (high agency and low communion), one fell in the Avoidant octant (low agency and low communion), and one fell in the Exploitable range (low agency and high communion).

In the present study, we examined GN and VN in relation to two measures of the IPC. We first conducted an exploratory factor analysis of 15 narcissism-related traits expecting that grandiose and vulnerable factors would emerge, and then examined these factors in relation to scales from the Interpersonal Adjectives Scale (IAS; Wiggins, 1995) and the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems–Circumplex (IIP-C; Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 1990). These measures differ substantially in that the former is a non-pathological measure of the IPC constructs, whereas the IIP-C identifies more pathological variants associated with interpersonal difficulties. We hypothesized that GN would be most strongly related to high agency and low communion and the corresponding octants (i.e., PA through DE; see Fig. 1). Alternatively, we expected that VN would be most strongly negatively correlated with communion and would manifest a null correlation with agency; at the octant level, we expected VN to manifest correlations with the octants ranging from BC through FG since VN is strongly related to neuroticism, which tends to project on the “cold-submissive quadrant” (Ansell & Pincus, 2004, p. 192).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website, which facilitates the collection of data from individuals using an online approach (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011 for a review). 277 participants provided complete,

useable, and valid data (65% female; 85% Caucasian; mean age = 31.3; SD = 11.0). Individuals were compensated \$2.00 for completion of the study. IRB approval was obtained for all aspects of the study.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

The NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988) is a 40-item, forced-choice, self-report measure of trait narcissism. We focus here on the three NPI subscales identified by a series of factor analyses: Leadership/Authority (LA: 11 items; $\alpha = .82$), Grandiose Exhibitionism (GE: 10 items; $\alpha = .79$), Entitlement/Exploitativeness (EE: 4 items; $\alpha = .62$).

2.2.2. Narcissistic Grandiosity Scale (NGS)

The NGS (Rosenthal, Hooley, & Steshenko, in preparation) asks participants to rate themselves on 16 adjectives such as “superior” and “omnipotent” on a 1 (“not at all”) to 7 (“extremely”) scale. The alpha for the NGS was .96.

2.2.3. Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS)

The HSNS (Hendin & Cheek, 1997) is a 10-item self-report measure that reflects hypersensitivity, vulnerability, and entitlement. The alpha for the HSNS was .81.

2.2.4. Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI)

The PNI (Pincus et al., 2009) is a 52-item self-report measure of traits related to VN and GN. Four subscales are related to VN: Contingent Self-esteem (PNI CSE; $\alpha = .95$), Hiding the self (PNI HS; $\alpha = .84$), Devaluing (PNI Dev; $\alpha = .89$), and Entitlement rage (PNI ER; $\alpha = .91$). Three subscales are related to GN: Self-sacrificing Self-enhancement (PNI SSSE; $\alpha = .83$), Grandiose Fantasies (PNI GF; $\alpha = .91$), and Exploitativeness (PNI E; $\alpha = .82$).

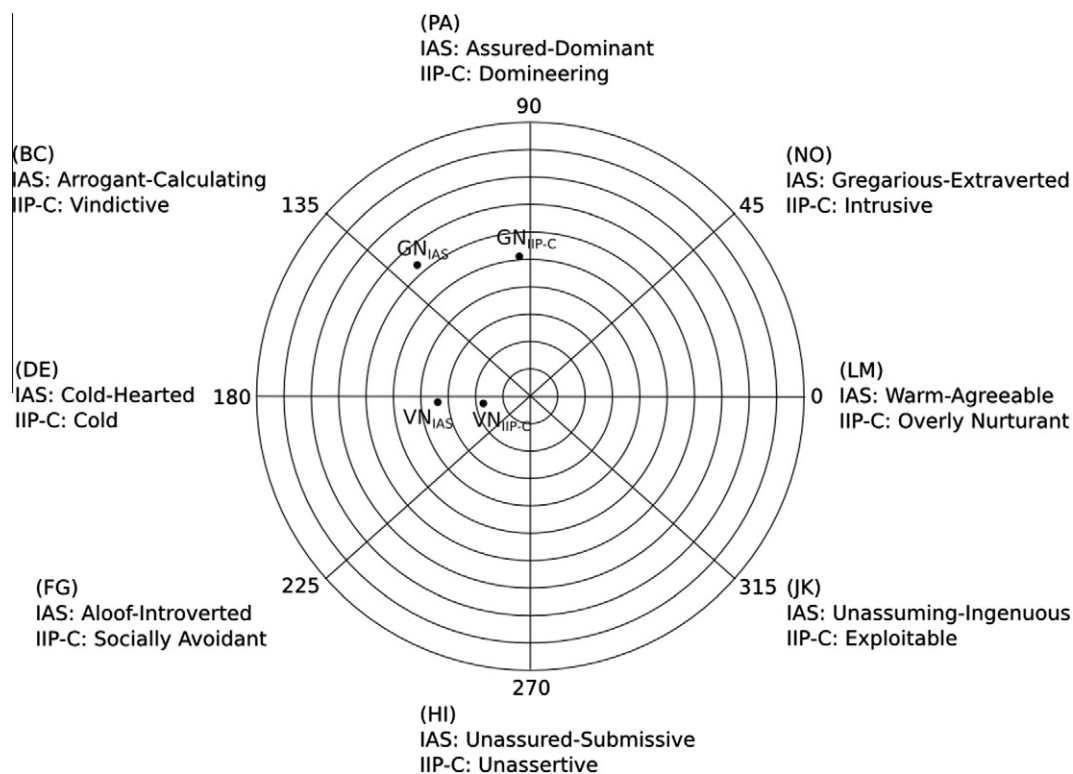


Fig. 1. Grandiose and vulnerable narcissism projected onto the Interpersonal circumplex with the IAS and IIP-C.

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