



Narcissists' negative perception of their counterpart's competence and benevolence and their own reduced trust in a negotiation context



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 March 2014

Received in revised form 10 October 2014

Accepted 11 October 2014

Keywords:

Narcissism

Trust

Competence

Benevolence

Negotiation

ABSTRACT

Despite its important role in interpersonal interactions, narcissism has rarely been examined in the context of negotiations in which individuals cooperate and compete with their counterpart. As negotiations occur frequently in daily life, empirical findings of the role of narcissism in negotiation settings can enhance the understanding of the functions of narcissism in common situations in which self- and other-interests are in conflict. By analyzing 35 negotiation dyads' within-dyad differences using multi-level analysis, I found that negotiators' narcissism was negatively related to their perception of their counterpart's competence but was not significantly related to their individual economic gain (objective negotiation performance), suggesting narcissists' inflated agentic self or deflated perception of their counterpart's competence. Additionally, narcissism was negatively related to trust, due to narcissists' negative perception of their counterpart's benevolence rather than their counterpart's competence. These findings contribute to the literatures on narcissism and trust.

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1. Introduction

Social psychologists deem narcissism as a normally distributed, dark personality trait that has adaptive and maladaptive features (Foster & Campbell, 2007; Miller & Campbell, 2008). As narcissism is on the rise particularly among the younger generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), its role in various contexts has received rising scholarly attention (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011; Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, in press; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Yet extremely little is known regarding its role in negotiations wherein individuals (re)define social relationships and resolve conflict (Walton & McKersie, 1965), despite its importance noted by Greenhalgh and Gilkey (1997). Negotiations are prevalent in daily life; individuals frequently negotiate with friends, colleagues, bosses, parents, spouses, and so forth. A considerable difference between negotiations and many other forms of social interactions (e.g., helping and advice giving) is that individuals have to balance the tension between cooperating and competing with their counterpart in negotiations (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

Recently, Park, Ferrero, Colvin, and Carney (2013) found that narcissism undermined the counterpart's trust and desire for future interactions due to reduced empathic accuracy. Their

findings are somewhat inconsistent with previous research suggesting that narcissists *can* be successful at establishing short-term relationships (Holtzman & Strube, 2011), building a positive image (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Holtzman & Strube, 2010), and making others value or like them in short-term interactions (Brunell et al., 2008; Zeigler-Hill & Besser, 2011). In addition, Park et al.'s (2013) study focused on between-dyad differences but did not account for within-dyad interdependence. Trust is an important factor in social interactions such as negotiations, as it increases interpersonal cooperation and joint benefits to individuals (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Kong, Dirks, & Ferrin, 2014; Ross & LaCroix, 1996). In the present research, I provide a different account of why narcissistic negotiators have lower trust *within* their dyads by investigating their inflated sense of agentic self (inflated self-perception of competence or deflated perception of counterpart competence) and negative perception of counterpart benevolence, using multilevel analysis. In doing so, the current research makes contributions to both literatures on narcissism and trust.

2. Theory and hypotheses

Individuals' social perception is often not aligned with objective reality, but instead, individuals self-construe their social environment (Ross & Nisbett, 1991), which influences their social perception (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). According to Brunswik's (1956) lens model, social perception is a "reflection" of the actual social cues,

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such as personality traits (e.g., Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002; Neumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009) and social skills (e.g., Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985), through the “lens.” However, the “lens” does not necessarily facilitate the accuracy of social perception; individuals can construe a lens that inflates their perception of the self in comparison to others, thereby falling victim to illusory superiority (Brown, 1986; Hoorens, 1995).

Narcissists are particularly susceptible to illusory superiority; they “care passionately about being superior to others, even if they are not yet convinced that they have achieved this superiority” (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998, p. 220). In order to maintain their fragile sense of superiority over others (Penney & Spector, 2002; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991), they often engage in dynamic self-regulation through which they affirm their narcissistic esteem (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and defend against an unfavorable self-image and the accompanied feelings of inferiority and shame (Raskin et al., 1991). Therefore, narcissists’ sense of superiority stems from their motivated self-enhancement and downward social comparison particularly in competitive situations (Maccoby, 2000). Because narcissists have strong beliefs about their agency/competence and modest beliefs about their communion/benevolence (Bosson et al., 2008), they tend to have inflated self-esteem in the agentic (competence) rather than communal (benevolence) domains (Bosson et al., 2008; Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007). Therefore, they often use interpersonal interactions as a means to bolster their agentic self through downward social comparison (Maccoby, 2000; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) despite the lack of supportive evidence (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), which simultaneously decreases their social perception of counterpart benevolence (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012). Competence and benevolence, reflecting the two fundamental dimensions of social perception (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), are critical determinants of trust (Mayer & Davis, 1999).

Negotiations are mixed-motive social interactions requiring ability, skills, and knowledge. Therefore, competence and benevolence are particularly relevant to self- and social perception (Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993). Because of individuals’ biased perception of negotiations as a zero-sum game, they often engage in competition and social comparison (Thompson, Valley, & Kramer, 1995). To maximize their narcissistic esteem and validate their grandiose self-image (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), narcissistic negotiators tend to make downward social comparison as a means to inflate their agentic self relative to their counterpart, or in other words, deflate their perception of counterpart competence relative to their own competence, even though they cannot achieve superior performance relative to their counterpart by objective standards. By making such comparison, narcissistic negotiators also worsen their perception of counterpart benevolence. Their negative perception of counterpart competence and benevolence, in turn, reduces their trust (Mayer & Davis, 1999).

Hypothesis 1: A negotiator's narcissism is negatively related to his/her perception of his/her counterpart's competence and benevolence in a negotiation.

Hypothesis 2: A negotiator's narcissism is negatively related to his/her trust in his/her counterpart, mediated by his/her perception of his/her counterpart's competence and benevolence in a negotiation.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

Seventy undergraduate students in two U.S. universities (43% female) completed the study as part of their class activities. Their average age was 20.76 years ($SD = .82$). They completed an

assessment of individual differences, including positive affect, negative affect, cognitive ability, and demographics, a few weeks after the start of the semester. About halfway through the semester, they completed a negotiation simulation named *Cartoon* (Brett & Okumura, 2009) and a post-negotiation questionnaire, in which they reported their agreement terms, trustworthiness (competence, benevolence, and integrity) perception, and trust.

The negotiation simulation was about the sale of syndicated rights to a television cartoon show for children. The seller was a major film production company, which was prepared to sell a fixed 5-year, 100-episode contract. The buyer was an independent television station in a large metropolitan area. The negotiation entailed one distributive/zero-sum issue (the price of each episode), two integrative/variable-sum issues for tradeoffs (financing and the number of runs of the show), and one compatible/identical-preference issue for both parties being better off if included (a second cartoon called *Strums*). Therefore, participants had to manage the tension between competing and cooperating with their counterpart in order to reach an agreement. Participants could also construct a contingency (betting) agreement based on their divergent expectations of the show ratings. They were randomly paired with one of their classmates (a total of 35 dyads) and were randomly assigned to a role. No dyad reached an impasse. Three dyads (8.57%) constructed a contingency agreement. Participants were fully debriefed.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Narcissism

Participants responded to Raskin and Terry's (1988) Narcissistic Personality Inventory, which comprised 40 forced-choice dichotomous items. Consistent with previous research (Miller & Campbell, 2008), the total score of NPI was used to assess narcissism, with a larger score indicating stronger narcissism.

3.2.2. Competence and benevolence perception

Participants indicated their perception of counterpart competence and benevolence by responding to 6 items of competence and 5 items of benevolence adapted from Mayer and Davis's (1999) scales on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included “My counterpart was very capable of negotiating” (competence) and “My counterpart was very concerned about my welfare” (benevolence). Participants' responses were averaged ($\alpha_{\text{competence}} = .86$ and $\alpha_{\text{benevolence}} = .85$), with a larger score indicating participants' more positive perception of their counterpart's competence and benevolence.

3.2.3. Trust

Participants indicated their post-negotiation trust toward their counterpart by responding to four items adapted from Mayer and Davis's (1999) scale on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included: “If I had my way, I wouldn't let my counterpart have any influence over issues that are important to me” (reverse-scored) and “I would be comfortable giving my counterpart a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor her/his actions.” Participants' responses were averaged ($\alpha = .66$), with a larger score indicating greater trust.

3.2.4. Individual economic gain (objective negotiation performance)

Each participant's individual economic gain, representing his/her objective negotiation performance, was the individual net value gained from the negotiation, with the expected value of contingency terms incorporated if any. The values were calculated based on participants' self-reported agreement terms and the given payoff tables. A larger numeric value represented a higher

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