Brief Report

A wolf in sheep's clothing? Communal narcissism and positive implicit self-views in the communal domain ☆

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ABSTRACT

Communal narcissists possess the unique belief in their capability to bring about freedom to the world, and so see themselves as "saints". To examine if this communal self-view extends to the more automatic component of self-evaluation, that is, a person's implicit self-view, the present study ($N = 701$) tested the extent to which communal narcissism was associated with explicit communal self-ratings and implicit associations between the self and communal attributes. The latent correlation between communal narcissism and explicit communal self-views was strongly positive, yet no such relationship emerged for implicit communal self-views. These findings support the notion that communal narcissism may represent an effort to gain favorable appraisals from others in the absence of a genuine communal self-view.

1. Introduction

From popular culture to global politics, the concept of "narcissism" is all around us. Narcissism can be characterized by a sense of uniqueness, feelings of entitlement, and fantasies of unlimited power, beauty, or ideal love (Rhodewalt & Peterson, 2009). Most conceptualizations of narcissism seem to agree that narcissism entails both grandiose and vulnerable features (for a recent review, see Krizan & Herlache, 2018). Although grandiose and vulnerable narcissism share common properties (e.g., grandiose fantasies), there are also marked differences. Grandiose narcissism corresponds closely to laypeople's view of narcissism as an attention-seeking, entitled, and interpersonally domineering individual (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008). In contrast, vulnerable narcissism reflects the more fragile expression of narcissism as an insecure, hypersensitive, and socially inhibited individual (Cain et al., 2008; Pincus et al., 2009). The present study focuses on grandiose narcissism and one of its facets.

In line with the agency model of narcissism (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006), grandiose narcissists[1] place a strong emphasis on agentic ("getting ahead") versus communal ("getting along") goals. They exhibit agentic narcissism and perceive themselves as superheroes. More recently, however, researchers have devoted increased effort into another type of narcissism, namely communal narcissism (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012). As condensed in the agency-communion model of narcissism (Gebauer et al., 2012), communal narcissists satisfy their core (agentic) self-motives (i.e., grandiosity, entitlement, and self-esteem) via communal (vs. agentic) means. According to Gebauer et al. (2012), communal narcissism can therefore be perceived as an agentic trait that is expressed via communal means. By definition, communal narcissists are assumed to hold unrealistically positive self-views in the domain of communion (e.g., helpfulness, trustworthiness, and warmth). For example, communal narcissists self-describe as "the *most* understanding person", "*extraordinarily* trustworthy", or "the *best* parent on this planet" (emphasis added, Gebauer et al., 2012, p. 878). Communal narcissism therefore differs from 'ordinary' communal self-views to the extent that the latter simply reflect trait-like attributes in the domain of communion (e.g., 'I am helpful') without conveying

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[1] For ease of exposition, we use the term 'narcissism' and its derivatives (e.g., 'narcissist') to describe individuals who score high on narcissism measures. We therefore refer to narcissism as a dimensional personality trait on which individuals differ from one another, rather than a discrete category that individuals belong to or do not belong to.

information regarding one's sense of grandiosity (e.g., 'I am the *most* helpful person I know'). Nevertheless, what is missing from the literature is how communal narcissists' implicit, as opposed to their explicit, self-views are like. This is crucial, however, to understand whether and to what extent communal self-views are internally integrated in communal narcissists' self-concept. To address this gap, we engage in an investigation of communal narcissists' implicit and explicit self-views in the communal domain (hereafter: implicit and explicit communal self-views) and test two competing hypotheses, the genuine communal hypothesis and the hypocritical communion hypothesis.

Personal self-views refer to qualities that make individuals distinct and unique from other individuals (Swann & Bosson, 2008) and come in two forms: explicit and implicit. Explicit self-views pertain to deliberately processed evaluations of the self and are assessed with direct measures (i.e., self-reports). In contrast, implicit self-views pertain to automatically processed evaluations of the self and are measured with indirect measures, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Whereas explicit self-views are assumed to be indicative of controlled, reflective, and rule-based operations in the rational system, implicit self-views are assumed to be indicative of automatic, impulsive, and association-based operations in the experiential system (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Moreover, it is assumed that the typical functioning of reflective processes condenses into propositional self-representations (e.g., 'I am helpful') whereas the typical functioning of impulsive processes condenses into associative self-representations (e.g., 'me—helpful'). Individual differences in propositional and associative self-representations are therefore referred to as the explicit and the implicit personality self-concept, respectively (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2009).

In their seminal study, Gebauer et al. (2012) have shown that communal narcissism is positively related to more positive explicit self-views in communal domains (e.g., helpfulness), but not in agentic domains (e.g., assertiveness). Moreover, communal narcissists tend to overclaim their communion in self-reports and, apparently, "*believe* that they are particularly advanced in communal matters" (emphasis added, p. 868). Relatedly, communal narcissists rate themselves high on prosocial behavior, such as helping others (Barry, Lui, Lee-Rowland, & Moran, 2017). On the supposition that the concept of communion is deeply entrenched in communal narcissists' self-concept, communal narcissists should not only differ in their typical reflective processes given specific situations (e.g., 'I am a person that likes to help people who are in need'), but also in their automatic perception of specific situational cues (e.g., other people), their impulsive tendencies (e.g., approaching), and the ease of activation of the trait concept of communion (e.g., helpful). As such, one would expect a positive association between communal narcissism and favorable communal self-views at both explicit and implicit levels (*genuine communion hypothesis*).

However, despite communal narcissists' exceptional belief in their communion, it has also been reported that individuals higher in communal narcissism actually do not possess more communal knowledge and, ironically, are viewed as lower in communion by other individuals (Gebauer et al., 2012). Stated differently, communal narcissists' favorable self-views do not seem to translate into overt communal behavior, which in turn could be perceived by others. This observation led some researchers to conclude that communal narcissism represents "an attempt to gain favor from others in the absence of a truly positive self-view" (Barry et al., 2017, p. 789). Because personality can be conceived of as the joint functioning of reflective and impulsive processes that together influence actual behavior (Back et al., 2009), the absence of an overtly communal behavior may, at least in theory, indicate that

the trait concept of communion is not (or, at best, weakly) rooted in communal narcissists' implicit self-views, but merely represent a lip service in the form of a hypocritical self-proclamation. Moreover, because indirect measures are less vulnerable to self-presentational concerns than explicit measures (Gawronski, LeBel, & Peters, 2007), when communal narcissists' implicit communal self-views are in fact not highly positive, the correlation between the narcissism measure and the IAT is expected to be absent. As such, one would continue to expect a positive association between communal narcissism and favorable communal self-views at explicit levels, but no (or a negative) association at implicit levels (*hypocritical communion hypothesis*).

2. Method

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2012). Data, code, and Mplus output files used for the analyses reported below are available from the Open Science Framework (OSF; Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018).

2.1. Participants and procedure

Following Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013), we opted for a minimum sample size of $N = 250$ to achieve sufficiently stable estimates. Participants were recruited via social networking sites and all measures were administered using a non-commercial online-survey system (SoSci Survey; www.soscisurvey.de; Leiner, 2018). Given that the study was conducted online, it was possible to oversample and a total of 702 individuals participated. Of these, 630 individuals provided demographic information (164 male, $M_{age} = 23.28$, $SD_{age} = 4.71$).[2] As an incentive, participants obtained feedback about their personality traits (provided upon study completion).[3] After consenting to participate, participants completed the measures described below, along with some additional measures that are not relevant to the current study (see Supplementary Table S1). All measures were administered in German.

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2018.07.004.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Communal narcissism

Communal narcissism was measured using the Communal Narcissism Inventory (CNI; Gebauer et al., 2012). The CNI consists of 16 items that assess grandiose self-views in the communal domain (e.g., "I will bring freedom to the people"; 1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = 0.88$).

2.2.2. Implicit communal self-views

Implicit communal self-views were measured using an adapted version of the IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998). The IAT was administered using SoSci Survey's "Implicit methods" module. The IAT is a computerized task, in which individuals are asked to classify stimuli (i.e., words) as fast as possible into four different categories: Two target categories ('me' vs. 'not-me'; 6 stimuli each) and two attribute categories ('positive' vs. 'negative'; 6 items). The improved scoring algorithm was used to calculate IAT scores (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003; Spearman-Brown corrected split-half reliability = 0.66). Higher scores reflect more favorable implicit communal self-views.

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[2] One participant had to be excluded due to an implausible age value (age = 2), thus the final dataset comprises 701 cases.

[3] The feedback was based on the Big Five Inventory-10 that was completed at the end of the study (Rammstedt & John, 2007).