



Entitlement is about ‘others’, narcissism is not: Relations to sociotropic and autonomous interpersonal styles



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ABSTRACT

Although narcissism and psychological entitlement are correlated, they may predict different patterns of interpersonal relationships. We hypothesized that narcissism is primarily about the self, while entitlement is about the self in relation to others. Therefore interpersonal relationships should play a minimal role in narcissism but should occupy a larger role in entitlement. To test this, we had 621 undergraduate students complete the Personal Style Inventory II which measures sociotropic (dependence) and autonomous (independence) interpersonal styles as well as the Psychological Entitlement Scale and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. We analyzed the variance explained by entitlement and by narcissism for each interpersonal style and their subscales. Narcissism negatively predicted sociotropy and was unrelated to autonomy, indicating low levels of dependence without being overly-independent. Conversely, entitlement positively predicted both sociotropy and autonomy, revealing an inconsistent mix of dependence on others and a need for independence from them. Therefore, although psychological entitlement and narcissism share a self-centric orientation, the two constructs differ in terms of orientation to others.

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1. Introduction

As one of the oldest constructs in the history of the field of psychology, models of narcissism are many and diverse. Across the spectrum of social-personality, developmental and clinical literatures, one can find evidence for two dimensions (e.g., Corry, Merritt, Mrug, & Pamp, 2008; Kubarych, Deary, & Austin, 2004), three dimensions (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011), four dimensions (e.g., Emmons, 1984) and seven dimensions (e.g., Raskin & Terry, 1988) subsumed under the construct of narcissism. Despite this variability, most models suggest that an individual who is high on trait narcissism is one who exhibits self-absorption, a sense of grandiosity, exhibitionism, arrogance, and feelings of entitlement.

On the other hand, the concept of psychological entitlement as a stand-alone construct is relatively new, as it has been historically viewed merely as a facet of narcissism. However Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, and Bushman (2004) conceptualize psychological entitlement as a unique individual difference variable with its own interpersonal consequences, and as such define it as the “stable and pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (p. 31). They developed and

validated the 9-item, single-factor Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES), and found that scores on the PES did correlate with scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), but that 75% of the variance of the PES is unshared with the NPI (Study 1). They also found that high scores on the PES predicted self-centered behaviors such as taking more in imagined situations (giving oneself higher salaries than coworkers, Study 6), real situations (taking candy from a purported Child Development lab, Study 5; behaving selfishly in romantic relationships, Study 8), and also predicted behaving aggressively in response to an insult (Study 9), over and above the Entitlement subscale of the NPI (ENT) when it was used as a covariate. Their findings suggest that although psychological entitlement and narcissism share variance, there is a large proportion that is not shared, indicating that the two constructs may tap into different psychological processes.

Both constructs appear to inflate one's sense of self, but may do so in different ways. One of those ways may be the role that other people play in each: the narcissist experiences self-importance, superiority, and grandiosity, and it is the self who is the star, with other people playing a peripheral role. However, the very definition of entitlement includes other people in that one “deserves more and is entitled to more *than others*” (*italics added*). Thus others are not merely implied, but are necessary for experiencing the feeling of entitlement.

There has been research comparing outcomes predicted by entitlement with those predicted by narcissism, but the comparisons

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are typically between scores on the PES and the ENT or Entitlement/exploitativeness subscales of the NPI. Additionally, they have focused on behavioral problems (Ackerman & Donnellan, *in press*, Study 2) or personality disorders (Pryor, Miller, & Gaughan, 2008). None have sought to examine the role of others in either entitlement or in narcissism with respect to interpersonal orientation. This is precisely the purpose of our current study: to examine and compare the role of others in interpersonal relationships among those high in entitlement, and those high in narcissism. We hypothesized that relationships should play a minimal role in narcissism, but should occupy a much larger role in entitlement due to entitlement's apparent reliance on others that lies at the core of its definition.

To test this possibility, we examined how psychological entitlement and narcissism predict the interpersonal styles of sociotropy and autonomy (Beck, 1983), styles that dichotomize interactions into those that focus on the need for others and those that do not. Sociotropy refers to a need for positive interchange with other people and reflects dependence on others. Those high on sociotropy place a great deal of value on approval, intimacy, affection and assistance. Autonomy refers to a need for independence and mastery, and a need for personal achievement and control. Those high on autonomy are concerned about failure, maximum control, and maintaining distance from others. Both styles have been associated with a variety of interpersonal problems (e.g., Desmet, Vanheule, Meganck, & Verhaeghe, 2010; Sato & McCann, 2007;) and vulnerability to depression, although sociotropy appears to be more strongly linked (Robins et al., 1994).

The present study attempts to address the possibility that the role played by other people differs for both psychological entitlement and narcissism. To do so, we analyzed the variance explained by psychological entitlement and by narcissism in both sociotropy and for autonomy, while controlling for each other's contribution.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Six-hundred-twenty-one participants (464 females, 157 males) enrolled at a mid-sized university located in the northeastern United States participated in the study. They were of traditional college age (18–22) with 47%, 21%, 16%, and 16% in their first, second, third and fourth year of college, respectively. The sample was predominantly white (89%). All participants completed the study in partial fulfillment of course requirements.

2.2. Materials and procedure

Participants were asked to complete the PES, the NPI, and the Personal Style Inventory II (PSI-II; Robins et al., 1994), as part of a larger correlational study of trait entitlement. All questionnaires were completed online through a secure departmental website.

The PES is a 9-item inventory designed to measure trait entitlement (e.g., "I demand the best because I'm worth it," "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others"). Responses range from 1 = strong disagreement to 7 = strong agreement. Scores for the PES are obtained by summing individual items ($M = 30.40$, $SD = 9.63$; $\alpha = .85$).

The NPI is a 40-item, forced-choice measure of global narcissism (e.g. "I like to have authority over other people" vs. "I don't mind following orders"). Each pair of statements has one narcissistic and one non-narcissistic response; total scores are calculated by summing the number of narcissistic choices. The mean NPI total score for the sample was 9.19 ($SD = 3.53$) with an alpha coefficient of .67.

Finally, the Personality Style Inventory II was used to measure interpersonal styles in terms of sociotropy and autonomy. It consists of 48 statements rated on a 6 point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree; scores were summed for each of six subscales. The PSI-II measures three facets of sociotropy: pleasing others ($M = 40.28$, $SD = 7.86$; 10 items, $\alpha = .82$), concerns about what others think ($M = 27.39$, $SD = 5.58$; 7 items, $\alpha = .78$), and dependency ($M = 30.13$, $SD = 5.60$; 7 items, $\alpha = .71$) and three facets of autonomy: perfectionism/self-criticism ($M = 15.84$, $SD = 3.41$; 4 items, $\alpha = .61$), need for control ($M = 27.59$, $SD = 5.14$; 8 items, $\alpha = .67$), and defensive separation ($M = 39.10$, $SD = 8.03$; 12 items, $\alpha = .76$). We computed a total score for sociotropy ($M = 100.60$, $SD = 14.41$; 24 items, $\alpha = .87$) and autonomy ($M = 82.82$, $SD = 13.10$; 24 items, $\alpha = .82$) by summing across individual subscales.

2.3. Analysis

Data were analyzed in two sets of multiple regression analyses. In the first set of analyses, gender, PES, and NPI were entered as predictor variables in two steps, with total scores for sociotropy and autonomy serving as the criterion variables. In the second set of analyses, gender, PES and NPI were again entered in two steps as predictors, with individual subscales for sociotropy and autonomy serving as the criterion variables.

In both sets of analyses, gender was entered as a first step to control for gender effects, as significant gender differences are typically found for measures of interpersonal style. The PES and NPI were entered simultaneously on the second step, to both control for one another and to compare the contribution of each construct as it relates to measures of sociotropy and autonomy.

3. Results

Simple correlations (Pearson r) were computed between predictor (entitlement and narcissism) and criterion (sociotropy, autonomy, and their subscales) variables prior to computing regression analyses (see Table 1). The correlation between the PES and NPI was .36 ($p < .01$), similar to the correlation found by Campbell et al. (2004). As expected, total scores for sociotropy and autonomy correlated highly with respective subscales; correlation values ranged from .56 to .88. Further tests revealed no evidence of collinearity among independent variables ($VIF < 2$ and tolerance $> .85$).

3.1. Sociotropy and autonomy – total score analyses

The results of two regression analyses for sociotropy and autonomy using total scores are presented in the left-most columns of Tables 2 and 3. Beginning with sociotropy (Table 2), we found that gender was a significant predictor at both steps, with females more likely to have higher scores on sociotropy than males. As expected, different patterns for entitlement and narcissism emerged on the second step of the model: the PES showed a small positive relationship and the NPI showed a strongly negative relationship to sociotropy.

For autonomy (Table 3), gender was also found to be predictive but in a direction opposite of that found for sociotropy: males were more likely to have higher scores on autonomy than females. The PES was positively related to autonomy, however narcissism was not. Therefore, overall scores suggest that entitlement and narcissism show different interpersonal patterns: entitlement is positively associated with both high sociotropy and autonomy, whereas narcissism is negatively related to sociotropy and is unrelated to autonomy.

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