



Self-focused and feeling fine: Assessing state narcissism and its relation to well-being[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The current research replicates and extends past findings for within-person variability in narcissism by examining how fluctuations in daily narcissism across three different measures relate to subjective well-being. We assessed state narcissism, daily life satisfaction, positive and negative affect over 14 days ($N = 147$) and observed substantial within-person variability in three measures of state narcissism. Within-person variability in “normal” grandiose narcissism (the Narcissistic Personality Inventory) was associated with greater life satisfaction, greater positive affect and greater hostility. Within-person variability on self-reports of narcissism reflecting more pathological expressions of narcissism (Single-Item Narcissism Scale, and an adjective-rating measure) were also associated with daily shame and guilt. People may thus display variable levels of normal and pathological narcissism that relate to well-being.

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1. Introduction

People high in narcissism have unrealistic and inflated positive self-views, a sense of entitlement and frequently strive to validate and enhance their self-esteem (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2007; Morf, Torchetti, & Schürch, 2011). Narcissism has mainly been studied as a structural variable, in terms of between-person variability, or the extent to which different people are characteristically more or less narcissistic. Recent research, however, suggests that narcissism may also function as a personality process or state such that everyone can be more or less narcissistic at different times (e.g., Giacomini & Jordan, 2016). The current research replicates and extends past findings by assessing the degree of within-person variability in daily narcissism across a variety of state narcissism measures. Furthermore the current research examines how fluctuations in daily narcissism relate to subjective well-being.

1.1. Narcissism as a process or state

Descriptions of narcissism, both within and across different assessment techniques and theoretical orientations, are heterogeneous (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010).

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This diversity in descriptions has led to the proposed existence of numerous forms of narcissism. One useful framework for considering phenotypic variation in narcissism is the hierarchical organization proposed by Pincus and colleagues (Cain et al., 2008; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Pincus & Roche, 2011). This framework firstly distinguishes normal and pathological narcissism, largely on the basis of whether the manifestation of narcissism is associated with adaptive (normal) or maladaptive (pathological) outcomes, such as psychological adjustment, mood disorder symptoms, and self-esteem. These forms of narcissism, in turn, manifest with narcissistic grandiosity or vulnerability. Grandiose narcissism is arrogant, extraverted, and exploitative, whereas vulnerable narcissism is more fragile, introverted, and neurotic. In the current research, we focus on normal, grandiose narcissism, assessed by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), although we admit to some reservation about labeling this form of narcissism “normal.” NPI scores are associated with maladaptive interpersonal outcomes, and with being aggressive, greedy, domineering, and insincere (Campbell & Miller, 2011). NPI scores also correlate with the five-factor trait profile rated by experts as being prototypic of individuals with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, suggesting the NPI does assess some pathological aspects of narcissism (Miller, Lynam, & Campbell, 2014).

In addition to the structural, trait component of normal, grandiose narcissism, recent models theoretically posit that this form of narcissism may include a process or state component. These models conceptualize narcissism as a self-regulatory system, in which narcissism is a set of mutually reinforcing characteristics, abilities and strategies (e.g., approach orientation, desire for

self-esteem) that orient individuals toward positive self-views and greater self-enhancement (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2007; Foster & Brennan, 2010; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). These characteristics are connected by positive feedback loops, such that when one element in the system changes, others are posited to also change, resulting in overall increases or decreases in narcissism. Contexts that highlight an individual's competence, for example, may fuel his or her desire for self-esteem, which in turn may increase other narcissistic tendencies. These models thus suggest that narcissism fluctuates as a function of situational affordances.

Recent research has begun to systematically examine within-person variability in normal, grandiose narcissism (Giacomin & Jordan, 2014, 2016). By investigating narcissism as a personality process or state, this research helps to align narcissism research with context-dependent models of personality (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995) and the density distribution approach to personality (Fleeson, 2001). The density distribution approach, for example, suggests that personality consists of a structural component—mean levels of a personality trait—and a process component—the within-person variability or dispersion around mean levels of a personality trait. People display personality traits which reflect general tendencies of behaving; however, they also display personality states to differing degrees across contexts or situations.

Giacomin and Jordan (2016) measured state narcissism across 10-days using the NPI-16 (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006), a widely used measure of normal grandiose narcissism. They examined whether there is significant within-person variability in grandiose narcissism and whether this variability relates systematically to other psychological states and daily events. They found that 24% of the variability in daily narcissism on the NPI-16 occurs within-person. Moreover, they found that participants reported higher state narcissism on days when they experienced more positive outcomes, such as having power over someone or when someone behaved positively toward them. In addition, felt stress was negatively associated with state narcissism such that on days when people reported more narcissism, they reported experiencing less stress.

Other research suggests that narcissism changes in response to situational affordances. For example, people reported less narcissism after being induced to experience empathy in response to another's suffering or when they were primed with interdependent self-construal (Giacomin & Jordan, 2014; for a review, see Jordan, Giacomin, & Kopp, 2014). People have reported higher state narcissism after increased social media use (Gentile, Twenge, Freeman, & Campbell, 2012, Study 1) and after thinking about a time when they had impressed others or after being primed with positive traits (e.g., beautiful, smart; Sakellaropoulou & Baldwin, 2007). Although some people are, in general, more narcissistic than others, this research suggests that people can also be more or less narcissistic across different times or situations, and these fluctuations in narcissism are psychologically meaningful.

To date, research examining state narcissism has only examined the degree of within-person variability in narcissism using the NPI-16. In the current research, however, we replicate and extend our past findings by examining the degree of within-person variability in state narcissism across three different assessments of daily narcissism. We then examine the extent to which state narcissism relates to daily subjective well-being. Subjective well-being can be considered to be composed of two components: a person's satisfaction with life and his or her mood (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). We examine whether people's daily positive and negative affective states and daily life satisfaction are associated with their daily narcissism.

1.2. Narcissism and well-being

Individuals high in normal grandiose narcissism tend to report good psychological health. This form of narcissism is positively

related to subjective well-being (Rose, 2002), and negatively related to anxiety (Watson & Biderman, 1993) and depression (Wink, 1992). Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, and Rusbul (2004) found that normal grandiose narcissism is related to decreased depression, loneliness, anxiety, neuroticism and increased subjective well-being, including life satisfaction and affective balance (i.e., the balance between positive and negative affect).

Some research has also examined how this form of narcissism relates to daily affect and variability in daily affect. Emmons (1987) found that narcissism (particularly its exploitativeness and entitlement facets) was associated with greater variability in positive and negative affect across 42 days. Rhodewalt, Madrian, and Cheney (1998) observed that trait narcissism predicted greater positive affect and more positive affect variability across five consecutive days, but was unrelated to negative affect. Narcissists, however, did experience greater fluctuations in positive and negative affect on days when they experienced more interpersonal hassles. These findings are consistent with theoretical accounts suggesting that narcissists are emotionally volatile (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1976).

There is thus evidence that trait narcissism is associated with greater subjective well-being and variability in daily affect. Based on the principle of similarity between states and traits within the density distribution approach to personality (Fleeson, 2001; Heller, Komar, & Lee, 2007), we predicted that similar associations would hold for state grandiose narcissism measured using the NPI-16. Thus we expected that daily grandiose narcissism would be positively related to daily subjective well-being, including greater life satisfaction, more positive affect and less negative affect. Because the association of trait narcissism with negative affect is least consistent, our prediction for this outcome was relatively tentative.

In addition to examining the relations between state narcissism and these measures of subjective well-being, we also examine the extent to which such relations are due to fluctuations in daily self-esteem. We previously observed that daily narcissism is associated with daily self-esteem (Giacomin & Jordan, 2016). In addition, the relation between trait grandiose narcissism and many indicators of psychological health, including subjective well-being, are fully mediated by self-esteem (Sedikides et al., 2004). Thus, it is possible, as with trait narcissism, that any relation between state narcissism and subjective well-being is due entirely to state self-esteem. We test this possibility in the present studies by measuring daily self-esteem and controlling it in our analyses. Evidence that the association between state narcissism and subjective well-being is reduced or eliminated when state self-esteem is controlled would provide evidence that self-esteem mediates this relation, as is the case for trait narcissism. If controlling state self-esteem does not reduce this relation, however, it suggests a unique effect of state narcissism on well-being that differentiates it from state self-esteem.

1.3. Assessing state narcissism

A limitation of our previous examination of daily narcissism was that we focused solely on fluctuations in state narcissism based on the NPI-16. Although using a well-validated narcissism scale increased confidence that we assessed normal grandiose narcissism, it also may have restricted the amount of within-person variability observed in daily narcissism. Personality states have typically been studied with rating scales and brief adjective-based assessments of personality dimensions (e.g., extroversion; Fleeson, 2001). Brief adjective ratings may allow people to more sensitively report changes in their behavior compared to the NPI-16 which requires participants to make forced-choices

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