



Narcissism and trust: Differential impact of agentic, antagonistic, and communal narcissism[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that individuals high in narcissism mistrust others, yet little is known about narcissism's relation to trust. In the current study ($N = 727$), we aim to close this gap in the literature by examining the relationship between facets of trust (i.e., cognitive bias in the evaluation of others and personal trustworthiness) and facets of grandiose narcissism (i.e., agentic, antagonistic, and communal). We strive to answer the question whether narcissistic individuals believe that others are reliable, honest, and benevolent (how they perceive others) and whether they present themselves as trusting of others (how they perceive themselves). We posit and show that agentic narcissism is not related to any of the studied trust facets, suggesting that the concept of trust is not relevant to their self-image. In contrast, antagonistic narcissism is negatively related to perceiving others and oneself as trustful, and communal narcissism is positively related to these trust facets, purportedly due to communal self-enhancement. We discuss our findings of the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept as well as to the Agency-Communion model of grandiose narcissism.

1. Introduction

Trust can be defined as a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). The acceptance of one's vulnerability seems to be antithetical to narcissism (Miller, Lynam, Hyatt, & Campbell, 2017). Most of the previous studies examined how narcissism is related to distrust (Kerr, Patton, Lapan, & Hills, 1994; Krizan & Johar, 2015) and not trust per se. Trust and distrust, however, are distinct constructs with distinguishable characteristics and determinants (e.g., Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). While distrust refers to confident negative expectations regarding others' behaviour (Lewicki et al., 1998), trust refers to a general assumption about the good nature of others (Evans & Revelle, 2008; Rotter, 1971). High distrust and low trust are distinct –the former is characterised by scepticism, defensiveness, and watchfulness, while the latter involves passivity, hesitation, and lack of hope (Lewicki et al., 1998).

High levels of trust are related to many desirable social outcomes, like cooperation (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013), relationship commitment (Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011), organisational citizenship behaviours (Duffy & Lilly, 2013), or civic and political engagement (Putnam,

1995). For this reason, examining the extent to which narcissism is related to trust is important for better understanding the social functioning of narcissists. The present paper adopts the distinction between three facets of grandiose narcissism: agentic, antagonistic, and communal. We examine narcissism in relation to trust as measured both by the general assumption about the positivity of human nature (Evans & Revelle, 2008; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994) and the general propensity to rely on others, which is expressed in trustworthiness as an aspect of agreeableness (Soto & John, 2017). Such an approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of the differential relations between distinct facets of narcissism and trust, thereby allowing us to integrate studies on grandiose narcissism and trust from both social and personality psychology perspective.

1.1. Three facets of grandiose narcissism

Within the literature, at least two theoretical models of grandiose narcissism can be distinguished, that is, the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC; Back et al., 2013) and the Agency-Communion (A-C) model of narcissism (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio,

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2012). Together, they define grandiose narcissism as a construct containing three facets: agentic, antagonistic, and communal. The agentic facet of narcissism is depicted within the NARC (Back et al., 2013) as *narcissistic admiration* and reflects the assertive features of narcissistic personality, such as fantasies of grandiosity, uniqueness, and charm- ingness (Back et al., 2013; Rogoza, Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Rogoza, Piotrowski, & Wyszynska, 2016). The antagonistic facet of narcissism is also depicted within the NARC as *narcissistic rivalry* and encompasses the malignant features of narcissistic personality, such as aggressiveness, hostility, and other-derogation (Back et al., 2013; Leckelt, Küfner, Nestler, & Back, 2015).¹ Finally, the communal facet of narcissism is only expressed in the A-C model of narcissism as *communal narcissism*, which emphasizes that narcissists fulfill their core self-motives (e.g., entitlement, power, and esteem) not only through agentic but also communal means (e.g., being extraordinarily helpful or trustworthy; Gebauer et al., 2012).

Most of the previous studies focused only on comparing two out of three narcissism facets (e.g., agentic vs antagonistic or agentic vs communal; Wetzel, Leckelt, Gerlach, & Back, 2016; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Czarna, Piotrowski, Baran, & Maltby, 2016). Fatfouta, Zeigler-Hill, and Schröder-Abé (2017) confirmed that the antagonistic and agentic facets are positively related to each other. Additionally, they revealed that while the communal facet is positively related to the agentic facet, it is unrelated to the antagonistic facet (Fatfouta et al., 2017). However, this lack of relation between antagonistic and communal narcissism might be obscured by communal self-enhancement. Antagonistic narcissism is directed against others through aggressiveness, hostility, or unforgiveness (Back et al., 2013; Grove, Smith, Girard, and Wright, in press). In contrast, communal narcissism (at least as expressed in the self-report) involves supporting others through (apparent) friendliness or warmth (Gebauer et al., 2012), although it is unrelated to actual communal behaviours (Nehrlich, Gebauer, Sedikides, & Schoel, 2018). For this reason, one would expect that outcomes related to communal and antagonistic aspects of narcissism are opposite, at least in self-report studies.

1.2. Narcissism and trust

Trust can be described as a personality characteristic that refers to the general willingness to trust others or the general assumption about the positive nature of the social world (Evans & Reville, 2008; Farris, Senner, & Butterfield, 1973; Mayer et al., 1995; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Individuals with a higher propensity to trust are more likely to perceive other people as trustworthy and consider their intentions as benevolent (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). In the Five Factor Model of personality, trust is regarded as a cognitive facet of the agreeableness trait and refers to the propensity of an individual to trust others (Costa Jr. & McCrae, 1992; Soto & John, 2017). However, it could also be regarded as a stable style of thinking about others (Evans & Reville, 2008; Rotter, 1971; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Therefore, trust can be examined both from a personality and social psychology perspective. A distinction between trust understood as a personality trait or as an individual-difference variable associated with stable assumptions about the nature of the social world seems to be irrelevant to narcissism as both approaches assume that trusting people manifests in positive perceptions of others. However, trust considered as an individual-difference variable might be associated with two aspects: (1) cognitive bias or generalised attitude toward others, so that it is based on beliefs about the human nature, or (2) self-perception as a person who appears open and benevolent to others due to one's own trustworthiness, so that it is associated with one's self-image (Gebauer et al., 2012). Therefore, the first aspect refers to the question, *how*

narcissists perceive others, while the latter refers to *how narcissists perceive themselves*. Hence, including both perspectives on trust, that is, as a cognitive bias/attitude and as a personality trait, might help us understand the complicated relationship between trust and different facets of grandiose narcissism.

Narcissists can skillfully exploit social relationships to build up their own position and status, but over time these relationships deteriorate due to narcissists' lack of empathy and trust toward others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Indeed, individuals scoring high in grandiose narcissism tend to score low on trust measured as a general opinion about others (Konrath, Chopik, Hsing, & O'Brien, 2014). However, Glover, Miller, Lynam, Crego, and Widiger (2012) found a positive relation only between antagonistic expressions of narcissism and distrust, suggesting that the distinction between antagonistic and agentic narcissism would be important in examining convictions about the human nature. Noteworthy, all of the studies above did not investigate how communal narcissism relates to trust. Thus, it is not clear to what extent communal self-views as a trustworthy person go along with positive views of others' benevolence. In light of the observed inconsistencies and the lack of inclusion of communal narcissism in previous research, the current study aims to systematically examine the narcissism-trust relationship in a more nuanced way by scrutinising distinct narcissism and trust facets.

Antagonistic narcissism is related to overt competition with others. For this reason, this facet should be related to social convictions associated with negative views of interpersonal relationships, like zero-sum thinking, assuming opposition in the interests of individuals, and this way of thinking is negatively related to trust (Rózycka-Tran, Boski, & Wojciszke, 2015). Agentic narcissism, however, is associated with self-enhancement in the agentic domain, which is less relevant to the perception of the human nature as trustworthy (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). Indeed, Back et al. (2013) reported a lack of correlation between perceptions of trustworthiness and agentic narcissism, while antagonistic narcissism was negatively correlated with these perceptions. Finally, communal narcissism is positively associated with self-enhancement in the communal domain (Gebauer et al., 2012). Moreover, communal narcissists consider themselves as “extraordinarily trustworthy” (Gebauer et al., 2012; p. 878). It is important to note that due to social norms, people present high levels of trust even if they actually do not experience trust (Dunning, Anderson, Schösser, Ehlebracht, & Fetchenhauer, 2014). Therefore, communal narcissists should follow this social norm for self-presentation aims, given that by presenting their own trustworthiness they could successfully maintain their communal self-view in front of others.

2. Current study

The main aim of the present study was to investigate the relations between facets of narcissism and trust. As narcissism is a heterogeneous construct (Ackerman et al., 2011; Wink, 1991), the current research distinguished three facets: agentic, antagonistic, and communal. We hypothesised that each of these narcissism facets would have a unique relation to trust: (1) agentic narcissism would be unrelated; (2) antagonistic narcissism would be negatively related; and (3) communal narcissism would be positively related to trust. As existing research suggests that these facets of narcissism are interrelated (Back et al., 2013; Fatfouta et al., 2017), we conducted linear regression models in which the different forms of narcissism were simultaneous predictors of trust. We provide the data used for our analyses via the Open Science Framework [please insert the link provided in the letter to the Editor].

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

Following Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013), we aimed for a

¹ We use the terms narcissistic rivalry and antagonistic narcissism as well as narcissistic admiration and agentic narcissism as interchangeable.

minimum sample size of 250 individuals. Aside from sex and age, no further demographic details were collected. Data were collected during a three-month period from October to December 2017 using Google Forms platform. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw from the study at any time without further explanation (in which case their responses were not recorded). As an incentive, participants were able to join a cash prize draw. Given that data collection was conducted online using snowball sampling (i.e., the link was spread via social networking sites), we were able to exceed this criterion, and a total of 727 individuals participated (30.1% were males). Ages ranged from 18 to 35 years ($M = 22.19$; $SD = 2.54$). All participants were Polish residents, and all measures were administered in Polish. All procedures were approved by the institutional Ethics Board (the decision was issued on October 25th; decision ID: KEiB – 14/2017).

3.2. Measures

For all measures described below, high scores reflect a higher level of the characteristic being assessed (i.e., higher narcissism and higher trust).

3.2.1. Agentic and antagonistic narcissism

The Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire-Short (NARQ-S; Back et al., 2013; Leckelt et al., 2018) is a six-item measure of narcissism distinguishing its agentic and antagonistic facets and referring to its affective-motivational, cognitive, and behavioural processes: (1) grandiosity, striving for uniqueness, and charmingness in terms of *narcissistic admiration* (3 items each; e.g., *I deserve to be seen as a great personality*); (2) devaluation, striving for supremacy, and aggressiveness in terms of *narcissistic rivalry* (3 items each; e.g., *I react annoyed if another person steals the show from me*). Respondents answered using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not agree at all*) to 6 (*agree completely*). Mean scores were computed for narcissistic admiration and rivalry, respectively.

3.2.2. Communal narcissism

The Communal Narcissism Inventory (CNI; Gebauer et al., 2012) is a 16-item measure originating from the Agency-Communion model of narcissism according to which communal narcissists share the same core self-motives as agentic narcissists, but they meet these motives through communal means (e.g., *I will be well known for the good deeds I will have done*). Respondents answered using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*).

3.2.3. Trust

The General Trust Scale (GTS; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994) is a brief six-item measure of generalised trust, defined as the assurance encouragingly leading to cooperative interactions with others (e.g., *Most people are basically honest*). In the current study, respondents answered using a seven-point response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Furthermore, to enhance the generalisability of results across trust measures, we administered the trust facet scale derived from the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI; Soto & John, 2017), which is a four-item measure capturing interpersonal trust defined as “holding positive generalised beliefs about others” (p. 121). Two of these items are negatively worded.² Therefore subjects rated how much they consider themselves as someone who, for example, ... *assumes the best about people* or ... *is suspicious of others' intentions* using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Thus, whereas the first measure captures how narcissists perceive others, the latter allows an assessment of how they perceive themselves.

² Negative items were reverse-coded in order to compute summated scores and perform the analyses.

4. Results

4.1. Zero-order correlations, descriptive statistics, and reliability estimates

Zero-order correlations (corrected for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni method, i.e., $0.05/n$; n = number of study variables), descriptive statistics, and reliability estimates for all variables under study are presented in Table 1.

Agentic narcissism was positively related to both antagonistic and communal narcissism, while antagonistic and communal narcissism was positive, albeit weakly, related to each other. The relationship between narcissism and trust showed a differentiated pattern. That is, agentic narcissism was not significantly related to trust, whereas antagonistic narcissism was negatively related, and communal narcissism was positively related. Most importantly, the pattern of relations replicated across trust measures, supporting the robustness of results across different trust measures.

4.2. Regression models examining relations between facets of narcissism and trust

Because narcissism facets were moderately correlated, the shared variance between them could potentially impact the observed results. Thus, using two multiple regression models examining relations between facets of narcissism (independent variable) and trust (dependent variable) as measured by GTS (Model 1) and BFI (Model 2), we controlled for this shared variance. Table 2 details the standardized estimates for the tested models.

Both models predicting trust as measured by GTS ($F_{(3,723)} = 20.10$; $p < 0.001$) and the BFI ($F_{(3,723)} = 68.65$; $p < 0.001$) were significant. Controlling for the shared variance among narcissism facets thus did not influence the observed results. In particular and, as expected, agentic narcissism was still unrelated, antagonistic narcissism was negatively related, and communal narcissism was positively related to trust, both as measured with the GTS and the BFI. The strength of the relation did not change for agentic and antagonistic narcissism but increased for communal narcissism (for the BFI trust facet) once again supporting the hypothesised pattern of relations between narcissism and trust.

5. Discussion

In the existing literature, there is a general assumption that narcissists do not trust others (Miller et al., 2017; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). However, this premise was examined by measuring distrust and not trust (often defined as the opposite of trust; Glover et al., 2012; Krizan & Johar, 2015) or by neglecting the multifaceted nature of grandiose narcissism (agentic, antagonistic, and communal). Moreover, previous narcissism research failed to differentiate between trustworthiness (i.e., an aspect of personality and self-image) and trust as an assumption about the good nature of others (Kong, 2015; Konrath et al., 2014). As trust and distrust yield distinct consequences (Lewicki et al., 1998), the lack of a direct examination of narcissism and trust seems surprising. The current study aimed to fill these gaps. The distinction between attitudes and one's own self-image is particularly important in studies on narcissism due to different ways of narcissistic self-enhancement, which could be related to both agency and communion (Gebauer et al., 2012) or different relational dynamics, as reflected in the distinction between admiration and rivalry (Back et al., 2013).

Our results revealed that grandiose narcissism – while considering its different facets – yields a differentiated pattern of relations with trust: (1) the agentic facet was unrelated, (2) the antagonistic facet was negatively related, and (3) the communal facet was positively related to trust. Conclusions drawn from our research meet theoretical assumptions of the NARC (Back et al., 2013) and the A-C model of narcissism (Gebauer et al., 2012), according to which the overarching goal of

Table 1
Zero-order correlations, descriptive statistics and reliability estimates of studied variables.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Agentic narcissism					
2. Antagonistic narcissism	0.43*				
3. Communal narcissism	0.46*	0.13*			
4. Trust (GTS)	−0.01	−0.21*	0.15*		
5. Trust (BFI)	−0.07	−0.35*	0.26*	0.47*	
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.94 (1.17)	3.18 (1.19)	3.77 (1.05)	4.10 (1.14)	2.95 (0.73)
α	0.78	0.56 ^a	0.91	0.83	0.57 ^b

Note. *N* = 727. GTS = General Trust Scale (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994); BFI = trust facet scale derived from the Big Five Inventory-2 (Soto & John, 2017).

* Correlations were adjusted for multiple comparisons: $0.05/5 = p \leq 0.01$ (two-tailed).

^a The reliability for antagonistic narcissism is relatively low. However, previous studies using this measure (Leckelt et al., 2018) indicated that the short version is in line with the full version of the NARQ (Back et al., 2013).

^b The reliability for trust as measured with the BFI facet scale is modest, albeit paralleling the lower reliability estimates of shorter versions of the Big Five measurement, especially agreeableness and its facets (e.g., Hahn, Gottschling, & Spinath, 2012; Lang, John, Lüdtkke, Schupp, & Wagner, 2011; Soto & John, 2017).

Table 2
Standardized beta regression coefficients of facets of narcissism predicting trust as measured by the GTS (Model 1) and the BFI (Model 2).

Trust	<i>R</i> ²	Agentic narcissism				Antagonistic narcissism			Communal narcissism		
		β [95%CI]	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>		β [95%CI]	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β [95%CI]	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
GTS ^a	0.08	0.02 [−0.06; 0.11]	0.52	0.604	−0.24 [−0.31; −0.16]	−6.11	0.001	0.17 [0.10; 0.27]	4.25	0.001	
BFI	0.22	−0.08 [−0.10; 0.01]	−1.89	0.060	−0.36 [−0.26; −0.18]	−9.89	0.001	0.35 [0.19; 0.29]	9.30	0.001	

Note. CI = confidence interval; GTS = General Trust Scale (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994); BFI = trust facet scale derived from the Big Five Inventory-2 (Soto & John, 2017).

^a One out of six items of the GTS (i.e., *I am trustful*) differs significantly from the other statements, which start with the formula “Most people are...”. In order to strictly refer to trust operationalised as a generalised belief about others, we tested an additional linear regression model, in which we excluded this problematic item. The results, however, did not change substantially.

grandiose narcissists is to maintain their excessively positive self-view.

Including both aspects of trust revealed a slight difference between self-perception and other-perception for the agentic aspect. Interestingly, agentic narcissism occurred to be negatively (yet only at the tendency level) related to one's self-perception as a trusting person, but this self-perception was unrelated to lower levels of trust toward others. Therefore, agentic narcissism is probably not associated with costs of low trust. Only the antagonistic aspect of narcissism is accompanied by lower levels of trust, preventing antagonistic narcissists from cooperation, commitment, and satisfactory relations with others.

The proposed distinction between agentic and antagonistic narcissism (Back et al., 2013) complements previous studies on trust and narcissism because it allows stating that the lack of trust toward others and the world is rather rooted in the malevolent and self-protective nature of narcissism. In contrast, narcissistic self-promotion and assertive self-enhancement, which serves as a mean to gain others' recognition (Back et al., 2013), is neither related nor unrelated to trust. Such conclusions seem to be consistent with research revealing that both agentic and antagonistic narcissism predict interpersonal conflict, but only the latter is uniquely related to general interpersonal problems (Grove et al., in press).

Trust is crucial for building a satisfactory relationship with another person (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Rubin, 2010) and a positive relation with communal narcissism might suggest that this facet of narcissism may also be less problematic than its agentic counterpart.

However, the underlying motivation of communal narcissists contains also the agentic motive of self-enhancement (Rogoza & Fatfouta, 2018). Moreover, when more indirect measures are used (e.g., implicit tests) this effect may be less prominent (Fatfouta et al., 2017), which might reveal that the core motive of communal narcissist is indeed agentic. On the other hand, agentic narcissism is unrelated to trust as an attitude toward others, so that the problem with the interpersonal functioning of grandiose narcissists seems to be limited only to its antagonistic aspect.

The current study demonstrates that there is a need to study narcissism in a more nuanced manner as the three facets of narcissism turned out to comprise divergent social strategies serving the same goal, that is, maintaining a grandiose self. Despite the widely held assumption that narcissists do not trust others, they are ready to view themselves as trustworthy when they engage in communal self-enhancement. Most correlational studies on narcissism and distrust did not measure convictions about others but rather self-perception. There was also no direct evidence that narcissism is negatively related to accepting one's own vulnerability in interpersonal relationships, preventing narcissists from engaging in positive relationships. Our correlational results suggest that agentic and communal narcissism is not associated with problems related to low trust. Moreover, communal narcissism is positively associated with trust, suggesting that this form of grandiose narcissism could be more “socialized” than its agentic counterpart. However, without experimental and behavioural data we cannot claim that holding positive convictions about the human nature

results in more cooperative and benevolent relations.

5.1. Limitations and future directions

Due to the self-report design, we were able to examine narcissistic beliefs related to trust regarding both human nature (i.e., trust defined as a propensity to see others as trustworthy) and self-perception (i.e., seeing oneself as ready to trust others). However, we did not capture narcissists' actual trust behaviour. Including different sources of data such as observer reports, implicit self-views, or behavioural measures should be applied in future studies to test the extent to which our findings generalise across different assessment formats. Recent research suggests that while the effects of admiration and rivalry generally follow their theoretical descriptions when non-standard measures (e.g., Ultimatum Game) are used, there is an inconsistency between explicit and implicit communal self-views (Fatfouta & Schröder-Abé, 2018). This suggests that our results regarding communal narcissism might not hold when behavioural measures of trust (e.g., Trust Game) are applied.

6. Conclusion

The current study indicates that including three aspects of grandiose narcissism in examining the relation between narcissism and trust revealed quite a differentiated picture. Furthermore, adopting the distinction between different trust facets appears meaningful and allows

for predicting how narcissistic individuals might interact with others. We are confident that our study could serve as a starting point for future investigations, highlighting the necessity of including different aspects of grandiose narcissism and including both the self-image aspect of trust and actual assumptions about the human nature.

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