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## Brief Reports

# Differential impact of vulnerable isolation and enmity: State social anxiety level, variability and inertia in vulnerable narcissism

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## ABSTRACT

We investigate the relationship between two strategies of vulnerable narcissism – isolation and enmity – in their relation to daily social anxiety and variability and inertia of social anxiety states. We recruited a sample of  $N = 317$  adults from Poland who participated in a 30-day long daily diary study ( $k = 7871$  observations). The results revealed that both strategies were related to increased levels of daily social anxiety (although this relation was stronger for isolation), however – we observed a differential pattern of relation in regard to variability and inertia of social anxiety states. Specifically, isolation and average social anxiety were related to greater variability in social anxiety states, which might reflect their vulnerability to the exposure to social stressors. In turn, only enmity was positively related to inertia of social anxiety states, which might suggest that this strategy is indeed reactive in nature; however, it is also ineffective in regulating experienced negative emotions. Findings from the current study provide further support for the validity of differentiating the two distinct strategies of vulnerable narcissism.

## 1. Introduction

Narcissism is a hierarchically organized construct with two different manifestations: grandiose and vulnerable (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). The former is characterized of puffed up self-esteem, entitlement and self-enhancing self-promoting behaviors; the latter is characterized by fragility, hypersensitivity, and social withdrawal in the anticipation of experiencing negative feelings (Blasco-Belled et al., 2024). Vulnerable narcissism (VN) is also associated with experiencing rumination of thoughts and self-referencing (i.e., using I-talk; Holtzman et al., 2024; Kalowski et al., 2021; Zajenkowski et al., 2021) and is considered as a form of internalizing psychopathology of personality (Di Sarno et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2017; Rogoza et al., 2022). It is not surprising that as such, VN is related to other internalizing problems such as social anxiety (SA; Villalongo Andino et al., 2024), however, less is known if VN constantly experience elevated feelings of social anxiety or does these feelings are characterized by greater variability over time? Through the lens of the dual model of VN, the Vulnerable Isolation and Enmity Concept (Rogoza et al., 2022), we attempt to address this issue.

### 1.1. Vulnerable narcissism

VN is related to high neuroticism (Miller et al., 2017). However, this neuroticism might be underpinned either by low extraversion and result in avoidance of social interactions (Di Sarno et al., 2020) or by low agreeableness and result in laughing at others (Blasco-Belled et al., 2022). These two pathways are considered as a strategies used to protect the fragile self-esteem and are referred to as isolation (i.e., social withdrawal and hypersensitivity) and enmity (i.e., paranoid reactivity to threats and attributing own hostile feelings on others; Rogoza et al., 2022). As such, the role of isolation is to prevent the self from being exposed, while the role of enmity is to assist in coping with the experienced feelings of shame and inferiority (Fatfouta & Rogoza, 2024; Rogoza et al., 2022; Ronningstam, 2010). Both, isolation and enmity are characterized of different nomological networks, are expected to explain different processes and together accounts for the complex nature of VN (Blasco-Belled et al., 2022; Rogoza et al., 2022).

### 1.2. Vulnerable narcissism and the level, variability, and inertia of social anxiety

Existing research suggests VN is related to internalizing

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psychopathology and not surprisingly – to SA (Rogoza et al., 2022; Villalongo Andino et al., 2024). SA, however, is related not only to unfavorable but also to unstable social comparisons (Goodman et al., 2021). Thus, while there is some evidence linking VN to SA, less is known about the relation to the stability of this self-view over time, which could be decomposed onto variability (reflecting individual differences in reactivity or exposure to stressors) and inertia. While variability in SA in studies with repeated measurement reflects the individual differences in the propensity to report varying levels of SA over time (as opposed to reporting stable scores, which may be either high or low), the inertia reflects the carry-over of SA over time, reflecting that after change in the level of SA (which might be higher or lower), people tend to remain higher or lower in their SA at the next moment. It follows that it takes time to return to equilibrium after being perturbed (Hamaker et al., 2018). In the current study, we examine the relations of the two strategies of VN in their relation not only to the mean level of SA over time, but also to its variability and inertia.

### 1.3. Current study

We expect that both VN scales will be positively related to SA (Villalongo Andino et al., 2024; H1). Because isolation reflects more fragile characteristics (Blasco-Belled et al., 2022), we expect that the strength of this relation will be stronger for isolation than for enmity (H2). The differentiation of isolation and enmity may bear different implications for the stability of SA over time. Specifically, the goal of isolation is to hide the fragile esteem, which is realized through the means of social withdrawal (Rogoza et al., 2022). Because of the constant need to be socially inhibited, isolation is susceptible to the exposure to any interpersonal threats which might take the form of being rejected or humiliated, thus – we hypothesized that it will be related to increased levels of variability of SA (H3). In turn, enmity reflects a pathological and ineffective strategy to deal with the experienced emotions, as it resembles an entitled expectation that something should happen to restore the status (Rogoza et al., 2022). Because of this ineffectiveness, we assumed that enmity should be in turn related to greater inertia of SA (H4).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Within the study we enrolled 317 volunteer participants from Poland (who identified as: female (70.7 %), male (28.4 %), and other (0.9 %)) aged between 18 and 73 years ( $M = 25.30$ ;  $SD = 11.05$ ). The results reported in the current study were part of larger data collection efforts. Participants first completed a set of measures and then were invited to the longitudinal part of the study. At the beginning of the study, participants were instructed about the goals and the nature of the project and were asked to agree to the mentioned terms and to receive contact via mail to proceed to further part of the study. Next, participants were invited to take part in the daily diary part of the study and were again instructed they can resign at any moment without stating the reason. During this part, once a day during the evening provided responses to state measures for 30 consecutive days. On average, participants provided 24.83 responses, which resulted in a total  $k = 7871$  observations. Each participant was remunerated with a voucher worth 50PLN after providing at least 70 % of responses.

### 2.2. Measures

*Vulnerable Isolation and Enmity Questionnaire* (Rogoza et al., 2022). It comprises 24 statements to which respondents were asked to rate their agreement using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Not agree at all*) to 6 (*Agree completely*). Both, isolation ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and enmity ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) were characterized by very good estimates of internal consistency.

*State Social Anxiety*. We used the three-item version of the scale,

which was previously used in evaluation of social anxiety in intensive longitudinal studies and has demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity in clinical and non-clinical samples (Goodman et al., 2021). Participants, using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Very often*) reported on frequency of the social anxiety indicators during the past 24 h.

### 2.3. Statistical analyses

To test the hypotheses, we used the Dynamic Structural Equation Modeling (DSEM) approach using Bayes estimator in Mplus (c.f., Hamaker et al., 2018). Among some advantages of the DSEM, it is worth highlighting that it handles missing data using Markov Chain Monte Carlo sampling and deals with unequal intervals (Hamaker et al., 2018). At the within-person, we estimated the autoregressive parameter of social anxiety (i.e., inertia) as well as the innovation variance across the course of the study (i.e., variability). Both these parameters were predicted at the between-person level by the trait scores of isolation and enmity. Of importance, due the fact that variability indices are correlated with state levels (see Baird et al., 2006), in estimation of our results we controlled for the state social anxiety level. Data and code necessary for the reproduction of results are available at: [https://osf.io/s65cq/?view\\_only=fa2d81fe014e420b9eca8e6c9739c959](https://osf.io/s65cq/?view_only=fa2d81fe014e420b9eca8e6c9739c959)

## 3. Results

The standardized coefficients estimated from the tested DSEM model are presented at Fig. 1. Both, isolation and enmity were positively related to the average state SA (thus, supporting H1). The Z-test further confirmed that the strength of the coefficients for isolation was stronger, as expected ( $Z = 7.09$ ;  $p < .001$ , supporting H2). At the within-person level, both the estimate of inertia ( $\beta = 0.05$  [95%CI = 0.02, 0.07];  $p < .001$ ) and the innovation variance of SA ( $\beta = 0.98$  [95%CI = 0.97, 0.99];  $p < .001$ ) were significant. At the between-person level, we have found that the average level of SA predicts higher variability in its states, but not higher inertia. Expectedly, we have observed a divergent pattern of relations between isolation and enmity to variability and inertia of SA. Specifically, only isolation was positively related to variability and only enmity was positively related to greater inertia of SA (supporting both, H3 and H4).

## 4. Discussion

The relationship between VN and internalizing pathology, and specifically SA is well-known (Miller et al., 2017; Rogoza et al., 2022; Villalongo Andino et al., 2024) and the results of the current study supports this claim as both, isolation and enmity were both positively related to increased levels of SA in daily life. Despite that, they differed in their relation to indices of dispersion of scores of SA over time – while isolation was related to increased variability of SA, enmity was related to increased inertia of SA states.

Individuals with elevated levels of SA, when exposed to threats (e.g., social relations) experience increased negative affectivity and prefer to isolate at home (Chow et al., 2017). Our results are congruent with this finding as both, isolation and SA were associated with increased level of variability in SA states. This result could be interpreted in terms of exposure to stressors – given the daily character of the study over a long period of time; it was likely that participants had opportunities to encounter social situations, which might have temporarily increased their level of SA. As isolating oneself may be used as a tool for regulation of SA (Chow et al., 2017), this might explain the observed increased variability in SA over time.

Enmity was positively associated with inertia in SA states. That is, enmity was related to increased time which was needed to return to the individual mean level of SA after change. The role of enmity in VN is to deal with intense negative feelings, for instance through attributing own

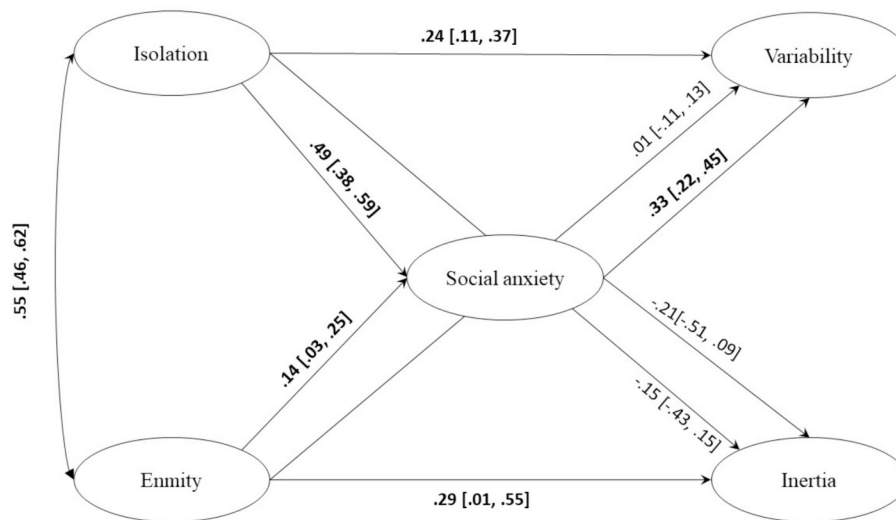


Fig. 1. Relations Between vulnerable narcissism and variability and inertia of social anxiety controlled for its mean level. Note. All results are standardized. Significant coefficients ( $p < .05$ ) are presented in bold.

unacceptable feelings on others (Caligor et al., 2015; Di Sarno et al., 2020; Rogoza et al., 2022). However, is it an effective strategy? The observed positive relation to SA inertia suggest it's not, as it reflects the tendency to stuck in self-perpetuating negative emotionality (Zajenkowski et al., 2021).

#### 4.1. Conclusion and limitations

Results supported the distinctiveness of isolation and enmity – while both were positively related to SA, only the former was related to increased variability in SA states and only the latter was related to increased inertia of SA. Although this finding shed new light on the relation between VN and SA, we relied on the daily reconstruction of experienced feelings, which might be less accurate as compared to momentary assessments of SA. Future studies may therefore consider applying momentary assessment of SA states, which might include influence of the experienced situational effects.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Radosław Rogoza:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

#### Declaration of competing interest

None.

#### Data availability

Data and code necessary for the reproduction of results are available at: [https://osf.io/s65cq/?view\\_only=fa2d81fe014e420b9eca8e6c9739c959](https://osf.io/s65cq/?view_only=fa2d81fe014e420b9eca8e6c9739c959)

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