



Great and Lonely?

Assessing the Bidirectional Relations Between National Narcissism and Loneliness

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Abstract: Past research suggests that national narcissism goes hand in hand with negative intergroup and intragroup outcomes. We contend that national narcissism can be also linked to maladaptive intra-individual concomitants. Across two studies, we examined the relationship between national narcissism and loneliness, using representative samples from Poland. Study 1 ($N = 633$) demonstrated a positive correlation between national narcissism and loneliness. Study 2 ($N = 811$) employed a two-wave design to test bidirectional effect of national narcissism and loneliness. The results confirmed that both cross-lagged paths between national narcissism and loneliness were significant over the 6-month period, reinforcing the findings from Study 1.

Keywords: loneliness, national narcissism, national identification

The human imperative to establish and sustain social connections can be compared to basic needs, such as hunger, because just as hungry people seek food, humans seek relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). One of the main theories explaining how people form social relations is the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1994). Social identity can be understood as a component of an individual's self-concept, arising from the understanding and the emotional connections to a particular social group (Tajfel, 1981). Individuals who identify with a particular group are inclined to engage in cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that align with that group's interests and objectives (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1994). People can identify with all kinds of social groups and categories, and one of them is their nation – the country in which they live and the people who are citizens of this country. Nevertheless, people differ in how they identify with the nation. Existing literature suggests that people could be identified either in a non-narcissistic or a narcissistic manner (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009).

National narcissism refers to the belief that one's national group is exceptional, yet insufficiently appreciated by others, with its value being dependent on acknowledging and validating its value by external entities (Golec

de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2020). Existing literature indicates that the antecedents of national narcissism may be rooted in an underlying sense of vulnerability and insecurity (Cichocka et al., 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024; see also Fromm, 1973). As a result of this fragility of the self, such excessive emotional attachment to one's nation appears superficial, as for instance, individuals with higher national narcissism overclaim historical knowledge about their nation, exhibit higher disloyalty towards their nation or willingness to conspire against their compatriots, and react with increased envy towards their fellow citizens (Biddlestone et al., 2022; Maciantowicz et al., 2024; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024; Molenda, Marchlewska, & Rogoza, 2023; Rogoza et al., 2024). Moreover, those scoring high on national narcissism tend to use manipulative tactics to exploit the emotions of others and treat their compatriots as mere instruments to achieve personal goals (Cichocka et al., 2022; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Molenda, Marchlewska, & Rogoza, 2023).

Unsurprisingly, national narcissism is related to a range of maladaptive psychological outcomes and can potentially result in detrimental consequences in intragroup and intergroup dynamics (e.g., Cichocka & Cislak, 2020;

Cichocka et al., 2022; Dyduch-Hazar & Mrozinski, 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2019; Marchlewska et al., 2020). Thus, social scientists emphasized that although national narcissism may stem from frustrated individual needs (e.g., low self-esteem; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; or high attachment anxiety; Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024), it does not necessarily satisfy them. That is, narcissistic identity does not have the potential to help individuals effectively deal with their psychological shortcomings and, instead, only seems to make things worse (e.g., Bagci et al., 2023; Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024). Given that individuals may develop a narcissistic group identity to satisfy their need to be recognized and validated by others, but they do not actually receive this type of desired attention, this unmet expectation may cause them to feel misunderstood and abandoned. Therefore, in this research, we investigated the bidirectional effects between national narcissism and perceived social isolation in the form of loneliness.

More Identified So Less Lonely?

Loneliness is a prevalent societal issue that affects people of all races, genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds (Rokach & Neto, 2000). As social beings involved in relationships, people are vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. Such a situation may arise because of isolation from others, when meaningful relationships deteriorate, or as a result of individuals' attitudes toward society (Rokach & Neto, 2000). Loneliness is defined as a specific unpleasant experience, caused by quantitative or qualitative impoverishment of individuals' social relations (Perlman & Peplau, 1981; Russell et al., 1978) or a gap between desired and actual social relationships, which is based on individuals' personal assessment regarding their level of social engagement or seclusion (Russell et al., 1980). Loneliness is also characterized as a circumstance arising from a dearth of meaningful relationships, where the desired level of closeness has not been achieved (S. Cacioppo et al., 2015). In other words, loneliness can be understood as a subjective experience characterized by a sense of unfulfillment and dissatisfaction in social relationships.

Individuals experience enhanced physical and mental well-being due to their sense of belonging to a group (Haslam et al., 2018; Jetten et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2014). Previous studies found that social identification was linked to lower anxiety (Haslam et al., 2005; Rubin & Stuart, 2018), reduced likelihood of depression symptoms (Cruwys et al., 2014), and enhanced overall well-being (Greenaway et al., 2016; Iyer et al., 2009). The feeling of belonging to a group, which contrasts loneliness, brings benefits due to its provision of access to a diverse array of social and psychological

resources (e.g., Avanzi et al., 2018). The mentioned positive outcomes are in line with the *social cure* hypothesis, according to which strong social identities have positive effects on one's health and well-being (Bonetto et al., 2022; Haslam et al., 2018). It could also be considered part of group processes, as individuals are not only more likely to provide social support to the members of their own group but are also more willing to accept help from their fellows (Haslam et al., 2009; Levine et al., 2005; Wakefield et al., 2011). However, do the benefits described by the social cure hypothesis apply equally to all forms of in-group identity? Previous research suggests that while many social identities promote well-being, national narcissism, in particular, may not provide the same positive effects and can even have harmful consequences, unlike non-narcissistic identification (Cichocka, 2016; Muldoon et al., 2019). Therefore, perhaps national narcissism could also be perceived as a social curse, since this type of group attachment relates to a series of maladaptive outcomes.

A real-life experiment testing this claim emerged during the coronavirus pandemic, as national identification (but not national narcissism) negatively predicted COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs (Górska et al., 2023; Marchlewska, Hamer, et al., 2022) and was linked to a greater readiness to support public health policies aimed at limiting the spread of the virus, such as mobility restrictions (Van Bavel et al., 2022). This provided initial support for the assumption that strong, yet the non-narcissistic group identification was positively associated with attitudes and behaviors supporting the overall well-being of the in-group, a narcissistic in-group identification did not contribute to it. Instead, national narcissism was linked to COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy (Marchlewska, Hamer, et al., 2022), conspiracy thinking in the context of the coronavirus (Górska et al., 2023), and dissemination of conspiracy theories during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sternisko et al., 2023). It is worth pointing out that although national identification has the potential to surpass prevailing intergroup biases among marginalized groups and foster a sense of unity (Levine et al., 2005), collective narcissism is focused mainly on achieving self-serving goals (Molenda, Marchlewska, & Rogoza, 2023). Thus, it can also be predicted that while national identification may mitigate the adverse effects of loneliness, national narcissism could catalyze these effects (Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024; Zdrenka et al., 2015).

Overview of the Current Research

The aim of this research was to examine whether and how national narcissism (as opposed to national identification) is related to loneliness. We assumed a positive relationship

between national narcissism and loneliness (Hypothesis 1, H1). Furthermore, we expected that this relation will be bidirectional, so that we hypothesized that in a panel study with two measurement occasions the relationships between both (a) national narcissism measured at Time 1 and loneliness measured at Time 2 as well as (b) loneliness measured at Time 1 and national narcissism measured at Time 2 will be positive and significant (Hypothesis 2, H2). We expected the relationships between loneliness and national narcissism to be especially pronounced when controlling for the shared variance between national narcissism and national identification (e.g., Marchlewska, Cichocka, et al., 2022). For this reason, we first report zero-order correlations, and then, we report the links between loneliness and national narcissism, while considering both national narcissism and national identification in one model (i.e., controlling for their shared variance). Researchers frequently control for the overlapping variances of national narcissism and national identification to discern their unique impacts (Cichocka, 2016; Cislak et al., 2021; Górska et al., 2023; Marchlewska, Cichocka, et al., 2022; Rogoza et al., 2024; Szczepańska et al., 2024). This method allows for the identification of the specific effects attributable to national narcissism (when the influence of national identification is removed) and national identification (when the influence of national narcissism is removed; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020, 2022).

Using an a priori power analysis, we established that to detect even a small effect size ($f^2 = .02$; with $\alpha = .05$ and power = .80) in a model with three predictors, we needed to recruit at least 550 participants (Faul et al., 2007). Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the studies. Both studies were conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences (number of approval: 19/IX/2022). All the data are accessible via the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/5tqke/>. Datasets from both Study 1 and Study 2 were previously utilized in two publications, but other variables were used in relation to national narcissism, i.e., predispositions to laughter (Szczepańska et al., 2024) and overclaiming of historical knowledge (Rogoza et al., 2024).

Study 1

In Study 1, we checked for the relationship between national narcissism and loneliness. We assumed that higher

level of national narcissism (when controlling for national identification) should be associated with higher intensity of loneliness (H1).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 1 was conducted using the computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) technique by an external research company also used in other academic studies (e.g., Molenda, Marchlewska, Rogoza, & Szczepańska, 2023). Participants were informed of the study's objective and duration. The confidentiality and anonymity of data were guaranteed by the research company. At any moment and for any reason, participants could refuse to answer a question, cease filling out the questionnaire, and not transmit their information using the *send* button. Data were obtained from a sample of 633 Poles (336 women, 297 men), aged between 18 and 81 ($M = 47.93$, $SD = 16.52$). The sample was representative in terms of gender, size of the place of residence, and age for the Polish adult population. Quotas were selected based on the last National Census of Population and Housing, carried out by the Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny; GUS). This sample was used to test H1.

Measures¹

National Narcissism

This construct was measured using a five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). Each item has been modified in such a way that the reference group was the nation. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement (e.g., "Poles deserve special treatment") using a scale ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 5 (= *strongly agree*). The internal consistency of this scale was good ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.08$, $\alpha = .89$).

National Identification

It was measured using the 12-item Social Identity Scale (Cameron, 2004; Polish adaptation: Bilewicz & Wójcik, 2010). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each statement (e.g., "Generally, being Polish is an important part of who I am") using a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency of this scale was good ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.70$, $\alpha = .87$).

¹ In both Studies, all participants completed a questionnaire that evaluated various psychological constructs. Below we will only detail the constructs relevant to the current research, but a full list of the other constructs measured in the Studies is available on the OSF project site.

Loneliness

Loneliness was measured using five items adapted from the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (De Jong Gierveld, 2006) with such items as “I experience a general sense of emptiness,” “There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems” (reverse-worded item), “I miss having people around,” “There are enough people I feel close to” (reverse-worded item), “I often feel rejected”. Respondents rated their agreement using a scale ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 5 (= *strongly agree*). The internal consistency of this scale was good ($M = 2.68, SD = 0.76, \alpha = .77$).

Results

At the zero-order level, the relationship between national narcissism and loneliness was nonsignificant ($r = .01, p = .787$), while the relationship between national identification and loneliness was significant and negative ($r = -.23, p < .001$). Furthermore, national narcissism and national identification were found to be positively and significantly related to each other ($r = .49, p < .001$). In line with the previously mentioned approach of controlling for the shared variance between national narcissism and national identification to distinguish their unique effects (e.g. Cichocka, 2016), we analyzed and present the results of a

structural equation model estimated with the use of MPlus 8.3, using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (i.e., MLR; Muthén & Muthén, 2017). We specified loneliness as the outcome and national narcissism and national identification as the latent independent variables, which is illustrated at Figure 1.

The presented model fitted the data well ($\chi^2_{(202)} = 595.84; p < .001; CFI = .931; RMSEA = .055$ [90% CI: .050, 0.61]), and the estimates of both predictor variables were significant as well (p 's $< .001$). The strength of all the factor loadings was adequate (i.e., $>.40$). Within the measurement model, we added three covariances between error terms for national identification (first pair of items both regarded thoughts about being Polish, however one was reverse-worded – “I often think about the fact that I am a Pole” and “The fact that I am a Pole rarely enters my mind”; the remaining two pairs regarded semantically similar content, first pair: “I often regret that I am a Pole” and “I don’t feel good about being a Pole” and second pair: “In general, I’m glad to be a Pole” and “Generally, I feel good when I think about myself as a Pole”), and one covariance for loneliness (which reflected the only two reverse-worded items – “There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems” and “There are enough people I feel close to”). The decision to free these covariances was made post hoc, after inspecting fit of each measurement model. While national narcissism was

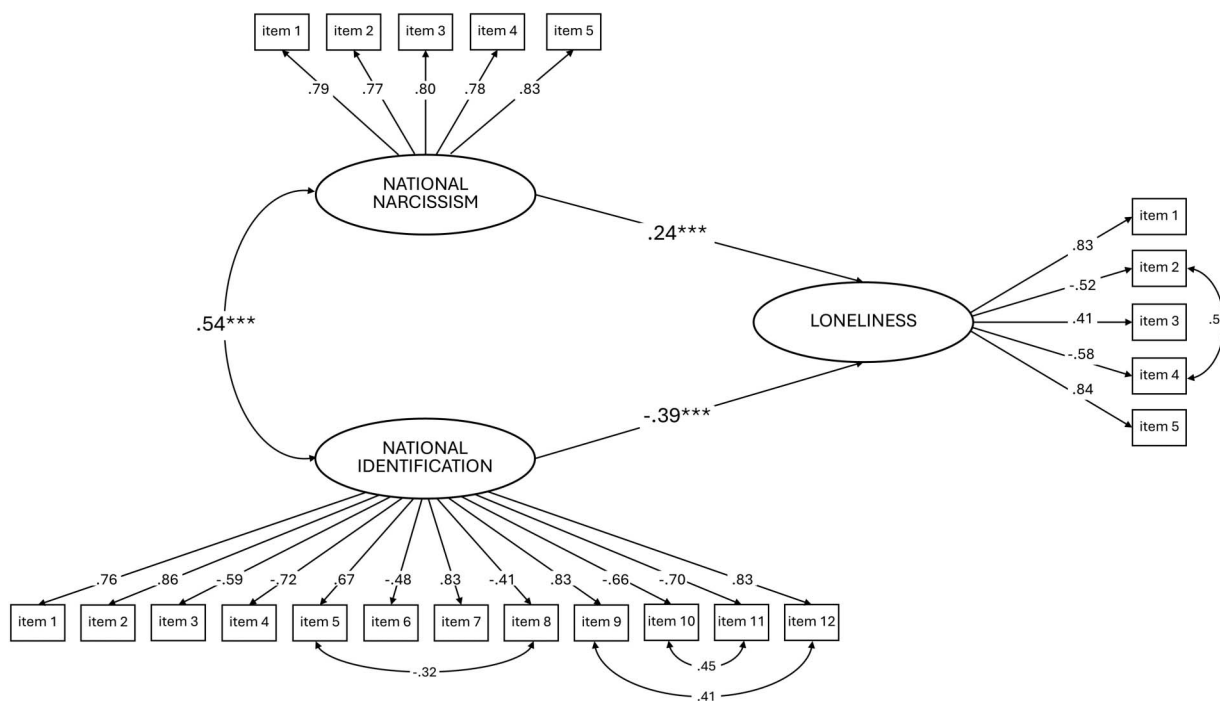


Figure 1. National narcissism and national identification predicting loneliness (Study 1, $N = 633$). We present only the standardized coefficients. All factor loadings were significant at $p < .001$. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

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related positively ($B = 0.21$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.31], $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), national identification was negatively associated with loneliness ($B = -0.59$, 95% CI [-0.55, -0.29], $\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$). These results are in line with our expectations and provide full support for H1.

Study 2

The results of Study 1 preliminarily supported our assumptions. Thus, in Study 2, we employed a two-wave study design to test our main hypotheses, assuming that the relationships identified in Study 1 would be bidirectional (H2). This study allowed us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between national narcissism and loneliness identified in Study 1.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 2 was also an online survey (i.e., CAWI) conducted by an external research company. The participants were provided with information regarding the objective and the duration of the study. The research company ensured the preservation of data confidentiality and anonymity. This study was administered as a two-wave survey. The sample was also representative in terms of gender, size of the place of residence, and age for the Polish adult population. Quotas were determined using the most recent National Census of Population and Housing conducted by the Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny; GUS). The two measurements were divided by a 6-month interval. In the first measurement (labelled as Time 1), data were obtained from 1,504 adult Poles (786 women, 718 men), their ages ranging between 19 and 96 ($M_{T1} = 46.10$, $SD_{T1} = 16.05$). Out of these respondents, 811 (53.92%) took part in the second measurement (labelled as Time 2). Only individuals who participated in both waves of the survey comprised the final sample for this study (399 women and 412 men with ages ranging between 20 and 97; $M_{T2} = 46.62$, $SD_{T2} = 16.27$). Attrition analyses revealed that participants who dropped out differed from those who were retained neither in their level of national identification ($t = 1.69$; $p = .091$; $d = .09$), national narcissism ($t = 0.92$; $p = .358$; $d = .05$), nor loneliness ($t = 0.94$; $p = .347$; $d = .05$).

Measures

National Narcissism

National narcissism was measured as in Study 1 (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). The internal

consistency of this scale was good ($M_{T1} = 2.71$, $SD_{T1} = 1.08$, $\alpha_{T1} = .93$, $M_{T2} = 2.86$, $SD_{T2} = 1.08$, $\alpha_{T2} = .94$).

National Identification

National identification was assessed with three items borrowed from Cameron's scale (2004; see also Górska et al., 2020): "I feel strong ties to other Poles," "In general, being a Pole is an important part of my self-image," and "In general, I'm glad to be a Pole." The response scale ranged from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 5 (= *strongly agree*). The internal consistency of this scale was good ($M_{T1} = 3.63$, $SD_{T1} = 0.93$, $\alpha_{T1} = .86$, $M_{T2} = 3.82$, $SD_{T2} = 0.96$, $\alpha_{T2} = .90$).

Loneliness

This construct was assessed as in Study 1. The internal consistency of this scale was good ($M_{T1} = 2.68$, $SD_{T1} = 0.81$, $\alpha_{T1} = .78$, $M_{T2} = 2.64$, $SD_{T2} = 0.83$, $\alpha_{T2} = .78$).

Results

Bidirectional Relationship Between National Narcissism and Loneliness

To investigate H2, which assumed the bidirectional relationship between national narcissism and loneliness, we conducted the analyses in two steps. To test the Hypothesis 1 and replicate the findings from Study 1, we analyzed the zero-order correlations between the variables of interest (Table 1) for the variables assessed in Study 2 among two waves. Across both measurements, national narcissism was not related to loneliness and was positively related to national identification. However, national identification was negatively related to loneliness at Time 1 and Time 2.

However, this analysis did not account for the variance shared by national narcissism and national identification. To conclude about the effects of national narcissism and test our hypothesis using structural equation modelling, we estimated the cross-lagged panel model (Selig & Little, 2012), which not only allows to partial out the shared variance between the two mentioned variables (Cislak et al., 2021; Górska et al., 2023; Marchlewska, Cichocka, et al., 2022), but also it allows to investigate cross-lagged effects over time. Additionally, to take into account the measurement error, the tested model was estimated on latent variables, measured by their respective items. The graphical representation of the tested model is presented in Figure 2. Finally, to ensure measurement equivalence between the two time points within the tested model, we constrained each factor loading at Time 1 to be equal to the respective loading at Time 2 (Mackinnon et al., 2022). The model was again estimated with the use of MPlus 8.3 using MLR estimation (i.e., MLR; Muthén &

Table 1. Zero-order relations national narcissism, national identification and loneliness (Study 2 – Time 1 and Time 2)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. National narcissism T1	—	.44***	.03	.82**	.43***	.01
2. National identification T1		—	-.22***	.44***	.76***	-.25***
3. Loneliness T1			—	.02	-.22***	.75***
4. National narcissism T2				—	.54***	.01
5. National identification T2					—	-.23***
6. Loneliness T2						—

Note. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

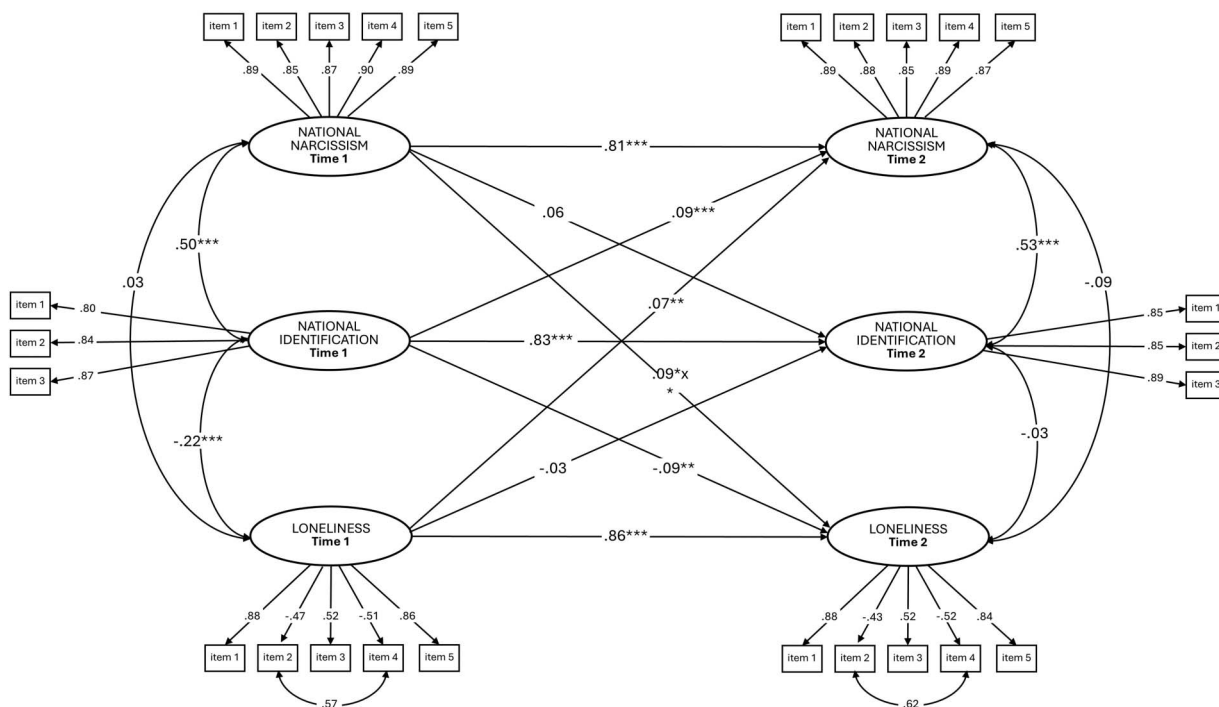


Figure 2. The relationship between national narcissism, national identification and loneliness across time (Study 2, $N = 811$). We present only the standardized coefficients. All of the factor loadings were significant at $p < .001$. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Muthén, 2017). The fit of the unrestricted model was good ($\chi^2_{(282)} = 1,253.64$; $p < .001$; CFI = .924; RMSEA = .065 [95% CI: .062, .069]) and the introduced constraints of factor loadings also resulted in a overall good model fit to the data ($\chi^2_{(292)} = 1,279.50$; $p < .001$; CFI = .923; RMSEA = .065 [95% CI: .061, .068]). The relative difference between the models, as according to the exact test, the model might be deemed as noninvariant ($\Delta\chi^2_{(10)} = 25.86$; $p = .004$); however, the approximate fit indices suggest factorial invariance as according even to the strict criteria ($\Delta CFI = .001$; $\Delta RMSEA = .000$; Chen, 2007).

Within the measurement model, we added two covariances between error terms for loneliness as identified in Study 1. Specifically, we freed covariances between the very same reverse-worded items (i.e., “There are plenty

of people I can rely on when I have problems” and “There are enough people I feel close to”) in first and the second measurement occasion. These were the only freed covariances within the measurement model, as in response to identified issues with the full national identification scale, we used the short version, which was characterized as better factorial validity as compared to its predecessor.

The zero-order cross-sectional correlations revealed that national narcissism was not related to loneliness, neither at Time 1 nor at Time 2. In turn, national identification measured at Time 1 was negatively related to loneliness assessed at Time 1, but not at Time 2. Yet, as expected, national narcissism assessed at Time 1 was positively related to loneliness assessed at Time 2 ($B = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.13], $\beta = .09$, $p = .013$) once

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loneliness at Time 1 and national identification at Time 1 were controlled for. In addition, loneliness measured at Time 1 was also positively related to national narcissism measured at Time 2 ($B = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.13], $\beta = .07$, $p = .005$) once national narcissism at Time 1 and national identification at Time 1 were controlled for. In turn, the cross-lagged effect of national identification assessed at Time 1 on loneliness at Time 2 ($B = -0.09$, 95% CI [-0.16, -0.02], $\beta = -.09$, $p = .014$) was negative, and the cross-lagged effect of loneliness assessed at Time 1 on national identification measured at Time 2 was not significant ($B = -0.03$, 95% CI [-0.09, 0.0], $\beta = -.03$, $p = .297$). Thus, these results provide support for H2.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the association between national narcissism and feelings of loneliness. In two studies conducted in the Polish national context, we hypothesized and found that national narcissism was positively associated with loneliness and both cross-lagged paths between national narcissism and loneliness were significant over the 6-month period. Our research adds to the growing literature of the adverse intrapersonal and interpersonal concomitants of national narcissism (e.g., Cichocka et al., 2022; Molenda, Marchlewska, & Rogoza, 2023) – this time in relation to loneliness.

Loneliness is related to an implicit tendency to pay excessive attention to negative social stimuli, as these stimuli are perceived as potential threats to one's social well-being (S. Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2016). Thus, the experience of being lonely results in a heightened vigilance toward the social environment and an unintentional prioritization of self-preservation (J. T. Cacioppo et al., 2017). Paradoxically, the experience of loneliness not only amplifies the conscious inclination to establish or re-establish social connections, but it also generates an underlying state of heightened vigilance towards potential social risks, which jeopardizes the successful making and maintaining of satisfying social connections (R. Rogoza, Ciecuch, et al., 2022). Moreover, it is conceivable that the harmful interpersonal and intragroup behaviors exhibited by national narcissists, such as instrumental manipulation and emotional exploitation (Cichocka et al., 2022), could be partially attributed to the loneliness they experience, which complicates the formation of genuine relationships.

National (collective) narcissism could be described in a similar manner. That is, it is frequently considered as a threat-based identity, built on exaggerated feelings of fear that the privileged position of an in-group is in danger (e.g.,

higher siege mentality, e.g., Marchlewska, Górska, Molenda, et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is closely associated with various forms of individual vulnerability, such as reduced personal control (Cichocka et al., 2018; Marchlewska, Cichocka, et al., 2022), lower self-esteem (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020), and heightened attachment anxiety (Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024). As a result, we expected that national narcissism can be related to an individual's weak capacity to engage effectively in social relationships and the results of the current study consequently supported this claim. Because feelings of loneliness, as well as national narcissism, impair the ability to respond appropriately to social situations (S. Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2016; Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024), and since both are interrelated over time, they may lead to a continuous vicious cycle, making it difficult for individuals to either find a sense of belonging within a group or feel comfortable when alone.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current study moves beyond analyzing a single cross-sectional study, it is important to consider the limitations when interpreting the results. First, the findings may not be generalizable to other cultural contexts due to the specific sample of adult Poles. Cultural variations in the manifestation of national narcissism and loneliness may exist, necessitating cross-cultural research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic in question. Thus, future studies might consider replicating the observed pattern of results in different populations.

Second, the study relied on self-report measures, which are subject to potential biases and limitations. For instance, social desirability bias and individuals' subjective interpretations of loneliness and national narcissism may have influenced the results. Future research could employ diverse measurement methods, such as observational or physiological measures, to strengthen the validity of the findings. Third, the correlational design of the study restricts the establishment of causal relationships. Although time-dependent (i.e., cross-lagged) associations are not just an index of covariation but represent a hint to causality (Costantini & Perugini, 2018), future experimental research could provide further insights into the causal nature of these relationships. For example, considering the effects of the related construct of ostracism on social phenomena (e.g., experimentally induced ostracism increased conspiracy beliefs; Poon et al., 2020), future studies might employ manipulations of this variable and examine its effects on collective narcissism as well. Lastly,

we employed only a brief measurement of loneliness, which although was characterized of good internal consistency, might not be able to capture the breadth of the construct. Thus, future research might employ more sophisticated measures of loneliness.

Conclusion

Being part of a social group, being surrounded by people, does not always protect us from the feeling of loneliness that can drain mental and physical health. A perfect example of this are individuals high on national narcissism, who, despite a declared attachment to their nation, actually feel lonely. Our findings underscore the bidirectional nature of the relationship between national narcissism and loneliness, which represents a key insight of this study. Specifically, individuals with higher levels of national narcissism tend to experience more intense feelings of loneliness, likely due to their defensive focus on protecting the positive image of their group at the expense of genuine social connections. In turn, this social isolation may further fuel their narcissistic tendencies, as they seek validation through exaggerated attachment to the nation rather than through authentic interpersonal relationships. This cyclical/bidirectional pattern, where loneliness not only results from national narcissism but also perpetuates it, creates a self-reinforcing loop that deepens both the psychological distress and the intensity of narcissistic identification.

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Authorship

Marta Rogoza: conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing; Marta Marchlewska: conceptualization, methodology, writing – review and editing, supervision; Radosław Rogoza: conceptualization, formal analysis, writing – review and editing, supervision; Zuzanna Molenda: writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; Dagmara Szczepańska: writing – review and editing; Dominika Adamczyk: writing – review and editing; Michalina Szczęsna: writing – review and editing; Dominika Witke: conceptualization, formal analysis. All authors approved the final version of the article.

Open Data

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