



# Decoding the Narcissism-Charisma link: A facet approach

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## ABSTRACT

Narcissists appear to be charismatic, yet the literature is inconsistent as to the systematic relationship between narcissism and charisma. To address this gap in the literature, the present study ( $N = 727$ ) compared the convergence and divergence between narcissism and charisma through the prism of their facets. We hypothesized that agentic and communal narcissism would be positively related to charisma, whereas antagonistic narcissism would be negatively related to it. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) confirmed these opposing effects, thereby helping to explain why some studies find a relationship between narcissism and charisma while others do not. Results highlight the utility of a facet approach to personality in general and narcissism in particular.

## 1. Introduction

Grandiose<sup>1</sup> narcissism (hereafter narcissism) can be broadly defined as entitled self-importance marked by seeking and satisfying self-aggrandizing goals (Krizan, 2018). Although narcissism is frequently treated as a unidimensional construct (e.g., as a part of the Dark Triad; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), recent and well-validated models document it is best conceived as multidimensional (see Rogoza, Cieciuch, Strus & Baran, 2019). More specifically, three facets of narcissism can be distinguished: agentic (i.e., assertive self-enhancement through self-promotion), antagonistic (i.e., antagonistic self-protection through self-defense), and communal (i.e., communal self-enhancement through self-sacrifice; Back et al., 2013; Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken & Maio, 2012; Mota et al., 2019).

In line with this multidimensional view, narcissism can be associated with a rich array of divergent outcomes. Agentic narcissism comes along with adaptive qualities, such as expressive and self-assured behavior, peer popularity, and a benevolent approach to conflict. Antagonistic narcissism, on the other hand, comes along with maladaptive qualities, such as aggressive and combative behavior, peer unpopularity, and a malevolent approach to conflict (Back et al., 2013; Leckelt, Küfner, Nestler & Back, 2015; Wurst et al., 2017). Finally, communal narcissism is linked to a marked emphasis on interpersonal relationships and concern for other people's well-being (Luo, Cai,

Sedikides & Song, 2014). Importantly, however, despite believing in their exceptional communal qualities, other people actually perceive communal narcissists as low in those qualities (Barry, Lui, Lee-Rowland & Moran, 2017; Gebauer et al., 2012). Although research on agentic and antagonistic narcissism is advancing (e.g., Back et al., 2013), research on communal narcissism is still in its infancy (Rogoza et al., 2019).

One domain of particular importance with respect to narcissism is that of charisma. Narcissists are frequently perceived as charismatic (Deluga, 1997), and these perceptions refer to the fact that narcissists are able to exude self-confidence and share grand visions that are vital to leadership (e.g., Fatfouta, 2018; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In the seminal work by Weber (1968, p. 241), for example, someone is considered charismatic if they are perceived as being “endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional power or qualities.” According to the more recent conceptualization by Tskhay, Zhu, Zou and Rule (2018), charisma comprises two dimensions, influence (i.e., the ability to guide others) and affability (i.e., the ability to make others feel comfortable and at ease). Whereas influence signals dominance, affability signals warmth and trustworthiness (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007).

Understanding the link between narcissism and charisma is critical to make accurate predictions of leadership emergence and effectiveness, especially in an organizational context. For example, despite

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<sup>1</sup> In the present paper, we use the term ‘narcissism’ to describe individuals scoring high (vs. low) on narcissism measures. To note, the form of narcissism being measured and discussed in this paper refers to grandiose narcissism, which is marked by feelings of entitlement and grandiosity, and not vulnerable narcissism, which is marked by feelings of inferiority and vulnerability (Back, 2018). Thus, whenever we speak of narcissism, we refer to grandiose narcissism.

narcissism being associated with a range of destructive leadership qualities (e.g., risk taking, amorality, and lack of concern for others), narcissists routinely tend to emerge as leaders in leaderless groups (for a recent review, see Fatfouta, 2018). Hence, narcissism may also comprise potentially advantageous aspects, a phenomenon which has been coined as the “bright side/dark side” of narcissism (e.g., Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Even though the distinction of narcissism and charisma is becoming increasingly apparent, the nature of their relationship remains elusive. Specifically, the question of how different dimensions of narcissism relate to different dimensions of charisma has not been addressed so far.

Previous empirical research on the relationship between narcissism and charisma yielded inconclusive results. Back, Schmukle, and Egloff (2010) studied the relationship between narcissism and peer-reported behaviors – some of which are reminiscent of narcissists’ charismatic air (e.g., conveying a charming facial expression) – and found a positive correlation. In contrast, (Williams, Pillai, Deptula, Lowe & McCombs, 2018) investigated the relationship between perceived leader narcissism and charisma and found a negative correlation. Finally, Galvin, Waldman and Balthazard (2010) studied a population of senior business and/or community leaders and reported a non-significant correlation between narcissism and charisma.

One likely reason for these contradictions is that the conceptualization of narcissism is not consistent across studies, because most previous studies relied on a unidimensional conceptualization of the construct. Indeed, the aforementioned studies on the narcissism-charisma link used the well-known Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), which has been critiqued for blurring the nuanced associations between narcissism dimensions and other criterion variables (Clarke, Karlov & Neale, 2015). Hence, a facet-oriented approach to narcissism may help reconcile the discrepant results obtained so far. For example, the differentiation of narcissism facets as separate indicators has been fruitful to broaden our understanding of other inconsistencies regarding narcissism’s correlates, such as forgiveness, trust, and self-esteem (Fatfouta, Zeigler-Hill & Schröder-Abé, 2017; Geukes et al., 2017; Kwiatkowska, Jułkowski, Rogoza, Żemojtel-Piotrowska & Fatfouta, 2019).

The overarching goal of agentic and communal narcissists is to self-promote and, as a result, they are able to quickly gather social potential (Back, Schmukle & Egloff, 2010; Rentzsch & Gebauer, 2019). Importantly, with their belief in their exceptional qualities, they can be visionary, inspiring, and they may win others easily over (e.g., through charm in the case of agentic narcissism or through friendliness in the case of communal narcissism). Hence, agentic and communal narcissism should be positively related to charisma. In contrast, the overarching goal of antagonistic narcissists is to self-defend and, as a result, they are able to quickly engender social conflict (Leckelt et al., 2015). Moreover, with their belief in their own superiority, they can be aggressive, competitive, and they may use coercive tactics to protect themselves (Lange, Crusius & Hagemeyer, 2016). Hence, antagonistic narcissism should be negatively related to charisma.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

The work presented in this manuscript was part of a larger collection effort (Kwiatkowska et al., 2019), but the current study reports novel analyses. In total, 727 individuals ( $M_{\text{age}} = 22.19$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.54$ ,  $\text{range}_{\text{age}} = 18\text{--}35$ ) participated (508 females and 219 males). Aside from sex and age, no further demographic details were collected. All participants were Polish residents and all measures were administered in Polish. As an incentive, participants were invited to join a cash prize draw. The institutional Ethics Boards approved the procedures of this study (KEiB – 14/2017).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics and correlations between studied variables.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.
<i>Narcissism</i>						
1. Agentic narcissism	2.94	1.17				
2. Antagonistic narcissism	3.18	1.19	.43*			
3. Communal narcissism	3.77	1.05	.46*	.13*		
<i>Charisma</i>						
4. Influence	3.29	0.84	.32*	.02	.39*	
5. Affability	3.65	0.88	.14*	−0.18*	.38*	.37*

*Note.* Bonferroni correction applied. Estimates at  $p \leq 0.01$  are marked as significant by \*.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Narcissistic admiration and rivalry questionnaire-short (NARQ-S; Back et al., 2013; Leckelt et al., 2018; Polish adaptation: Rogoza, Rogoza & Wysznińska, 2016)

The NARQ-S consists of 6 items that capture two distinct narcissism facets: narcissistic admiration captures agentic narcissism (3 items,  $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = 0.78$ ; e.g., “I deserve to be seen as a great personality”), whereas narcissistic rivalry captures antagonistic narcissism (3 items,  $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $\alpha = 0.56$ ; e.g., “Most people are somehow losers”).<sup>2</sup> Responses were given on a 6-point scale (1 = *not agree at all*, 6 = *agree completely*).

#### 2.2.2. Communal narcissism inventory (CNI; Gebauer et al., 2012; Polish adaptation: Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Czarna, Piotrowski, Baran & Maltby, 2016)

The CNI consists of 16 items that capture the communal facet of narcissism ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ; e.g., “I will be well known for the good deeds I will have done”). Responses were given on a 7-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*).

#### 2.2.3. General charisma inventory (GCI; Tskhay et al., 2018)

The GCI consists of 6 items that capture two distinct dimensions of charisma: influence (3 items,  $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ,  $\alpha = 0.71$ ; e.g., “I am someone who has a presence in a room”) and affability (3 items;  $M = 3.65$ ;  $SD = 0.88$ ,  $\alpha = 0.74$ ; e.g., “I am someone who can get along with anyone”). Responses were given on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The Polish adaptation was prepared for the purpose of the current study, using a standard back-translation procedure in communication with the first author of the scale.

### 2.3. Analytic plan

To test our hypotheses, we run a Structural Equation Model (SEM) using robust maximum likelihood estimation in Mplus v. 7.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). To maintain the balance of items between measures, we parcelled the CNI items into three parcels using the item-to-construct balance approach (Little, Cunningham, Shahar & Widaman, 2002). To evaluate model fit, we used the following criteria: CFI > 0.90 and RMSEA < 0.08 (Byrne, 1994). Raw data and syntax used in the current study are available at the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/5tvxh>).

## 3. Results

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between studied variables are presented in Table 1.

Fig. 1 illustrates the SEM with standardized parameter estimates.

<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, the reliability of antagonistic narcissism is modest, yet in line with previous research using this short narcissism scale (e.g., Leckelt et al., 2018).

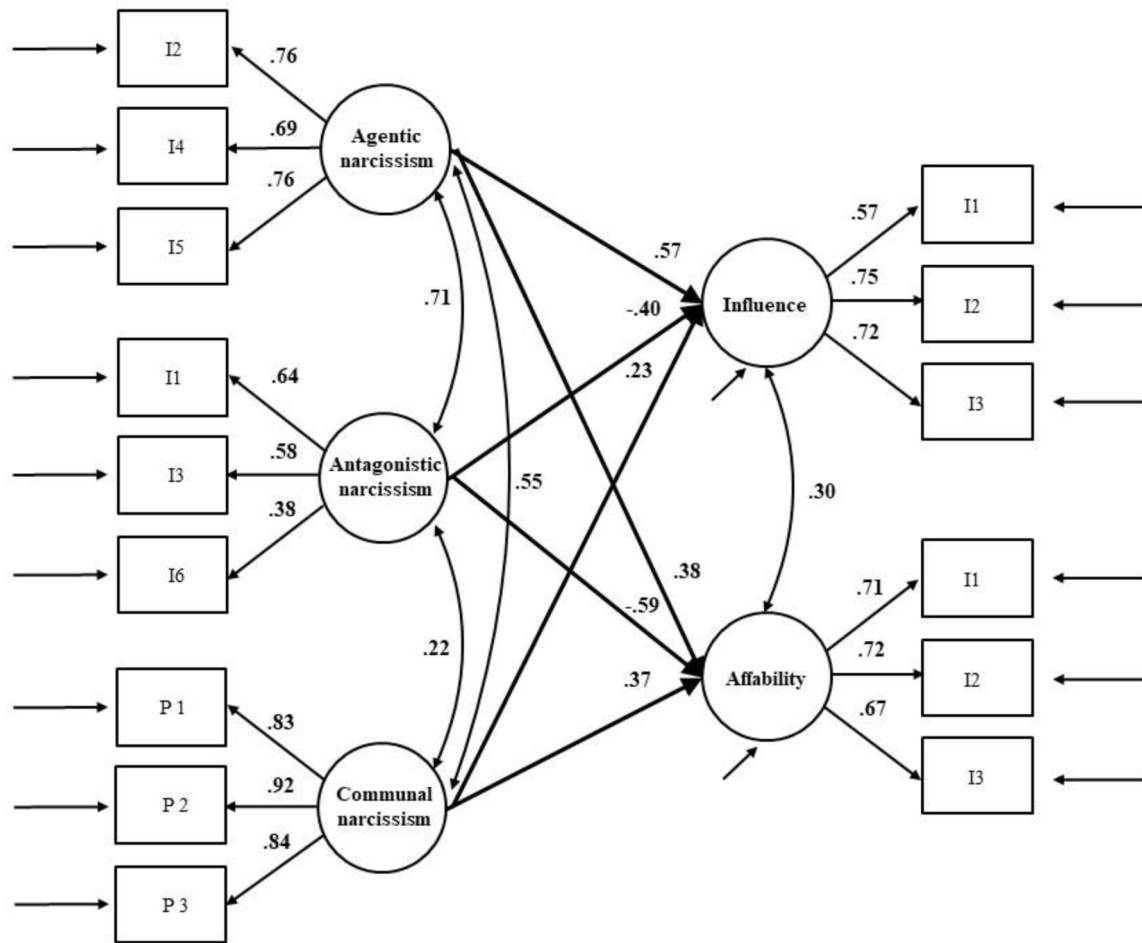


Fig. 1. Structural Equation Model of the relationship between narcissism and charisma facets. *I* = item; *P* = parcel. All estimates are significant at  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

The SEM demonstrated a good fit,  $\chi^2(80) = 293.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.061[.053, 0.068].

As expected, agentic as well as communal narcissism were significant positive predictors of influence and affability. In contrast, antagonistic narcissism was a significant negative predictor of influence and affability. Hence, whereas individuals high in agentic and communal narcissism reported a greater ability to guide others and get along with them, individuals high in antagonistic narcissism reported the reverse.

Moreover, we also investigated whether the beta weights of influence and affability are significantly different for each of the facets of narcissism. To do so, we tested three additional models, in which we constrained the aforementioned beta weights to be equal on one facet of narcissism at a time. Results revealed no differences in agentic ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 0.02$ ;  $p = .888$ ) and antagonistic ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 2.13$ ;  $p = .144$ ) narcissism, whereas communal narcissism was a significantly stronger predictor of affability than influence ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.95$ ;  $p = .026$ ).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Discussion

Given the hitherto inconsistent relations between narcissism and charisma in the literature, we applied a facet approach to shed more light on this issue. To control for shared variance and alleviate

measurement error, we used a SEM approach. Our results suggest that agentic and communal narcissism are positively related to charisma, whereas antagonistic narcissism is negatively related to it. Our findings are consistent with previous research, as agentic and communal narcissists strive to self-enhance (albeit through different means) while antagonistic narcissists tend to self-defend (Back et al., 2010; Leckelt et al., 2015; Rentzsch & Gebauer, 2019). The correlations between mean scores of agentic and antagonistic facets as well as between agentic and communal facets, were also common to previous studies (Back et al., 2013; Doroszuk et al., 2019; Rogoza et al., 2016; Vecchione et al., 2018). To note, communal narcissism was more strongly related to affability than to influence. Affability signals trustworthiness and warmth, whereas influence signals dominance (Fiske et al., 2007). As such, our findings provide novel support for the notion that communal narcissists self-enhance in communal, but not agentic domains (Gebauer et al., 2012). Note, however, that whereas agentic narcissists proclaim and behave in a self-focused manner, communal narcissists proclaim to be other-focused, but behave in a self-focused manner (Gebauer & Sedikides, 2018).

Previous research emphasized that grandiose narcissism can have bright as well as dark sides with respect to leadership (Fatfouta, 2018). The facet approach adopted here helped us shed light on this issue. More specifically, we revealed that it is the agentic (and communal) facet of narcissism that is positively related to charisma, whereas it is the antagonistic facet of narcissism that negatively related to it. One implication of the present research is that certain narcissism facets (i.e., agentic and communal narcissism) may be associated with productive characteristics that are conducive to gaining social appeal. Our research

<sup>3</sup> The differences in fit indices (i.e., CFI and RMSEA) did not exceed .001 in any model. The differences in Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) were marginal (i.e., 32334.68 vs. 32328.79 was the highest difference).

supports the view that agentic and communal narcissists, unlike antagonistic narcissists, present themselves as “charmers who can convert the masses with their rhetoric (Maccoby, 2004, p. 2).” However, it remains to be investigated to what extent this appeal persists over time.

#### 4.1. Limitations and future directions

First, our sample was cross-sectional in nature, which limits the causal interpretation of findings. For example, it is possible that narcissism influences the development of charisma (e.g., being self-assured, charming, and dominant facilitates the ability to get along with and/or influence others). Yet, the reverse is equally plausible (e.g., being charismatic nurtures narcissistic tendencies). Given that our study contains only a momentary assessment, future longitudinal studies are needed that examine the development of narcissists’ charisma over time.

Second, there is a mismatch in how communal narcissists proclaim to be in self-reports and how they are actually seen by others (Gebauer et al., 2012). For example, although communal narcissists declare to be kind in self-report (Rogoza & Fatfouta, 2019), others perceive them as not being prosocial (Nehrlich, Gebauer, Sedikides & Schoel, 2019). Thus, the positive associations between communal narcissism and charisma should be interpreted with caution, as they might be biased by communal narcissists’ hypocritical self-presentation. Future studies using informant reports could bring more clarity in this regard.

Third, our study focused on grandiose narcissism at the expense of vulnerable narcissism, which might also be interesting for future studies on the narcissism-charisma link. Knowing the structural organization of narcissistic personality and how specific measures map onto it facilitates potential predictions about this link (Rogoza et al., 2019). For example, antagonistic narcissism is assumed to tap some elements of narcissistic vulnerability (Wright & Edershire, 2018). Therefore, we would expect vulnerable narcissism to be also negatively related to both charisma facets.

Finally, we assessed mostly students. Although charisma can be successfully studied in student and general population samples (Tskhay et al., 2018), it is especially relevant for leadership in organizations (see charismatic leadership, Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka, 2009). Therefore, future studies might benefit from examining the extent to which narcissism in organizations relates to perceived charisma by employees and/or direct reports. The use of a facet approach, as demonstrated in the current study, should also be considered in such studies, as there are evident differences between narcissism and charisma facets. Moreover, such approach could provide further insight into potential discrepancies between self- and other-views of narcissists in organizational settings.

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