



## Effects of narcissistic entitlement and exploitativeness on human physical aggression

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### Abstract

Research has demonstrated that narcissism is related to the perpetration of aggression. Despite being commonly considered a pathological form of personality, theorists have argued that narcissism represents a mix of adaptive (e.g., Self-Sufficiency) and maladaptive (e.g., Entitlement and Exploitativeness) traits. The current study sought to examine the relationship between narcissistic traits and aggression. Ninety-one men completed a laboratory aggression task in which participants had the opportunity to administer electric shocks to a confederate or to refrain from doing so. General aggression as well as initial and extreme aggression were measured. Results indicated that narcissistic entitlement and exploitativeness were the narcissistic subtraits that best predicted all measures of aggression. The findings support existing research that identifies these traits as particularly maladaptive traits of narcissism, and are discussed in terms of the linkage between narcissism and perpetration of violence and victimization.

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## 1. Introduction

Narcissism has been described as a “mixed-blessing” (Paulhus, 1998) because it comprises adaptive and maladaptive features. On the one hand, narcissists can be outgoing (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), confident (Emmons, 1984), perform well under pressure (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and implement self-regulatory tactics that preserve self-esteem (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). On the other hand, narcissists tend to be impulsive (Vazire & Funder, 2006), fail to learn from their mistakes (Campbell, Goodie & Foster, 2004), and—perhaps most concerning—are prone to many forms of aggression including verbal, physical, and violence (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

There is an increasing focus on the multidimensionality of narcissism (i.e., how unique narcissism factors relate to different propensities, such as aggression). For example, Wink (1991) argued that two underlying factors, namely, overt and covert narcissism, exist within this personality construct. Wink described overt narcissists as displaying “...self-assuredness, aggressiveness, exhibitionism, self-indulgence, and disrespect for the needs of others” (p. 596). In contrast, he conceptualized covert narcissism in individuals who are, “...defensive, hypersensitive, anxious, and socially reticent individuals with personal relations marked by self-indulgence, conceit and arrogance, and an insistence on having their own way” (p. 596). While both subtypes are linked to various forms of maladjustment, overt narcissism seems to be more interpersonally disruptive. For example, overt narcissists are described by their partners as “bossy,” “intolerant,” and “cruel” (Wink, 1991; p. 596). Moreover, overt narcissism has been linked to MMPI and MMPI-II profiles (Rathvon & Holstrom, 1996; Wink & Gough, 1990) that reflect serious psychopathology (e.g., depression/anxiety, hostility/irritability) in individuals who are “unpredictable and prone to act out unexpectedly” (Greene, 1991; p. 283).

Robert Raskin’s (Raskin & Hall, 1979; Raskin & Terry, 1988) seminal work on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)—the most widely used measure of narcissism in social psychology—emphasized the existence of seven narcissism subfactors that map roughly onto the DSM-III criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder (i.e., Authority, Self-sufficiency, Entitlement, Exploitativeness, Vanity, Exhibitionism, and Superiority). Importantly, these subfactors of narcissism comprise a continuum of psychological maladjustment (Raskin & Novacek, 1989). These authors found that narcissistic Entitlement and Exploitativeness, in particular, represent extreme psychological maladjustment, whereas Self-sufficiency and Authority represent milder maladjustment. Notably, Entitlement and Exploitativeness scores correlate most strongly with DSM-III-referenced Antisocial, Passive-Aggressive, and Paranoid personality disorders.

Apart from being obnoxious, narcissistic maladjustment also harbors danger to others. Narcissism has been linked to aggression in response to an external threat to one’s self-esteem (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) and, more recently, to aggressive responding even in the absence of ego-threat (Martinez, Zeichner, Reidy & Miller, 2008). Narcissists defend themselves aggressively, but also aggress against others when unprovoked. Perhaps most disturbing is that laboratory-controlled studies of the narcissistic personality and aggression have an ecological parallel in some of the most severe forms of aggression. For example, Bushman, Baumeister, Phillips and Gilligan (1999, cited in Baumeister, Bushman & Campbell, 2000) found that incarcerated violent offenders endorsed significantly elevated levels of narcissism. Critically, however, their highest scores were on the NPI subscales of Entitlement and Superiority. This suggests that the dangerous aspects of

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