



## Do narcissists try to make romantic partners jealous on purpose? An examination of motives for deliberate jealousy-induction among subtypes of narcissism



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 27 January 2017

Received in revised form 21 March 2017

Accepted 23 March 2017

Available online xxxx

#### Keywords:

Narcissism

Jealousy induction

Motives

Tactics

Romantic relationships

### ABSTRACT

We speculated that narcissists' apparent desire for alternative mates might reflect a behavioral strategy designed to induce jealousy in their partners. We assessed grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, propensity to engage in strategic jealousy induction, and five motives for strategic jealousy induction. Both grandiose and vulnerable narcissists reported enhanced strategic jealousy induction. Results revealed that grandiose narcissists induce jealousy as means to acquire power and control, but vulnerable narcissists induce jealousy as a means to acquire power and control, exact revenge on the partner, test and strengthen the relationship, seek security, and compensate for low self-esteem. Additional mediation analyses revealed that the effects of both narcissism subtypes on jealousy induction were reduced upon controlling for Machiavellianism, and the effects of grandiose (vulnerable) narcissism on jealousy induction were accentuated (suppressed) upon controlling for trait self-esteem. Therefore, narcissists' relationship-threatening behavior might, in part, be strategic.

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Narcissism refers to a cognitive-affective preoccupation with the self (Westen, 1990) and can manifest in at least two subtypes: grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Grandiose narcissists are socially fearless, confident, approach-oriented, and, on first encounters, come across as “narcissistic” (Miller et al., 2011). Vulnerable narcissists, on the other hand, are neurotic, fearful, avoidance-oriented, and, on first encounters, come across as shy and reserved (Miller et al., 2011), but they can also come across as arrogant and conceited after longer encounters (Wink, 1991). Despite these differences, both narcissism subtypes appear associated with relationship-threatening behaviors suggestive of interest in alternative mates (e.g., flirting with or discussing attractive rivals; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Campbell & Foster, 2002; Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Hunyady, Josephs, & Jost, 2008; Peterson & DeHart, 2014; Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2012). Yet, it remains unclear why narcissists perpetrate relationship-threatening behaviors. Here, we explored the possibility that some of these behaviors might be employed strategically by narcissists to make their partners feel jealous.

Indeed, many of narcissists' relationship-threatening behaviors—appearing unattached/uncommitted, pursuing attractive alternatives, flirting, discussing attractive mate alternatives, etc.—can be used to induce jealousy in a romantic partner (Fleischmann, Spitzberg, Andersen, & Roesch, 2005; Wade & Weinstein, 2011; White, 1980). Jealousy

induction refers to behaviors (e.g., flirting with others; discussing attractive rivals) that are designed to elicit perceived relationship threats in the partner via the presence of rivals (Fleischmann et al., 2005; Mattingly, Whitson, & Mattingly, 2012; White, 1980). Mattingly et al. (2012) proposed five jealousy-inducing motives: (a) acquire power/control, (b) exact revenge, (c) test/strengthen the relationship, (d) seek security, and (e) compensate for low self-esteem. Seemingly, these motives fit under two taxonomies of self-serving behavior that might relate to narcissism (Hart, Adams, Burton, & Tortoriello, 2017): offensive-oriented (a and b) and defensive-oriented (c, d, and e) goals. Table 1 briefly describes these motives (indexed by the Motives for Inducing Romantic Jealousy Scale [MIRJS]; Mattingly et al., 2012).

Given narcissists' manipulative constitution, narcissism might relate to jealousy induction. Indeed, some researchers posit that narcissists' interpersonal behavior is typified by enhanced use of manipulative tactics to achieve interpersonal goals (e.g., Hart, Adams, Burton et al., 2017; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). Furthermore, in the context of romantic relationships, grandiose and vulnerable narcissists endorse a game-playing love style (i.e., ludus; Campbell et al., 2002; Rohmann et al., 2012) which involves relational deception, manipulation, and distancing (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). Nonetheless, ludus and strategic jealousy induction are theoretically distinct constructs and appear only weakly related (Mattingly et al., 2012).

Although grandiose and vulnerable narcissism might both relate to enhanced jealousy induction, the motives which underlie this behavior should diverge as a function of narcissism subtypes. For grandiose

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**Table 1**

Descriptions of the Five Motives for Inducing Romantic Jealousy and sample items from the MIRJS.

Jealousy motive	Description	Sample item (MIRJS) Each sample item is preceded by the sentence stem, "On the occasions in which I try to make my romantic partner jealous, I do so because..."
Power/control	Exerting one's power over the partner to gain leverage	"...I want to gain power over my partner."
Revenge	Retaliating due to partner inducing jealousy in him/her	"... I want to get revenge because my partner had made me jealous."
Testing/strengthening the relationship	Increasing relational closeness by testing the relationship	"...I want to test my partner's love for me."
Security	Seeking relational security	"...I want assurance that my relationship is strong."
Compensatory self-esteem	Needing relationship or partner for approval	"...I feel inadequate."

Note. Descriptions were influenced by those in White (1980) and Mattingly et al. (2012).

narcissism, we presumed it would relate to enhanced power/control and revenge motives (Table 2). Grandiose narcissists desire interpersonal dominance (Campbell et al., 2002; Rasmussen & Boon, 2014) and adopt dominance and revenge goals readily when provoked (Hart, Adams, Burton et al., 2017). Grandiose narcissism should be unrelated to motives symptomatic of defense against *relationship insecurity* (testing the relationship, seeking security). Because grandiose narcissism relates to secure and dismissive attachment styles (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003), it might have contradictory tendencies on relationship security motives. Nonetheless, because grandiose narcissism relates to high self-esteem (e.g., Bosson et al., 2008; Brunell & Fisher, 2014), it should inversely relate to motives symptomatic of defense against *personal insecurity* (i.e., compensatory self-esteem).

For vulnerable narcissism, we presumed it would relate to all five jealousy-induction motives (Table 2). Like grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism should relate to power/control and revenge motives. Due to their coveting of grandiosity and power (Hart, Adams, Burton et al., 2017), vulnerable narcissists pursue goals to assert power and exact revenge following provocation (Hart, Adams, & Tortoriello, 2017). Unlike grandiose narcissism, however, vulnerable narcissism should also relate to testing/strengthening the relationship, seeking security, and compensatory self-esteem motives (Mattingly et al., 2012). They are also deficient in self-esteem (Miller et al., 2011), and their behavior is presumed to arise from feelings of personal insecurity (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003).

**Table 2**

Hypothesized relations between narcissism subtypes and romantic jealousy-induction measures.

	Grandiose narcissism	Vulnerable narcissism
Romantic jealousy induction	✓	✓
Motives for Inducing Romantic Jealousy		
Offensive motives:		
Power/control	✓	✓
Revenge	✓	✓
Defensive motives:		
Testing/strengthening		✓
Security		✓
Compensatory self-esteem	✓–	✓

Note. "✓" denotes a hypothesized positive relation; "✓–" denotes a hypothesized negative relation.

We related grandiose and vulnerable narcissism to the Romantic Jealousy-Induction Scale (INDUCE; Mattingly et al., 2012) and the Motives for Inducing Romantic Jealousy Scale (MIRJS; Mattingly et al., 2012). We also included two personality correlates of narcissism that seemed relevant to our theory of narcissism and jealousy induction: Machiavellianism and self-esteem. Machiavellianism refers to a manipulative personality (Christie & Geis, 1970) and is a feature of narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). If effects of narcissism on jealousy induction reflect a manipulative constitution, such effects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism might be suppressed upon controlling for Machiavellianism. Self-esteem refers to one's attitude toward the self. Although an implicit form of self-esteem exists (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), we indexed one's self-reported ("explicit") self-esteem. Theories and findings suggest that explicit self-esteem reduces the need for using interpersonal manipulation tactics for offensive or defensive purposes (Hart, Adams, Burton et al., 2017; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Because jealousy induction represents a form of interpersonal manipulation, we presumed self-esteem would inversely relate to jealousy induction. Given that narcissism subtypes diverge in their relations to self-esteem, effects of grandiose (vulnerable) narcissism on jealousy induction might be accentuated (suppressed) upon controlling for self-esteem.

## 1. Method

### 1.1. Participants and design

Two-hundred-and-thirty-seven undergraduate students (166 female<sup>1</sup>) participated in an online study for partial course credit ( $M_{age} = 18.75$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). The design was cross-sectional.

### 1.2. Procedure and materials

Participants were introduced to a study on personality and romantic relationships in which they completed the following measures (in randomized order): the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988;  $\alpha = 0.86$ ;  $M = 16.46$ ,  $SD = 7.25$ ) to index grandiose narcissism<sup>2</sup>; the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997;  $\alpha = 0.74$ ;  $M = 28.63$ ,  $SD = 6.29$ ) to index vulnerable narcissism; the narcissistic vulnerability dimension of the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI-V; Pincus et al., 2009;  $\alpha = 0.92$ ;  $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) to index (pathological) vulnerable narcissism per Wright, Lukowitsky, Pincus, and Conroy (2010); the Mach-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970;  $\alpha = 0.66$ ;  $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) to index Machiavellianism; and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965;  $\alpha = 0.86$ ;  $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) to index explicit self-esteem.

Next, to measure participants' propensity toward inducing jealousy in their romantic partner, they completed the Romantic Jealousy-Induction Scale (INDUCE; Mattingly et al., 2012;  $\alpha = 0.97$ ;  $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). Finally, participants completed the MIRJS (Mattingly et al., 2012) that measures the five putative motives for inducing jealousy (see Table 1 for representative items and subscale descriptions): *testing/strengthening the relationship motives* ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ;  $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ), *revenge motives* ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ;  $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ), *power/control motives* ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ;  $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ), *security motives* ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ;  $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ), and *compensatory self-esteem motives* ( $\alpha =$

<sup>1</sup> Gender did not moderate any relations between narcissism measures and jealousy-induction variables at or below an alpha of 0.05. Hence, we discuss gender no further.

<sup>2</sup> Although some researchers have expressed concern over the NPI's psychometric properties (e.g., factor non-invariance) and construct validity (see Ackerman et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2009), there is strong evidence of its construct validity (e.g., Miller & Campbell, 2011; Miller et al., 2014), reliability (Raskin & Terry, 1988), and measurement equivalence across genders (Grijalva et al., 2015). Hence, although the scale is imperfect, the NPI total is a well-respected index of grandiose narcissism.

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