



## Three faces of Narcissism

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### ABSTRACT

Narcissism is increasingly recognised as a heterogeneous construct, with two dimensions of narcissistic dysfunction commonly accepted, *Grandiose Narcissism* and *Vulnerable Narcissism*. The current study aimed to provide empirical support for the heterogeneity of Narcissism. Along with the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI) and the Narcissism subscale of the Narcissism–Aloofness–Confidence–Empathy (NACE), questionnaires assessing personality traits, psychopathologies, and behavioural characteristics were administered to Australian university students. In addition to confirming the two dimensions of Narcissism through factor and correlational analyses, a possible third dimension of Narcissism emerged which was markedly aggressive and antisocial. The current study highlights the phenomenological breadth of Narcissism and the need for an improved understanding of Narcissism, particularly given the imminent publication of DSM-5.

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### 1. Introduction

Narcissism has been a concept of interest for a considerable time, having been explored in a variety of domains including Greek mythology, psychodynamic theory, psychiatric practice, and personality research. Despite this enduring fascination, there has been a lack of agreement regarding the conceptualisation of Narcissism. Although Narcissism is now commonly accepted as multi-dimensional, it was traditionally conceptualised as a homogeneous construct. An appreciation of the heterogeneity of Narcissism is crucial for a clearer understanding of the construct as well as improving the detection and management of Narcissism. This is particularly relevant at the present time as the reformulation of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is questioning the diagnostic utility and reliability of Narcissism as an independent personality disorder.

Two distinct dimensions of Narcissism are increasingly accepted (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008; Wink, 1991). *Grandiose Narcissism* is characterised by overt grandiosity and exhibitionism. Individuals with this grandiose expression of Narcissism openly display a sense of entitlement and are preoccupied with a need for admiring attention from others. *Vulnerable Narcissism* is a more covert dimension of Narcissism associated with hypersensitivity to criticism and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions. For those displaying this vulnerable expression of Narcissism, attempts

to inhibit grandiose desires and control an underlying sense of entitlement often result in distress.

With these distinct and seemingly conflicting descriptions of narcissistic dysfunction, it is not surprising that approaches to the measurement of Narcissism have been varied. Research examining self-report measures of Narcissism has shown little association between scales which have been found to focus on grandiosity and those that emphasise vulnerability (Wink, 1991). This supports the idea that there are two distinct groups of self-report Narcissism scales, neither of which portray the full breadth of the construct. However, measures that assess both Grandiose Narcissism and Vulnerable Narcissism have begun to emerge. The most notable of these is the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009). Although not as well explored in empirical literature, the Narcissism subscale of the Narcissism–Aloofness–Confidence–Empathy scale (NACE; Munro, Bore, & Powis, 2005) is another measure of Narcissism that assesses a range of narcissistic tendencies.

Research that distinguishes between the dimensions of Narcissism reveals that Grandiose Narcissism and Vulnerable Narcissism display distinct relationships with various correlates. For example, Miller et al. (2011) found Grandiose Narcissism related positively to Extraversion and negatively to Neuroticism, while Vulnerable Narcissism related negatively to Extraversion and positively to Neuroticism through factor and correlational analysis using the PNI. Miller et al. also found Grandiose Narcissism was unrelated to psychological distress, whilst Vulnerable Narcissism was positively related to psychological distress.

Similarly, the dimensions of Narcissism were found to relate to different factors of Psychopathy, with Grandiose Narcissism more closely related to Primary Psychopathy and Vulnerable Narcissism

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more closely associated with Secondary Psychopathy (Miller et al., 2010). Distinguishing between the dimensions of Narcissism may also provide further insight into established relationships between Narcissism and other correlates such as aggression (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000).

Like the aforementioned work of Miller et al. (2011), the current study used factor and correlational analyses to explore the dimensional structure of Narcissism and provide further evidence for its heterogeneity. However, different measures of Narcissism and construct validity variables were used in this study. Based on the aforementioned clinical and empirical literature (Cain et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2011; Wink, 1991), it was predicted that a two-factor structure would underlie both PNI and the NACE Narcissism subscale, with one factor characterised by grandiosity and self-centredness (Grandiose factor) and the other factor characterised by vulnerability and hypersensitivity (Vulnerable factor). It was predicted that the Grandiose and Vulnerable factors would share characteristics fundamental to Narcissism, with both factors displaying negative relationships with Empathy, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Additionally, it was predicted that the factors of Narcissism would be distinguishable through distinct patterns of intrapersonal and interpersonal styles. Consistent with previous empirical research (Miller et al., 2010, 2011), it was anticipated that the Grandiose factor would display relationships indicative of a grandiose and self-centred individual (e.g. positive relationships with Grandiosity, Extraversion, Primary Psychopathy, and Physical and Verbal Aggression; negative relationships with Neuroticism and Psychological Distress). On the other hand, the Vulnerable factor was expected to display correlations suggestive of vulnerable and hypersensitive individuals (e.g. positive relationships with Hypersensitivity, Neuroticism, Secondary Psychopathy, Anger and Hostility; negative relationships with Extraversion).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Three hundred participants were recruited from the first year undergraduate psychology cohort at an Australian university. Demographic details such as age and sex were not collected. Participants completed the test battery online and received course credit for their participation. The order of questionnaires was randomly assigned to each participant by an online research participation system to account for potential order and fatigue effects.

### 2.2. Measures

Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009) is a 52-item self-report measure of Narcissism ( $\alpha = .95$ ), designed to capture both the grandiose and vulnerable aspects of Narcissism based on an extensive review of cross-discipline theoretical and empirical literature on Narcissism and discussions with psychotherapists about clinical cases of narcissistic psychopathology. Within the PNI, there are four scales that assess Grandiose Narcissism (Exploitative scale, Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement scale, Grandiose Fantasy scale, and Entitlement Rage scale) and three scales that assess Vulnerable Narcissism (Contingent Self-Esteem scale, Hiding the Self scale, Devaluing scale). A six-point Likert scale ranging from 'not at all like me' to 'very much like me' was used to rate items such as "I often fantasise about being admired and respected" and "My self-esteem fluctuates a lot". High scores overall on the PNI are associated with low empathy, low self-esteem, interpersonal distress, and aggression.

Narcissism–Aloofness–Confidence–Empathy scales (NACE; Munro et al., 2005) are a self-report measure of personality traits

considered to be undesirable and desirable, particularly in medical professionals. Only the 24 Narcissism items ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and the 24 Empathy items ( $\alpha = .85$ ) were used in the current study. The NACE consists of a comprehensive selection of Narcissism and Empathy items identified through a thorough review of literature on the constructs, including existing measures and the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Examples of Narcissism items include: "It is important that others recognise how much I have achieved" and "I think people pretend to care more about others than they really do". An example of the Empathy items includes: "I feel most worthwhile as a human being when I am helping others". Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'definitely true' to 'definitely false'. High scores on the NACE Narcissism subscale are associated with disagreeableness, sensitivity to reward, and aggression. High scores on the NACE Empathy subscale indicate a high level of empathy.

Revised Short-scale Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985) is a 48-item measure of Eysenck's personality types: Psychoticism ( $\alpha = .51$ ), Extraversion ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and Neuroticism ( $\alpha = .79$ ). Rated on a dichotomous response scale (Yes/No), examples of items include: "Would you take drugs which may have strange or dangerous effects?" (Psychoticism subscale), "Are you a talkative person?" (Extraversion subscale), and "Does your mood often go up and down?" (Neuroticism subscale).

Goldberg's International Personality Item Pool (International Personality Item Pool: A Scientific Collaboratory for the Development of Advanced Measures of Personality Traits and Other Individual Differences) is a widely-used self-report measure of the Five Factor model of Personality. Only the 60 Agreeableness items ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and 60 Conscientiousness items ( $\alpha = .94$ ) were used in this study as the EPQ provided an index of Extraversion and Neuroticism. The Openness subscale was not included as no hypotheses were made for this construct. Items such as "Trust others" (Agreeableness subscale) and "Complete tasks successfully" (Conscientiousness subscale) were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'definitely false' to 'definitely true'. High scores on the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness subscales indicate a high level of agreeableness and conscientiousness, respectively.

Serkownek's Narcissism–Hypersensitivity Scale (Serkownek, 1975) is a 20-item self-report measure of Hypersensitivity ( $\alpha = .64$ ). Items such as "My feelings are not easily hurt" were rated on a dichotomous response scale (True/False). High scores on the scale are associated with hypersensitivity and low self-confidence.

Peters et al. Delusions Inventory (Peters, Joseph, & Garety, 1999) is a self-report measure of delusional ideation ( $\alpha = .78$ ). In the current study, the five Grandiosity items were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'feel it rarely' to 'feel it all the time'. An example of the items is: "Do you ever feel as if you are destined to be someone very important?" High scores on the Grandiosity items indicate a high level of grandiosity.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler et al., 2002) is a 10-item self-report screening tool used to detect psychological distress ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Items such as "Do you feel depressed?" were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'all of the time' to 'none of the time'. High scores on the scale indicate a high level of psychological distress.

Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) is a 26-item self-report scale that assesses the two commonly accepted factors of Psychopathy: Primary Psychopathy ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and Secondary Psychopathy ( $\alpha = .71$ ). Items such as "Success is based on survival of the fittest; I am not concerned about the losers" (Primary Psychopathy subscale) and "I find myself in the same kinds of trouble, time after time" (Secondary Psychopathy subscale) were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'disagree strongly' to 'agree strongly'. High scores on the

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