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The Relationship between Trait Narcissism and Perceptions of Control

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Abstract

Current research supports two variants of narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Although each variant shares a common core comprised of an antagonistic personality and an inflated sense of entitlement, the Perceived Control Theory of Narcissism (PCTN) identifies perception of control as the distinguishing factor between the two narcissistic subtypes. This study utilized self-report measures to examine the relationship between trait narcissism, locus of control, exploitativeness, and personal sense of power to test the predictability of the PCTN. Additionally, we explored whether social context affects trait narcissists' expressions of exploitativeness and power. As expected, we found vulnerable narcissism correlated with an external locus of control, both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism correlated with exploitativeness, and grandiose narcissism correlated with a higher personal sense of power while vulnerable narcissism correlated with a lower personal sense of power. Our exploration involving the friends vs strangers condition revealed increasing levels of grandiose narcissism correlated with an increasing perception of power over strangers. Social context did not affect vulnerable narcissists' personal sense of power nor did it affect trait narcissists' exploitativeness. This research addressed a central question arising from current trait narcissism research seeking to identify diverging points between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Our results support the PCTN prediction that differences in perceived control result in divergent expressions of narcissistic traits. This research adds to a growing body of literature identifying traits specific to grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Keywords: grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, perceived control theory of narcissism, locus of control, exploitativeness, personal sense of power, friends, strangers

Introduction

Current research supports two variants of narcissism, grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism; however, the literature has focused more on identifying the characteristics related to each narcissistic subtype than on the underlying cause leading to two distinctly diverse narcissistic manifestations. In the last decade as research into narcissism has flourished (Miller, Lynam, Hyatt, & Campbell, 2017) theories have recently begun to identify possible diverging points which explain both narcissistic variants (Hansen-Brown, 2018; Miller et al., 2017). This increased interest in narcissism by researchers has also led to a growing controversy related to the construct's definition (Miller et al., 2017). A crucial step towards resolving this controversy will be identifying the divergence point between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, which will also aid future researchers in identifying and clarifying characteristics particular to both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Recent research has identified perceived control as a potential diverging point between each variant of trait narcissism (Hansen-Brown, 2018). Three psychological constructs which closely align with perceived control are locus of control, exploitativeness, and personal sense of power. The current research applied these constructs to test perceived control as the diverging point between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Additionally, other research has suggested social context influences trait narcissists' behavior (Lannin, Gyll, Krizan, Madon, & Cornish, 2014; Sullivan & Hansen-Brown, 2019). Thus, the current research also explored whether social context affects the relationship between trait narcissism, exploitativeness, and personal sense of power. This research aims to gain insight into the characteristics of trait narcissists by better understanding forces which influence their behavior.

Trait Narcissism

Despite a long history ranging from the works of psychologists such as Otto Rank (1911), who first began defining narcissism, to more recent research exploring trait narcissism (Wink, 1991), narcissism remains a controversial research construct which has drawn increasing interest (Miller et al., 2017). The twentieth century has seen psychiatrists such as Otto Kernberg propose detailed theories describing narcissism as a personality disorder (Kernberg, 1970). In 1980, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* officially recognized narcissism as a personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Over the last three decades trait narcissism research has offered insight into the dynamics of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Wink, 1991). Trait narcissism research not only adds to the literature describing the interaction between narcissistic traits and corresponding attitudes and behavior styles, it may inform treatment techniques aiding individuals who express narcissistic traits.

Research offers evidence supporting two narcissistic subtypes, grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. Both subtypes share a common core comprised of an antagonistic personality and high levels of entitlement, while diverging in expressions of grandiosity, aggression, dominance, adequacy, and competence (Miller, Hoffman, Gaughan, Gentile, Maples, & Campbell, 2011; Wink, 1991). Grandiose narcissists express a self-assured grandiosity, aggression, dominance, and non-compliance, while vulnerable narcissists display greater hostility, distrust others, and present a defensive and insecure grandiosity masking self-perceived inadequacy and incompetence (Miller et al., 2011). Grandiose narcissists base their entitlement on their perceived superiority, while vulnerable narcissists base their entitlement on their perceived fragility (Miller et al., 2011). Research also suggests trait narcissists diverge in personality traits and intrapsychic experiences. Grandiose narcissism correlates with extraversion and low agreeableness, while vulnerable narcissism correlates with neuroticism (Allroggen,

Rehmann, Schürch, Morf, & Kölch, 2018; Miller et al., 2011). Additionally, while envy is traditionally viewed as a core narcissistic trait, other research identifies envy as a core element particular to vulnerable narcissism (Krizan & Johar, 2012).

Perceived Control

One variable which offers insight into trait narcissism is perceived control. Perceived control encompasses beliefs related to one's self, others, and general life events, including those which involve luck or chance as the actual determining factor (Hansen-Brown, 2018). Research has examined individuals' motivation to control their environment. Control, whether real or perceived, mitigates the negative consequences which accompany a perceived lack of control such as increased anxiety, greater passivity, and accepting failure (Langer, 1975). The illusion of control theory (Langer, 1975) explains a common result of this control motivation, where individuals erroneously attribute outcomes to themselves. The illusion of control facilitates individuals' perception that they possess control when an objective analysis would reveal the determining factor as random chance, luck, or the power and influence of others. This perception aids in avoiding the negative consequences which accompany the awareness one has little or no control.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the illusion of control is learned helplessness theory. Learned helplessness theory describes a potential negative effect of causally attributing general outcomes to external forces such as chance, luck, or the power and influence of others, leading individuals to develop a general expectancy that outcomes are uncontrollable (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Alloy, Peterson, Abramson, & Seligman, 1984). Research investigating learned helplessness proposes that people's causal attributions encompass three dimensions: internal-external, stable-unstable, and global-specific (Abramson et al., 1978).

To illustrate this concept, individuals who often present external, stable, and global causal attributions will generally view outcomes as beyond their control (external), believe this will continue perpetually (stable), and believe this will apply across many situations (global). Learned helplessness theory postulates that individuals who perceive outcomes as uncontrollable suffer various motivational, cognitive, and emotional deficits (Abramson et al., 1978).

One theory which explains the divergent characteristics of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism is the Perceived Control Theory of Narcissism (PCTN; Hansen-Brown, 2018). The PCTN posits that grandiose narcissists perceive high control regarding social relationships and general life outcomes, whereas vulnerable narcissists perceive low control regarding social relationships and general life outcomes. Exaggerated beliefs of high control over social relationships and personal outcomes align with grandiose narcissists' self-assured grandiosity, aggressive and dominant personalities, and tendency towards non-compliance (Hansen-Brown, 2018; Miller et al., 2011). Such traits suggest grandiose narcissism may strongly align with illusion of control theory, which describes a common motivation resulting from a desire to control one's environment. In contrast, exaggerated beliefs related to perceived control deficiencies involving social relationships and personal outcomes (Hansen-Brown, 2018) align with vulnerable narcissists' defensive and insecure grandiosity, overtly hostile and distrustful personalities (Hansen-Brown, 2018; Miller et al., 2011), and elevated neuroticism (Allroggen et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2011). Characteristics of vulnerable narcissism also align with learned helplessness theory which describes a potential negative effect of causally attributing general outcomes to external forces such as chance, luck, or the power and influence of others, leading individuals to develop a general expectancy that outcomes are uncontrollable (Abramson et al., 1978; Alloy et al., 1984).

Locus of Control, Personal Sense of Power, Exploitativeness, and the PCTN

Three psychological concepts may offer insight into trait narcissists' perceptions of control related to interpersonal relationships and general life outcomes: locus of control, exploitativeness, and personal sense of power. These constructs each reflect a specific component or consequence of perceived control, which should be predictable based upon the tenets of the PCTN. Examining existing relationships involving trait narcissism and these constructs through the lens of the PCTN represents an opportunity to further clarify characteristics of and divergences between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

The PCTN identifies individuals' attribution of perceived control to oneself or external forces as a significant diverging point between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Hansen-Brown, 2018), a prediction which aligns with locus of control theory. Locus of control theory (LOC) describes individuals' attribution of control affecting life outcomes as originating from either their own behavior or external forces (Rotter, 1966). Julian Rotter's theory of internal versus external control of reinforcement proposes two expressions of LOC. Internal LOC involves a personal belief that the individual controls general life outcomes rather than external factors such as fate, luck, or the power and influence of others. External LOC involves a personal belief that general life outcomes primarily result from external forces such as luck, fate, or powerful others, and little or no effect is attributed to internal factors such as personal decisions, skill, or other self attributes. Little research has explored the relationship between locus of control and trait narcissism.

Based upon the tenets of the PCTN (Hansen-Brown, 2018), the relationship between trait narcissism and exploitativeness, which is a component of perceived control, should be predictable. Exploitativeness refers to a psychological state in which individuals unfairly use

others for personal advantage, disregarding the norms of reciprocity (Brunell, Davis, Schley, Eng, Dulmen, Wester, & Flannery, 2013). Exploitative individuals better recognize others' negative emotional states which may facilitate their ability to identify vulnerability, making it easier to exploit individuals for personal gain (Konrath, Corneille, Bushman, & Luminet, 2014). Although exploitative behavior has traditionally been viewed as a core narcissistic trait (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), research has indicated a stronger association exists between exploitativeness and grandiose narcissism than with vulnerable narcissism (Brunell & Buelow, 2018; Miller, Few, Wilson, Gentile, Widiger, Mackillop, & Campbell, 2013). However, by applying the tenets of the PCTN (Hansen-Brown, 2018) the relationship between trait narcissism and exploitativeness may be further clarified.

Perceived power within interpersonal relationships may also be a diverging point which distinguishes grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. The PCTN proposes that grandiose narcissists proactively seek to exert influence and maintain power within interpersonal relationships, whereas vulnerable narcissists are interpersonally defensive and reactive (Hansen-Brown, 2018). Personal sense of power (PSP) is defined as an individual's perceived ability to influence others (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). This perception is subjective and may or may not reflect actual power within interpersonal relationships. PSP is specific to individual relationships and moderately consistent across relationships. This is a result of individuals first forming a general perception of possessing high or low power within interpersonal relationships, then applying this general perception to individual relationships.

Based on the tenets of the PCTN the relationships involving trait narcissism, LOC, PSP, and exploitativeness should be predictable. The PCTN posits grandiose narcissists are prone to overestimating their intelligence and cognitive abilities (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002).

Grandiose narcissism also associates with extroversion, a self-assured grandiosity (Miller et al., 2011), a sense of personal superiority (Krizan & Johar, 2012), an aggressive, manipulative, and dominant interpersonal style (Miller et al., 2011, Wink, 1991) as well as an openly expressed power orientation (Wink, 1991). These relationships suggest grandiose narcissism should correlate with an internal LOC, an elevated PSP, and a propensity to engage in exploitative behavior. Vulnerable narcissism is associated with neuroticism (Miller et al., 2017), hostility, distrust of others and an insecure grandiosity masking feelings of inadequacy and incompetence (Miller et al., 2011). Vulnerable narcissists have been found to be socially inhibited, emotionally reactive, insecure, and vindictive (Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Wink, 1991). Vulnerable narcissists have also been found to be hypersensitive, anxious, introverted, uncomfortable with leadership roles, and lacking confidence in social settings (Wink, 1991). These relationships suggest vulnerable narcissism should associate with an external LOC, a low PSP, and an elevated expression of exploitative behavior.

Social Context

Social context influences trait narcissists' behavior. One recent study tested whether social context moderated the association between trait narcissism and helping behavior (Lannin et al., 2014). Participants were presented the option to help when a confederate sought their aid. The study presented either a high or low social pressure condition randomly to participants. Participants in the high social pressure condition believed that their decision to help or not would be known to the confederate, while participants in the low social pressure condition believed their decision would remain unknown. Grandiose narcissists openly and defiantly refused the confederate's request for help in the high social pressure condition, while vulnerable narcissists helped least in the low social pressure condition. This research revealed trait narcissists help

differently based on social pressure conditions, as the target's awareness of the choice to help affected when grandiose and vulnerable narcissists engaged in helping behavior. Traits such as non-compliance (Miller et al., 2011) and low agreeableness (Allroggen, et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2011) offer context for grandiose narcissists' open and defiant refusal to help in high social pressure conditions. Traits associated with vulnerable narcissism such as hostility towards and distrust of others (Miller et al., 2011) offer context for their reluctance to help in low social pressure conditions.

Other research has explored the relationship between trait narcissism, social context, and attitudes involving helping behavior (Sullivan & Hansen-Brown, 2019). This research operationalized social context as individuals known (friends) and unknown (strangers). The friends condition refers to non-familial known individuals; the strangers condition refers to previously unknown individuals. The friends condition retained aspects of Lannin and colleagues' (2014) high social pressure condition as the decision to help friends implies existing and ongoing relationships, while the strangers condition retained aspects of Lannin and colleagues' (2014) low social pressure condition as the decision to help strangers implies no expectation of future contact. Importantly, whereas the strangers condition also retained Lannin and colleagues' (2014) examination of onetime interactions, the friends condition included an additional component of expected ongoing relationship maintenance. This research revealed overall trait narcissists helped friends more than strangers, although the results also revealed higher levels of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism associated with a decreasing willingness to help friends. The results also revealed higher levels of grandiose narcissism associated with an increased willingness to help strangers. These results suggest that both levels

of trait narcissism and social context (friends vs strangers) influenced participants' attitudes related to helping behavior.

Although previous research (Lannin et al., 2014; Sullivan & Hansen-Brown, 2019) has examined the effect social context has on the relationship between trait narcissism and helping behavior, little research has explored the impact social context has on trait narcissists' perceptions of control. The PCTN posits grandiose narcissists perceive high control over personal outcomes, others' behavior, and their environment, while vulnerable narcissists believe they have little or no control over personal outcomes and are generally reactive to individuals and their environment (Hansen-Brown, 2018). This research explored whether social context impacts grandiose and vulnerable narcissists' expressions of exploitativeness and perceived power.

The Current Research

This research examined the relationships between trait narcissism and attributions of control regarding general life outcomes, perceptions of power and control within interpersonal relationships, as well as attitudes related to exploitative behavior. A secondary focus was any impact social context may have on trait narcissists' perceptions of control. We based our predictions on current theories of trait narcissism and the Perceived Control Theory of Narcissism (PCTN). We expected to find that higher levels of grandiose narcissism would associate with an internal locus of control (H1A), and that higher levels of vulnerable narcissism would associate with an external locus of control (H1B). We expected that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism would associate with increased exploitative behavior (H2). We also expected higher levels of grandiose narcissism would associate with an inflated sense of power within interpersonal relationships (H3A) while higher levels of vulnerable narcissism would

associate with a lower sense of power within interpersonal relationships (H3B). Finally, our examination of the friends and strangers condition was exploratory. We first explored whether the link between each narcissistic variant and exploitative behavior differs based on the friends vs the strangers condition (H4A). We then explored whether the link between each narcissistic variant and perceived power within interpersonal relationships differs based on the friends vs the strangers condition (H4B).

Method

Participants

Using G*Power *a priori* power analysis (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), we determined that 134 participants would give us 95% power to detect a medium-sized effect for hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Another *a priori* power analysis determined that 107 participants would give us 95% power to detect a medium-sized effect for our exploratory hypothesis 4. We aimed to recruit 200 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk to ensure replicability of our results. Participants had to be a member of Amazon Mturk, have a HIT approval rate of 95% or greater, be at least 18 years old, and be a U.S citizen. Participants were compensated \$1.25 for participation in the study. Before gathering data, we preregistered our hypotheses on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/7skvt>). We also outlined exclusion criteria at that time. Exclusion criteria included an item presented before debriefing asking participants to rate how seriously they took the study on a scale of 1 (not at all seriously) to 5 (very seriously). A total of 214 participants began the survey on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Fourteen participants with partial data who did not receive compensation were excluded from the study. We also excluded two participants who selected 1 (not at all seriously). Lastly, participants with missing data were

excluded from each analysis, not the whole data set. Our final total sample size was 198 participants (158 Caucasian, 126 male, age range 19-69, mean age 36.61 years).

Self-Report Measures

The Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997) is a 10-item self-report measure utilized to assess vulnerable narcissism. This study used the full HSNS inventory. The measure captures expressions of hypersensitivity, vulnerability, and entitlement. The measure utilizes a Likert scale format of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Items include statements such as “I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others.” We summed all items to create a total vulnerable narcissism score ($\alpha = .80$).

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) is a 40-item self-report measure utilized to assess grandiose narcissism. This study used the full NPI inventory. Participants were asked to select the item that best describes themselves. Items were in the form of forced choice selections (“I will be a success” / “I am not too concerned about success”). We summed all narcissistic items to create a total grandiose narcissism score ($\alpha = .92$).

The Multidimensional Locus of Control Scales (IPC; Levenson, 1973) is a 24-item self-report measure developed to assess an individual’s perceptions of personal control over their life (I subscale; example item: “My life is determined by my own actions”), perceptions of powerful others’ control over their life (P subscale; example item: “My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others”), and perceptions of chance (i.e., luck) having control over their life (C subscale; example item: “When I get what I want, it's usually because I'm lucky”). The measure utilizes a Likert scale format of 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). We determined locus of control scores by summing items reflecting agreement to internal locus of control (I

subscale, $\alpha = .74$), powerful others locus of control (P subscale, $\alpha = .87$) and chance locus of control (C subscale, $\alpha = .87$).

The Interpersonal Exploitativeness Scale (IES; Brunell et al., 2013) is a 6-item self-report measure developed to assess individuals' attitudes related to exploiting others for personal gain. This scale was modified so all 6-items reflect either one of the two conditions in our study, friends or strangers. Participants were presented either a 6-item friend or a 6-item stranger version of the modified scale. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. The measure utilizes a Likert scale format of 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Items in the friends condition include statements such as "I'm perfectly willing to profit at the expense of friends". Items in the strangers condition include statements such as "It doesn't bother me to benefit at a stranger's expense." We summed all scores to create a total exploitativeness score (IES friends condition $\alpha = .95$; IES strangers condition $\alpha = .95$).

The Personal Sense of Power Scale (PSP; Anderson et al., 2012) is an 8-item self-report measure developed to assess an individual's perception of their ability to influence individuals or groups. This scale was modified so all items reflect either one of the two conditions in our study, friends or strangers. Participants were presented either an 8-item friend or an 8-item stranger version of the modified scale. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. The measure utilizes a Likert scale format of 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Items in the friends condition include statements such as "I think I have a great deal of power over my friends". Items in the strangers condition include statements such as "I can get strangers to do what I want". We summed all items to create a total personal sense of power score (PSP friends condition $\alpha = .76$; PSP strangers condition $\alpha = .88$).

Procedure

Prior to conducting our research, IRB approval was obtained from Bridgewater State University. After providing informed consent, participants completed self-report measures of narcissistic traits (grandiose and vulnerable), locus of control, exploitativeness, and personal sense of power. We randomly assigned participants to either the friends or strangers condition when presenting the personal sense of power and exploitativeness measures. In the friends condition participants responded to items regarding non-familial individuals known to them. In the strangers condition participants responded to items regarding individuals unknown to them. We presented all measures in a fixed order in both conditions. Upon completion of the study, we debriefed participants and informed them as to the purpose of the study.

Results

Trait Narcissism and Locus of Control

Contrary to our prediction, the association between grandiose narcissism and internal locus of control (H1A) was not supported, $r(194) = .11, p = .14$. Unexpectedly, we did find a weak positive correlation between the NPI and the powerful others subscale, $r(195) = .14, p = .05$. We also found a weak positive correlation between the NPI and the chance subscale, $r(195) = .22, p = .002$. Our prediction regarding the association between vulnerable narcissism and an external locus of control (H1B) was supported, as vulnerable narcissism was strongly correlated with both the powerful others subscale, $r(196) = .62, p < .001$, and the chance subscale, $r(196) = .57, p < .001$. We found no correlation involving the HSNS and the internal subscale, $r(195) = -.12, p = .11$. Interestingly, these results indicate that both narcissistic variants seem to have an external LOC.

Trait Narcissism and Exploitativeness

Our predictions regarding the association between trait narcissism and exploitativeness were supported (H2), with both narcissistic variants strongly associating with exploitative behavior. We found statistically significant strong positive correlations between the IES and the NPI, $r(195) = .54, p < .001$, and the IES and the HSNS, $r(196) = .52, p < .001$. These results support our prediction that both narcissistic variants are exploitative.

Trait Narcissism and Personal Sense of Power

Our predictions regarding personal sense of power and trait narcissism were supported, with grandiose narcissism associating with a higher personal sense of power (H3A) and vulnerable narcissism associating with a lower personal sense of power (H3B). We found a moderately strong positive correlation involving the NPI and the PSP, $r(194) = .33, p < .001$, as well as a moderately strong negative correlation involving the HSNS and the PSP, $r(195) = -.32, p < .001$. These results indicate grandiose narcissists perceive an inflated sense of power within interpersonal relationships while vulnerable narcissists perceive a lower sense of power, supporting our hypothesis.

The Link between Trait Narcissism, Exploitativeness, and Friends vs Strangers

For our first exploratory hypothesis (H4A) we tested whether grandiose narcissists' exploitative behavior differs toward friends vs strangers by conducting a univariate General Linear Model analysis. Our results revealed there was no main effect of condition, $F(1, 193) = 1.99, p = .16$. Our results did reveal a statistically significant main effect of grandiose narcissism, $F(1, 193) = 84.53, p < .001$, replicating the bivariate correlation between NPI and IES. Importantly, the interaction between condition and the NPI was not significant $F(1, 193) = .06, p = .81$, suggesting that grandiose narcissists do not exploit friends vs strangers differently.

We then conducted a second General Linear Model analysis to test whether vulnerable narcissists exploit friends vs strangers differently (H4A). Again, our results revealed no main effect of condition, $F(1, 194) = .79, p = .37$. Our results did reveal a statistically significant main effect of the HSNS, $F(1, 194) = 71.78, p < .001$, again replicating the bivariate correlation between HSNS and IES. Importantly, the interaction between condition and the HSNS was not significant $F(1, 194) = .18, p = .67$, suggesting that vulnerable narcissists also do not exploit friends vs strangers differently.

These findings combined with the correlations involving the NPI, the HSNS, and the IES (H2) indicate that levels of trait narcissism rather than the friends or strangers condition affected the expression of exploitativeness in this study. These results suggest trait narcissists' exploitative behavior is not affected by social context, somewhat contradicting previous research (Lannin et al., 2014; Sullivan & Hansen-Brown, 2019) supporting the role of social context as a determining factor influencing trait narcissists' behavior.

The Link between Trait Narcissism, Perceived Power, and Friends vs Strangers

For our second exploratory hypothesis (H4B) we first tested whether grandiose narcissists' personal sense of power differs towards friends vs strangers by conducting a General Linear Model analysis. Our results revealed a main effect of condition, $F(1, 192) = 32.23, p < .001$, as well as a main effect of the NPI, $F(1, 192) = 24.57, p < .001$; these results indicate that individuals perceive a higher personal sense of power relative to friends vs strangers independent of levels of grandiose narcissism, and grandiose narcissists perceive higher power compared to non-narcissists. Our results also revealed a significant interaction between the NPI and condition, $F(1, 192) = 6.95, p = .009$, depicted in Figure 1 below. Simple slopes tests revealed as levels of grandiose narcissism increase, perceived power over strangers also increases, $t(192) = 5.36, p <$

.001, but grandiose narcissism levels are unrelated to perceived power in the friends condition, $t(192) = 1.64, p > .05$. Finally, simple slopes tests indicated that people perceive more power over friends vs strangers at both lower grandiose narcissism levels, $t(192) = -6.13, p < .05$, and higher grandiose narcissism levels, $t(192) = -2.39, p < .05$.

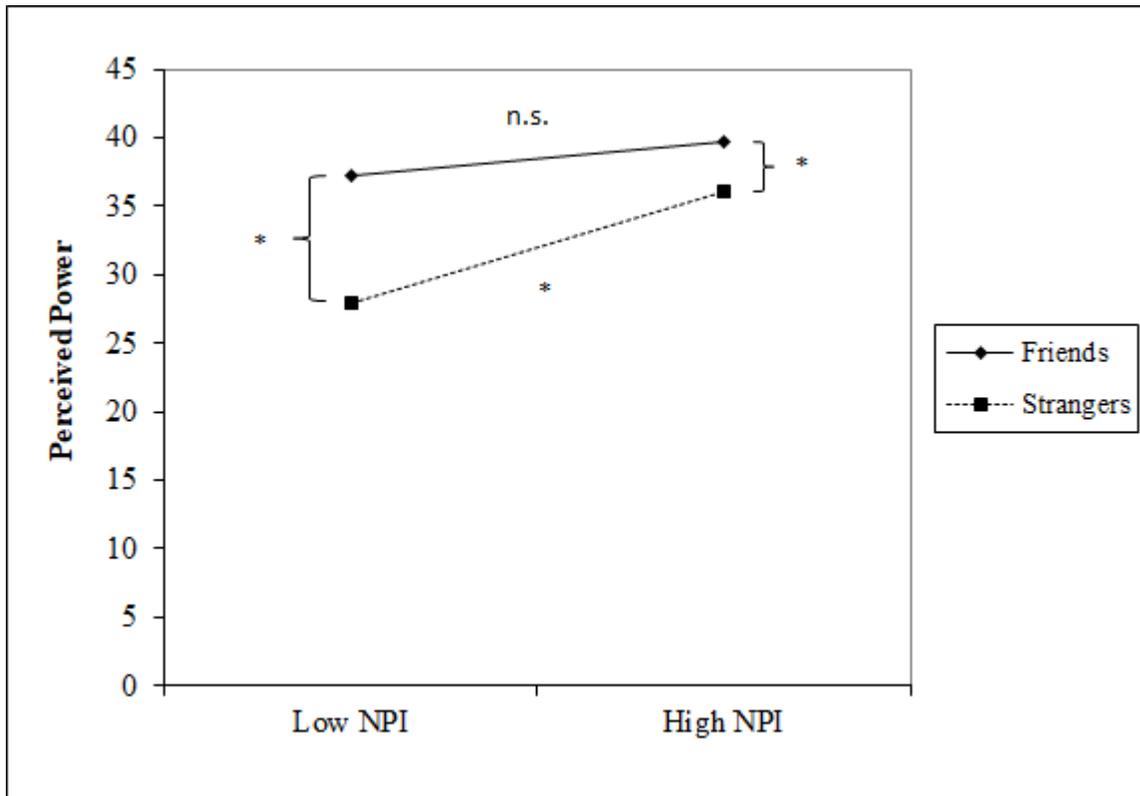


Figure 1. Relationship between grandiose narcissism and perceived power, moderated by social context (friends vs strangers). Asterisks indicate $p < .05$ for simple slopes tests.

Next, we conducted a General Linear Model analysis to test whether vulnerable narcissists' personal sense of power differs towards friends vs strangers (H4B). Our results revealed no main effect of condition, $F(1, 193) = .96, p = .33$. Our results did reveal a main effect of HSNS, $F(1, 193) = 25.62, p < .001$, replicating the bivariate correlation between HSNS and PSP. Finally, our results revealed the interaction between condition and the HSNS was not

significant, $F(1, 193) = .21, p = .65$, suggesting that while levels of vulnerable narcissism affected personal sense of power, the friends vs strangers condition did not.

Discussion

This research examined the relationship between trait narcissism and perceptions of power and control within interpersonal relationships as well as attitudes regarding general life outcomes and exploitative behavior. Several of our hypotheses were supported in this study. We found grandiose narcissism correlated with both exploitativeness (H2) and an inflated personal sense of power (H3A). Vulnerable narcissism correlated with an external LOC (H1B), exploitativeness (H2), and a decreased personal sense of personal power (H3B). We also found that the friends vs strangers condition only influenced perceptions of power for grandiose narcissists (H4B), having no effect on either vulnerable narcissists' perceptions of power or either grandiose or vulnerable narcissists' exploitative behavior.

Our unsupported hypothesis regarding grandiose narcissism and internal locus of control (H1A) raised questions as to a possible problem in our methodology. The Levenson IPC scale (Levenson, 1973) was used to measure participants' LOC, which consists of three 8-item subscales: the I subscale (internal), the P subscale (powerful others), and the C subscale (chance). Only one of the three subscales measured internal LOC, which may have been insufficient to measure this construct. Cronbach's alpha for the I subscale was also lower than expected ($\alpha = .74$) which may have affected our ability to accurately measure this construct. Future research should consider options which create a more balanced measurement of internal LOC.

Our first exploratory hypothesis (H4A) examined the link between trait narcissism and exploitative behavior. Our results revealed that the friends vs strangers condition had no effect

on trait narcissists, suggesting trait narcissists do not exploit friends and strangers differently. This result corresponds with previous research identifying exploitativeness as a core narcissistic trait. We suggest future research further examine trait narcissists' expressions of exploitativeness for overt vs covert characteristics. Traits associated with grandiose narcissism such as a self-assured grandiosity, extroversion, and a dominant and aggressive personality (Miller et al., 2011) along with high perceived control (Hansen-Brown, 2018) suggest these individuals may be more prone to open and bold expressions of exploitative behavior. Conversely, traits associated with vulnerable narcissism such as a defensive and insecure grandiosity, combined with feelings of inadequacy and incompetence (Miller et al., 2011) and low perceived control (Hansen-Brown, 2018) suggest these individuals may be likely to engage in a more subtly manipulative and cautious expression of exploitative behavior. While our results found both variants of trait narcissism strongly associated with exploitativeness, the manner in which grandiose and vulnerable narcissists engage in exploitative behavior warrants further examination.

Our second exploratory hypothesis (H4B) examined the link between trait narcissism and personal sense of power. Our results revealed that both levels of grandiose narcissism and the friends vs strangers condition affected personal sense of power, but the friends vs strangers condition had no effect on vulnerable narcissists. One possible explanation for these results was our modification to the Personal Sense of Power scale (Anderson et al., 2012) creating the friends vs strangers condition. Perhaps our modification insufficiently captured this relationship. The PSP scale is an 8-item measure. In its original format only 2 items reference other individuals (e.g., "I can get him/her/them to do what I want"), while 6 items make generalized inquiries (e.g., "I think I have a great deal of power"). It is possible that transforming all items into inquiries addressing other individuals ("I think I have a great deal of power over my

friends”; “I think I have a great deal of power over strangers”) compromised the original measurement’s sensitivity. The original scale strongly correlated with the narcissistic factors of leadership and authority, while it was uncorrelated with the factors of exploitativeness and entitlement (Anderson et al., 2012). Anderson and colleagues (2012) suggest a high personal sense of power is likely connected to a personal belief in one’s own superiority. We may have captured grandiose narcissists’ self-assured grandiosity, self-perceived superiority, and correlation with extroversion (Miller et al., 2011) better with our modified scale, while vulnerable narcissists’ defensive and insecure grandiosity, sense of fragility, and correlation with neuroticism (Allroggen et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2011) was not well captured. Overall, our research appeared to capture power as a construct well, as our results confirmed our hypothesis (H3A, H3B), with grandiose narcissists expressing an inflated personal sense of power and vulnerable narcissists expressing a decreased personal sense of personal power. However, perhaps our modification creating the friends vs strangers conditions was insufficiently sensitive to detect an interaction for vulnerable narcissists. As prior research has found both social pressure (Lannin et al., 2014) and friend vs stranger relationships (Sullivan & Hansen-Brown, 2019) to influence both grandiose and vulnerable narcissists, we recommend future research employ additional measures to examine this relationship further.

This research has several implications regarding both the research literature and practical applications. One important aspect of this study is it has applied the tenets of the PCTN to predictions involving the relationship between both narcissistic variants and LOC, exploitativeness, and personal sense of power. Basing our hypotheses on the principles of the PCTN adds support for the theory by testing and confirming its predictability. Importantly,

evidence supporting the PCTN adds to the literature identifying perceived control as the main point of divergence between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Beyond its implications involving the PCTN, this research has broader implications relating to research and treatment of narcissistic traits in general. Research studying trait narcissism offers a more detailed and accurate view of narcissism, which has great importance given the recent debate involving the definition of the construct. Research which aids in further clarifying the characteristics of narcissistic traits is essential in resolving this controversy. This research adds to the literature clarifying narcissistic traits particular to both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Elucidating traits and related attitudes and behavior patterns specific to each narcissistic variant has important clinical implications. By gaining greater insight into expressions of narcissistic traits which may adversely affect individuals' interpersonal relationships and social interactions, clinicians will be better positioned to mitigate potential negative outcomes.

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