Getting What You Want vs. Playing Nice With Others:
Agency, Communion, and the Narcissistic Subtypes

THESIS

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine potential fundamental differences in self-perceived agency and communion between grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. In Studies 1 and 2, participants completed various self-report measures of agentic and communal self-ratings. In Study 3, participants rated the general and personal desirability of agentic and communal traits, and then rated their own self-perceptions on these traits. In Study 4, participants completed an agency recall manipulation and then reported state self-esteem. Studies 1-3 showed that whereas grandiose narcissists perceive themselves as having high agency, vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as having low agency, supporting the primary hypothesis. Grandiose narcissism was consistently unassociated with communal self-ratings, while vulnerable narcissism was unassociated or negatively associated with communal self-ratings. Studies 1-3 also tested a mediation model in which the association between each narcissism type and self-esteem is accounted for by perceived agency; this mediation model was supported in each study, although the agency and self-esteem variables were interchangeable. Study 4 attempted to establish the directionality of the preferred mediation model, but was unsuccessful, perhaps due to problems with the chosen manipulation of agency. Implications of these findings are addressed in the discussion section.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We can likely all conjure up some image of a narcissist. Perhaps the narcissist in our mind’s eye is overt—someone who thinks only of themselves, except for when they brag about their superiority to others and wait expectantly for admiration. Or perhaps the narcissist we think of is more covert—someone who keeps their head down in public, but who secretly harbors extravagant fantasies about all the things they deserve but haven’t yet received. Are these two types of narcissist equally capable of achieving the outcomes they desire? And if not, does this lead to differences in their psychological well-being?

Historically, narcissism has been considered primarily as a psychological disorder studied from a clinical perspective (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, narcissism has received much empirical attention in recent decades from social and personality psychologists, who view the construct as an individual difference variable (Foster & Campbell, 2007; Miller & Campbell, 2010; Widiger, 2010). According to this view, narcissism exists as a continuum on which the general population is normally distributed (Raskin & Hall, 1979); thus, everyone possesses some level of narcissism¹.

Much of the work on non-clinical narcissism focuses on understanding the social impact that these narcissists have on others, such as in team settings, the workplace, and

¹ Although it is a continuous construct, for brevity, we refer to people high in trait narcissism as “narcissists.”
interpersonal relationships. However, this research depends on basic knowledge of the fundamental characteristics and features of narcissists; in this paper, I argue that the current literature is missing a key piece of that knowledge.

The current research aims to better delineate the characteristics and subjective experiences of different types of narcissists. Specifically, I aimed to gain a better understanding of how grandiose and vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves in terms of agency and communion. Do both subtypes feel capable of getting the things they want in life? And do they view themselves as getting along well with others? In short, the purpose of the current work is to lay the groundwork to better understand the fundamental characteristics of grandiose and vulnerable narcissists.

The Narcissistic Subtypes

Until recently, narcissism was conceptualized as a single construct. However, this led to some issues with reconciling contradictory findings within narcissism theory and research. In fact, theorists and researchers have identified a continuum of narcissistic features for decades, and clinical patients often exhibit a combination of different features (Gabbard, 1989). For example, Kernberg (e.g., 1970) described a type of narcissist who is arrogant, aggressive, and demanding of others’ attention and admiration. Kohut (e.g., 1971), in contrast, described a type of narcissist who is hypervigilant to personal slights, feels inferior to others, and suppresses deep-seated feelings of entitlement.

Narcissism measures designed to capture specific clusters of narcissistic features typically do not correlate with each other (Emmons, 1987; Wink, 1991), and even manifest radically different associations with various constructs. Importantly, some
narcissism measures exhibit positive correlations with scales measuring self-esteem and other indicators of well-being, whereas other narcissism measures exhibit negative correlations with the same scales (e.g., Hickman, Watson, & Morris, 1996; Rose, 2002; Wink, 1991). Similarly, narcissism research has sometimes shown that narcissists display social insensitivity, while other research has shown that narcissists display social hypersensitivity (e.g., Besser & Priel, 2010; Exline, Single, Lobel, & Geyer, 2004).

As a way to reconcile these contradictory findings, researchers have proposed that two distinct subtypes of narcissist exist, typically called grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Gabbard, 1989; Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Wink, 1991). Grandiose and vulnerable narcissists share several key narcissistic features: entitlement, self-absorption, aggression, exploitation, and grandiose fantasy (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Krizan & Johar, 2012; Miller, Hoffman, Gaughan, Gentile, Maples, & Campbell, 2011). However, the two narcissistic subtypes differ in many important ways.

Grandiose narcissists most closely match the stereotypical image of narcissism. These individuals are arrogant (Akhtar & Thomson, 1982), superior (Krizan & Bushman, 2011), and competitive (Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Pickard, 2008). Grandiose narcissists chronically self-enhance (Paulhus, 1998) and show insensitivity to the needs of others (Gabbard, 1989). They are impulsive (Vazire & Funder, 2006) and approach-oriented (Foster & Trimm, 2008). These narcissists exhibit high self-esteem and well-being (Rose, 2002).

At least in the short-term, grandiose narcissism is associated with some adaptive benefits (Rose, 2002). These narcissists procure good outcomes for the self, although this
often occurs at the expense of others (Paulhus, 1998). For example, grandiose narcissists’ tendency to self-enhance leads to boosts in self-esteem (Rose, 2002; Taylor & Brown, 1988), but these narcissists are quick to sacrifice the well-being of others in order to promote their own (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005). They attribute their successes to their own ability and distance themselves from failure by blaming external sources (Kernis & Sun, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1998). In general, grandiose narcissists carefully craft and maintain their positive self-views, even when protecting their well-being results in negative consequences for others.

In contrast, vulnerable narcissists exhibit a more maladaptive set of characteristics. They are hypersensitive (Hendin & Cheek, 1997), anxious (Wink, 1991), and insecure (Kernberg, 1986). Vulnerable narcissists are defensive (Wink, 1991) and shame-prone (Atlas & Them, 2008; Malkin, Barry, & Zeigler-Hill, 2011). Vulnerable narcissists view themselves negatively (Malkin et al., 2011) and experience low self-esteem and lowered well-being (Rose, 2002).

 Whereas grandiose narcissists possess at least some adaptive properties, vulnerable narcissism is primarily maladaptive (Rose, 2002). Self-doubt plagues the vulnerable narcissist (Wink, 1991), who tends to internalize emotions (Malkin et al., 2011). Vulnerable narcissists are also prone to worry and pessimism (Wink, 1991) and depression (Rathvon & Holmstrom, 1996). These narcissists may experience a kind of depressive realism, without the emotional benefits of illusory self-enhancement (Rose, 2002; Taylor & Brown, 1988). All in all, vulnerable narcissists’ characteristics culminate in poor well-being and psychological distress.
Though much past research focuses on grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism has received less attention. As such, many questions about this form of narcissism remain unanswered, including the question of their seemingly conflicted sense of self-worth. Vulnerable narcissists’ characteristics seem contradictory; they are entitled and self-absorbed, but simultaneously feel poorly about themselves. Grandiose narcissists, on the other hand, also feel entitled and self-absorbed but experience positive self-views. What makes one type of narcissist more adaptive than the other, when they share the same core narcissistic features? One way to answer this question may be through examining grandiose and vulnerable narcissists’ agentic and communal self-perceptions; specifically, it is possible that one type of narcissist enjoys positive self-views and other benefits due to their sense of competence, whereas the other feels incapable and thus possesses negative self-views. Thus, in the current work, my primary predictions revolved around differences in grandiose and vulnerable narcissists’ self-perceived agency. I examined potential communal predictions as well, in a more exploratory manner.

Agency and Communion

Agency and communion are two basic components of personality and social perception. Bakan (1966) coined these specific terms to explain human motives and behavior, arguing that they represent modalities of human existence. These terms have been studied under other names (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005), including warmth and competence (Asch, 1946), instrumentality and expressiveness (Parsons & Bales, 1955), and intellectual versus social desirability (Rosenberg, Nelson,
Agency and communion are sometimes called the Big Two (Digman, 1997), and are believed to be universal (Abele, Uchronski, Suitner, & Wojciszke, 2008).

Agency refers to traits of extraversion, action, competence, and skill (Bakan, 1966; Bosson, Lakey, Campbell, Zeigler-Hill, Jordan, & Kernis, 2008). Agentic tendencies stem from the desire to distinguish the self from others. This dimension allows a person to bring about his or her desired outcomes, generally through efficient goal pursuit and attainment. Agency is primarily related to the interests of the self, including self-expansion and self-confidence (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Agency-oriented individuals strive for mastery, self-assertion, achievement, and power (Bakan, 1966).

Communion refers to traits of agreeableness, warmth, nurturance, kindness, and affection (Bakan, 1966; Bosson et al., 2008). This dimension serves to connect the person to the larger social structure. Communion allows individuals to work well and cooperatively with others, through emotional expression and focus on the well-being of others. Communion is primarily related to the interests of others, including friendliness and cooperation (Abele, & Wojciszke, 2007). Communion-oriented individuals strive for close relationships and a secure sense of belonging (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1993).

Additionally, Bakan (1966) argued that agency must be “mitigated” by communion for healthy psychological functioning; in other words, people should ideally value and possess both agency and communion. Unmitigated agency, then, refers to the tendency to chronically put one’s own needs before the needs of others, whereas unmitigated communion refers to the tendency to chronically place others’ needs before
one’s own needs (Bakan, 1966; Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Although my primary predictions concerned differences between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism on standard agency and communion measures, I included unmitigated agency and communion for exploratory purposes. These arguably more extreme forms of agency and communion may help to further shed light on the associations between the narcissistic subtypes and agency and communion.

*Relations between Grandiose Narcissism, Agency, and Communion*

Grandiose narcissism has historically been associated with high levels of agency and low levels of communion, both theoretically and empirically. For example, Freud (1931) wrote that narcissists tend to excel as leaders because although they are not warm and caring toward others, they are competent, dominant, and assertive. Furthermore, the agency model of narcissism asserts that grandiose narcissism is grounded in a basic asymmetry between agency and communion (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006). The agency model proposes that grandiose narcissists focus on agentic rather than communal concerns, with the goal of regulating their self-esteem. To this end, grandiose narcissists employ agentic rather than communal interpersonal strategies, such as seeking out trophy partners, viewing themselves as better than others, and constantly engaging in self-enhancement and self-promotion behaviors. Rather than cultivating communal qualities to regulate their self-esteem through mutually beneficial interactions with others, grandiose narcissists hone their charm, charisma, extraversion, and self-confidence in order to superficially impress others and gain admiration.
Consistent with the agency model, empirical evidence shows that grandiose narcissists evaluate themselves positively in domains of agency but not communion. For example, grandiose narcissists exhibit high self-views on agentic traits both explicitly and implicitly (Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007). However, Campbell and colleagues (2007) found no relation between grandiose narcissism and implicit or explicit communal self-views, suggesting that these narcissists do not necessarily view themselves as communal beings.

Although grandiose narcissists are chronic self-enhancers, they self-enhance primarily on status-relevant rather than other-focused attributes (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). These narcissists rate themselves as more open to experience and extraverted than average, but not as more agreeable or emotionally stable than average. Grandiose narcissists also rate themselves as more intelligent than average, but not more moral. Additionally, non-narcissists with high self-esteem self-enhance relatively equally on both agentic and communal attributes, but grandiose narcissists self-enhance almost solely on agentic attributes.

Grandiose narcissists also engage in interpersonal relationships with agentic goals in mind rather than communal goals (Campbell, 1999). For example, these narcissists prefer romantic partners with qualities of ambition, physical attractiveness, and confidence, rather than partners with qualities of warmth and caring. Additionally, grandiose narcissists are more attracted to partners who provide admiration and who confer social status to the narcissist. In sum, grandiose narcissists’ romantic preferences
are driven more by the desire to self-enhance and gain self-esteem via the partner, rather than by a desire for genuine intimacy.

Additionally, grandiose narcissists care much more about competition than about cooperation. For example, in the commons dilemma, grandiose narcissists engage in significantly more competitive than cooperative behavior, resulting in a benefit to the narcissistic individual at the cost of other individuals and to the commons as a whole (Campbell et al., 2005). Indeed, grandiose narcissists base their self-worth in competition with others, but in no other externally validated domain (e.g., others’ approval; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008).

In sum, theory and research behind grandiose narcissists’ agentic and communal tendencies converge. Grandiose narcissists focus on bolstering their self-esteem through competition and agentic interpersonal strategies, and have few communal concerns. Instead, they seem to use others as a tool to bolster the self even more, beyond what they already achieve through agentic means (Arkin & Lakin, 2001).

Relations between Vulnerable Narcissism, Agency, and Communion

In contrast to the considerable evidence related to grandiose narcissism, the links between vulnerable narcissism, agency, and communion are relatively unclear. Campbell and colleagues’ (2006) agency model describes grandiose narcissists, but not vulnerable narcissists. Although much previous research empirically confirms the links between grandiose narcissism and agency-communion, past work has not directly tested those links for vulnerable narcissists. However, we can draw on theory and tangential empirical evidence to infer how vulnerable narcissism may relate to both agency and communion.
There is some evidence for the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissism may be associated with a lack of agency. For example, Kernberg (1986) theorized that these narcissists lack self-confidence and initiative. Additionally, vulnerable narcissists are believed to hold entitled expectations of others, in that they feel entitled to special treatment from others; however, they are thought to be incapable of adequately expressing those expectations (Pincus, Ansell, Pimentel, Cain, Wright, & Levy, 2009), which suggests that they may be unable to orchestrate the desired outcomes they feel they deserve. Empirically speaking, vulnerable narcissists are known to be generally anxious, hesitant, and unsure (Foster & Trimm, 2008).

Based on these characteristics, it is possible that vulnerable narcissists lack the ability to achieve their desired outcomes. In other words, these narcissists may feel entitled to good outcomes, but incapable of orchestrating those outcomes. Unlike grandiose narcissists whose every move seems strategically aimed at self-enhancement and confirmation of their own superiority, vulnerable narcissists may feel like they deserve good things, but that others should simply recognize their deservingness and act accordingly. Thus, in stark contrast to grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists may actually lack a sense of personal agency. Furthermore, such a lack of perceived agency may help to explain vulnerable narcissists’ low self-esteem. Past research has shown that people tend to base their self-esteem at least partly on their feelings of agency (e.g., Tafarodi & Swann, 2001; Wojciszke, Baryla, Parzuchowski, Szymkow, & Abele, 2011). Thus, it seems theoretically plausible that if vulnerable narcissists do experience low agency, this could contribute to their experience of low self-esteem.
Additionally, vulnerable narcissists are more interpersonally dependent than grandiose narcissists, which may suggest that they view themselves as communal beings. For example, vulnerable narcissists are interdependent (Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2012) and hypersensitive to others’ feedback (Hendin & Cheek, 1997). They base their self-worth largely in externally validated domains, such as “others’ approval” (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008). These narcissists are sensitive to social evaluation (Hendin & Cheek, 1997), and are highly susceptible to interpersonal threats (Besser & Priel, 2010).

Because vulnerable narcissists are so interpersonally sensitive and dependent on the opinions of others, do they attempt to “suck up” to others to get better evaluations? If they are low in agency, do they behave communally to procure the things to which they believe they are entitled? In other words, might vulnerable narcissists behave communally in an attempt to make up for their lack of outright agency? Notably, this form of communion may be less genuine and more insincere than that exhibited by non-narcissists. Regardless, it is possible that vulnerable narcissists view themselves as communal.

The Current Research

The links between grandiose narcissism, agency, and communion are clearly demonstrated through theory and research findings, but these links are unclear for vulnerable narcissists. Given that the distinction between the two narcissistic subtypes has been widely accepted, it seems imperative that researchers begin to balance the established empirical work on the agentic and communal qualities of grandiose
narcissists with new work that clarifies these links for vulnerable narcissists and, importantly, how the two narcissistic subtypes may differ in these domains.

The current studies aimed to examine the question of how vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves in terms of agency and communion, and whether their self-perceptions differ from those of grandiose narcissists. Study 1 provided initial evidence for vulnerable narcissists’ self-ratings on agentic and communal traits, in contrast with those provided by grandiose narcissists. Study 2 replicated these initial findings with additional scales and self-ratings, and extended the initial results by examining unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion. Study 3 determined whether vulnerable and grandiose narcissists generally and personally value agency and communion in the same ways, to further clarify earlier findings. Studies 1 through 3 additionally tested a mediation model in which perceived agency mediates the relationship between each narcissistic subtype and self-esteem. Lastly, Study 4 examined whether induced perceptions of low or high agency causally led to changes in self-esteem among grandiose and vulnerable narcissists.

Across all studies, I expected to replicate past work for grandiose narcissists. Specifically, I predicted that grandiose narcissism would be positively associated with perceived agency and either negatively associated or unassociated with perceived communion. In contrast, I predicted that vulnerable narcissism would be negatively associated with perceived agency and positively associated with perceived communion. In addition, I expected perceived agency to mediate both the positive relation between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem, and the negative relation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem.
narcissism and self-esteem. These studies aimed to fill a gap in the literature that may be crucial in our understanding of how narcissism can manifest in two such different ways. If supported, these novel predictions could help explain why one type of narcissist is more adaptive than the other even though they share the same core of narcissistic features.
Chapter 2: Study 1

In Study 1 I began examining agentic and communal self-perceptions among the narcissistic subtypes, employing a simple design where participants rated themselves on agentic and communal traits. I predicted that grandiose narcissists would rate themselves as high in agentic traits but low in communal traits, replicating past research. I tested new predictions regarding vulnerable narcissism, hypothesizing that vulnerable narcissists would rate themselves as low in agentic traits and high in communal traits. Such findings would provide initial evidence into how vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves in terms of agency and communion.

Method

Participants

Participants were 101 undergraduate students at the Ohio State University who completed the study in exchange for course credit. One participant’s data were excluded\(^2\) for indicating that they did not take the study seriously, reporting a 1 on a five-point scale from “not at all seriously” to “very seriously.” The final sample consisted of 100 participants (58 female, \(M_{\text{age}} = 18.82\)).

Materials & Procedure

\(^2\) Results do not differ if this participants’ data are included.
Participants arrived to the lab in groups of one to six and completed the study individually at separate computers. As part of a larger study and after completing a consent form, participants were assessed for grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, and were asked to rate themselves on a list of agentic and communal words (see Appendices A through D). At the end of the study, participants were asked to report how seriously they took the study along with their demographics, and were then debriefed.

**Measurement of vulnerable narcissism.** The 10-item Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997) was used to measure vulnerable narcissism ($\alpha = .76$). Participants indicated how well each of the statements described them, on a scale ranging from 1 (“very uncharacteristic or untrue; strongly disagree”) to 5 (“very characteristic or true; strongly agree”). The HSNS includes items such as “I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others,” “My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or by the slighting remarks of others,” and “I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others.” All ten items were summed to create a total score of vulnerable narcissism.

**Measurement of grandiose narcissism.** The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) was used to assess grandiose narcissism ($\alpha = .80$). The NPI consists of 40 forced-choice items, where participants indicate which of two statements they identify with most. For each pair of statements, one represents a more narcissistic statement and the other represents a less narcissistic statement. Examples of more narcissistic statements include “I am an extraordinary person” versus “I am much like everybody else,” “I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so” versus
“When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed,” and “I am more capable than other people” versus “There is a lot that I can learn from other people.” The number of narcissistic responses given by the participant were summed to create a total score of grandiose narcissism.

Measurement of self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess self-esteem (α = .91). The RSES measures global, stable, explicit self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the 10 statements on a scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 4 ("strongly agree"). The RSES includes statements such as “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.” All ten items were summed to create a total score of self-esteem.

Measurement of agency and communion. Agentic and communal word lists were taken from Campbell and colleagues (2007). Participants were instructed to rate themselves on a series of words that reflected traits people may have, on a scale from 1 ("not like me") to 5 ("very like me"). These words reflected a mix of high and low agency and communion. High agency words included “assertive,” “outspoken,” and “dominant.” Ratings for words representing low agency, such as “reserved,” “submissive,” and “inhibited,” were reverse-scored. The agency ratings were summed to create an agency score (α = .89). High communion words included “friendly,” “generous,” and “cooperative.” Ratings for words representing low communion, such as “rude,” “grouchy,” and “quarrelsome,” were reverse-scored. The communion ratings were summed to create a communion score (α = .89).
Results

Correlations

Table 1 outlines the bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of all variables used in the study. All continuous variables were mean-centered for analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. NPI</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>7.17</td>
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<td>2. HSNS</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28.76</td>
<td>4.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. RSES</td>
<td>.42*</td>
<td>-.19†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29.68</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agency</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>- .42**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43.71</td>
<td>8.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Communion</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.44</td>
<td>6.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. NPI: Narcissistic Personality Inventory. HSNS: Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale. RSES: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. **p < .01; *p < .05; †p < .10

As predicted, grandiose narcissism was positively correlated with agency (r = .59, p < .01) and uncorrelated with communion (r = -.02, p = .89). Participants higher in grandiose narcissism evaluated themselves as higher in agency, but did not consistently rate themselves as high or low in communion. These findings replicate past work on grandiose narcissism and match my predictions.

In contrast, vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with agency (r = -.23, p = .02) and negatively correlated with communion (r = -.28, p < .01). Participants higher in vulnerable narcissism evaluated themselves as lower in agency, as predicted, and rated
themselves as lower in communion, contrary to my prediction. Thus, my hypotheses were partially supported.

Partial Correlations. In addition to the bivariate correlations reported above, I computed partial correlations to estimate the unique association between each narcissism type and agency, controlling for self-esteem. When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and agency remained significant ($pr = .51, p < .001$), indicating that self-esteem accounts for very little variance in this association. When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between vulnerable narcissism and agency became marginally significant ($pr = -.17, p = .10$), indicating that self-esteem does account for some portion of variance in the relation between vulnerable narcissism and agency.

As an ancillary analysis, I computed the partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism, controlling for agency. These two constructs are typically uncorrelated (e.g., Hendin & Cheek, 1997), as they were in the current study. However, when controlling for agency, the partial correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism was significant and positive ($pr = .22, p = .03$). I discuss this interesting finding further in the general discussion.

Secondary Correlational Analyses. The correlations in the present data between grandiose narcissism and both agentic and communal traits replicates past research.

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3 I also computed partial correlations between narcissism type and self-esteem, controlling for agency. The partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem when controlling for agency remained significant ($pr = .23, p = .03$), while the partial correlation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem when controlling for agency was non-significant ($pr = -.11, p = .30$).

4 When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism was non-significant ($pr = .13, p = .20$).
However, past research has not examined the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and these attributes. Thus, to better examine these relations, we also correlated vulnerable narcissism with the individual agentic and communal traits.

In the agency trait list, vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with the traits energetic ($r = -.17, p = .10$), outspoken ($r = -.19, p = .06$), and enthusiastic ($r = -.20, p = .04$), but was positively correlated with the trait words silent ($r = .30, p < .01$) and withdrawn ($r = .23, p = .02$). Vulnerable narcissists see themselves as lacking some agentic qualities—energetic, outspoken, and enthusiastic—and as possessing some non-agentic qualities—silent and withdrawn. Overall, these individuals perceive themselves as low in agency, as predicted and reflected in the overall correlation presented in Table 1.

Several interesting correlations arose in the communion word list. Vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with the traits cruel ($r = .26, p = .01$), grouchy ($r = .34, p < .01$), quarrelsome ($r = .23, p = .02$), rude ($r = .25, p = .01$), and stingy ($r = .30, p < .01$), but exhibited no other significant correlations with other traits. Thus, vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as possessing several non-communal traits—cruel, grouchy, quarrelsome, rude, and stingy. Two possible explanations exist for these findings. First, they may indicate simply that vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as high in these non-communal traits and thus low in communion. Second, these correlations could arise due to vulnerable narcissists’ general negative self-views, which lead them to disparagingly rate themselves high in traits with negative connotations. I further explore these possible explanations in Study 3.
Mediation Models

To better answer the question of whether grandiose and vulnerable narcissists’ differential self-esteem might be produced by differences in perceived agency, as was predicted, I conducted mediation analyses. I expected that the positive association between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem would be mediated by agency, as would the negative relation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem.

A mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) and bootstrapping methods with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that the effect of grandiose narcissism on self-esteem was mediated by agency, indirect effect $b = .10$, BootSE = .05, 95% BootCI [.0147, .1958]. Thus, the tendency for people higher in grandiose narcissism to report higher explicit self-esteem was statistically accounted for by their higher self-evaluations of agency.

Figure 1. Self-esteem as a consequence of grandiose narcissism and agency.
A second mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) and bootstrapping methods with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that the effect of vulnerable narcissism on self-esteem was also mediated by agency, indirect effect $b = -.08$, BootSE = .04, 95% BootCI [-.1769, -.0194]. Thus, the tendency for people higher in vulnerable narcissism to report lower explicit self-esteem was statistically accounted for by their lower self-evaluations of agency.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 2. Self-esteem as a consequence of vulnerable narcissism and agency.

These significant mediation models provide initial support for the hypothesis that grandiose and vulnerable narcissists may experience differences in self-esteem due to their differing sense of agency. As described previously, I hypothesize that vulnerable narcissists feel incapable of achieving the good outcomes to which they feel entitled, and this lack of agency contributes to their low self-esteem. This is in contrast to grandiose
narcissists, who perceive themselves as possessing the agency necessary to achieve those good outcomes and thus experience high self-esteem.

However, the mediation models presented here should be interpreted with caution. Importantly, the model is also significant when the agency and self-esteem variables are flipped, suggesting that differences in self-esteem may also contribute to differences in agency. This model is also plausible, as vulnerable narcissists’ proneness to low self-esteem may lead to poor motivation and lack of agency while grandiose narcissists’ proneness to high self-esteem may do the opposite. Because this study did not establish a causal sequence of events, we cannot yet verify that the model shown here is the correct model, although it is my preferred model. I aim to provide stronger causal evidence for this model in Study 4.

Discussion

Study 1 provided initial evidence that grandiose and vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves differently in terms of agency and communion. Importantly, unlike grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as low in agency. This novel finding serves as a first indication that vulnerable narcissists do not see themselves as competent and capable. This represents a significant deviation from decades of narcissism theory and research which suggests that narcissism is universally associated with high agency (e.g., Freud, 1931).

The negative association between vulnerable narcissism and communion emerged contrary to predictions. Importantly, this association seemed be driven by the tendency for vulnerable narcissists to rate themselves high in the non-communal traits on the
communion trait list such as “cruel” and “grouchy.” It is possible that this reflects a true association between vulnerable narcissism and low communion; in fact, this association may provide support for previous speculation that vulnerable narcissists have a hostile attribution bias (Miller, Dir, Gentile, Wilson, Pryor, & Campbell, 2010). Specifically, these individuals may infer malicious intentions from the behaviors of others and may then behave in non-communal ways to protect themselves from interpersonal harm or from being taken advantage of. Alternately, it is also possible that this finding emerged from a tendency for vulnerable narcissists to evaluate themselves negatively, due to their relatively global negative self-views.

In addition, the mediation models presented here serve as a rough indication that differences in grandiose and vulnerable narcissists’ sense of agency may contribute to their experiences of high or low self-esteem. Notably, this model should be taken only as preliminary evidence, as the causal sequence of events has not yet been tested. If correct, however, this model may provide an answer to the question of how both subtypes of narcissist are entitled but experience different levels of self-esteem.
Chapter 3: Study 2

Study 2 aimed to replicate and extend the findings from Study 1 by using additional scales and self-rating items. I expected to again find that grandiose narcissists perceive themselves as high in agency and neither high nor low in communion, and I expected to replicate Study 1 by finding that vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as low in both agency and communion. To that end, I included a variety of different scales in Study 2 to further assess self-perceptions of agency and communion, including the agency thinking and pathways thinking subscales of the Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), the agency and communion subscales of the Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979), and the self-competence subscale of the Self-Liking/Self-Competence Revised Scale (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001).

I aimed to extend the findings from Study 1 by also including measures of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion. These concepts are arguably more extreme versions of agency and communion, and thus provide an additional exploratory test beyond standard agency and communion ratings. In Study 2, I measured unmitigated agency with the EPAQ unmitigated agency subscale, and measured unmitigated communion with the Revised Unmitigated Communion Scale (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998).

Study 2 also provided an opportunity to test whether the negative association between vulnerable narcissism and communion in Study 1 was simply due to the negative
connotations associated with low communion words. The EPAQ communion subscale contains only words that reflect high communion; thus, if vulnerable narcissism is again negatively associated with communion, we may conclude with more confidence that these narcissists perceive themselves as not very communal.

In addition, Study 2 provided an opportunity to replicate the meditation model found in Study 1. Notably, the method used in Study 2 still did not allow me to claim causality or to establish whether my preferred model fits the data better than the alternative model. Regardless, as I had collected all the variables necessary to test the mediation model, I checked for replication.

Method

Participants

Participants were 114 undergraduate students at the Ohio State University, who completed the study in exchange for course credit. Four participants’ data were excluded because they completed less than half of the study. The final sample consisted of 110 participants (63 female, Mage = 19.09).

Materials & Procedure

Participants were sent a link to the study at 9:00am and were instructed to complete the survey in one sitting before midnight of the same day. After completing a consent form, participants completed a series of self-report questionnaires. At the end of the study, participants were asked to report how seriously they took the study along with their demographics, and were then debriefed.
Measurement of vulnerable narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism was measured using the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS), as in Study 1.

Measurement of grandiose narcissism. Grandiose narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), as in Study 1.

Measurement of self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), as in Study 1.

Measurement of agency and communion. Agentic and communal self-perceptions were measured with a variety of self-report questionnaires and self-rating items (see Appendices E through H).

Hope Scale. The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) measures trait hope by assessing agency thinking and pathways thinking. Agency thinking involves the motivation to pursue goals as well as the perception of self-efficacy in achieving desired outcomes, while pathways thinking involves developing and laying out routes to achieving goals (Snyder, 2002). In the current study, the agency thinking subscale (4 items, α = .81) and pathways thinking subscale (4 items, α = .74) were assessed separately and interpreted as indicators of personal agency. Example agency thinking items are “I meet the goals that I set for myself” and “My past experiences have prepared me well for my future,” while example pathways thinking items are “I can think of many ways to get out of a jam” and “There are lots of ways around any problem.” Participants indicated the degree to which each statement was true of them, on a scale ranging from 1 (“definitely false”) to 4 (“definitely true”). The agency thinking items were summed to
create an agency thinking score, and the pathways thinking items were summed to create a pathways thinking score.

*Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire.* The Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979) includes subscales which assess agency (8 items, e.g., independent; $\alpha = .70-.77$), communion (8 items, e.g., kind; $\alpha = .72-.81$), and unmitigated agency (8 items, e.g., dictatorial; $\alpha = .71-.85$). The EPAQ agency and communion subscales are conceptually very similar to the word lists used in Study 1, while the EPAQ unmitigated agency subscale taps into the tendency to focus on the self to the exclusion of others. Participants rated themselves on each of the items on a 5-point scale (e.g., 1 (“not at all aggressive”), 5 (“very aggressive”)). The agency items were summed to create an EPAQ agency score, the communion items were summed to create an EPAQ communion score, and the unmitigated agency items were summed to create an EPAQ unmitigated agency score.

*Revised Unmitigated Communion Scale.* The Revised Unmitigated Communion Scale (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998) contains 9 items designed to assess unmitigated communion ($\alpha = .69-.76$), or the tendency to focus on others to the exclusion of the self. Participants rate their agreement with statements like “Even when exhausted, I will always help other people” on a scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). All items were summed to create an unmitigated communion score.

*Self-Liking/Self-Competence Revised Scale.* The Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001) consists of 16 items assessing self-liking (8 items, $\alpha = .90$) and self-competence (8 items, $\alpha = .82-.83$). The self-liking subscale measures
people’s overall sense of worth as social beings, while the self-competence subscale measures people’s sense of their ability to bring about desired outcomes, or self-efficacy (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001). Example items for self-liking include “I am secure in my sense of self-worth” and “I feel great about who I am”, while example items for self-competence include “I am highly effective at the things I do” and “I am very talented.” Participants indicated their agreement with statements on a scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The self-liking items were summed to create a self-liking score, which I treated as an additional measure of general self-esteem, while the self-competence items were summed to create a self-competence score, which I treated as an additional measure of personal agency.

Results

Correlations

Table 2 outlines the bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of all variables used in the study. All continuous variables were mean-centered for analyses.

Consistent with predictions, grandiose narcissism was positively correlated with various measures of perceived agency, including both the agency thinking ($r = .29, p < .01$) and pathways thinking ($r = .22, p = .02$) subscales on the Hope Scale, the EPAQ agency subscale ($r = .54, p < .01$), and the self-competence subscale of the Self-Liking/Self-Competence Revised Scale ($r = .36, p < .01$). Grandiose narcissism was uncorrelated with communion as measured by the EPAQ communion subscale ($r = .10, p = .32$). Across a variety of self-report measures of perceived agency, participants higher
Table 2  
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study 2 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>.80**</td>
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<td>.40**</td>
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<td>-.18†</td>
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<td>.28**</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>24.89</td>
<td>4.62</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. NPI: Narcissistic Personality Inventory. HSNS: Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale. RSES: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. EPAQ: Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire. **p < .01; *p < .05; †p < .10
in grandiose narcissism evaluated themselves higher in agency; on a new measure of communion, these participants did not consistently rate themselves higher or lower in communion. These results replicate Study 1 as well as past work relating grandiose narcissism to agency and communion.

Vulnerable narcissism, in contrast, was generally negatively correlated with measures of perceived agency. This relation was non-significant but in the expected direction for the agency thinking \((r = -.15, p = .11)\) and pathways thinking \((r = -.12, p = .21)\) subscales of the Hope Scale. The negative relation between vulnerable narcissism and agency was significant on the EPAQ agency subscale \((r = -.22, p = .02)\) and the self-competence subscale of the Self-Liking/Self-Competence Revised Scale \((r = -.23, p = .02)\). Interestingly, vulnerable narcissism was uncorrelated with the EPAQ communion subscale \((r = -.03, p = .76)\). Thus, replicating Study 1, people higher in vulnerable narcissism tended to evaluate themselves as lower in agency. However, in this study, people higher in vulnerable narcissism did not consistently rate themselves as higher or lower on a new measure of communion; therefore, the negative relation between vulnerable narcissism and communion found in Study 1 was not replicated here.

Surprisingly, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism were similarly related to unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion. Grandiose narcissism was positively correlated with the EPAQ unmitigated agency subscale \((r = .43, p < .01)\) and uncorrelated with the Unmitigated Communion Revised Scale \((r = -.14, p = .15)\), indicating that people higher in grandiose narcissism evaluated themselves as high in unmitigated agency and neither high nor low in unmitigated communion. These associations match
my hypotheses. However, vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with the EPAQ unmitigated agency subscale \((r = .24, \ p = .01)\) and uncorrelated with the Unmitigated Communion Revised Scale \((r = -.09, \ p = .37)\) indicating that people higher in vulnerable narcissism also evaluated themselves as high in unmitigated agency and perceived themselves as neither high nor low in unmitigated communion. The positive association between vulnerable narcissism and unmitigated agency is particularly surprising, as unmitigated agency is thought to be agency not mitigated by communion. As vulnerable narcissists tend to rate themselves low on agency, a high self-rating on unmitigated agency seems incongruous.

**Partial Correlations.** I again computed partial correlations to estimate the unique association between each narcissism type and agency as measured by the EPAQ agency subscale, controlling for self-esteem. When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and agency remained significant \((pr = .49, \ p < .001)\), indicating that self-esteem accounts for very little variance in this association. When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between vulnerable narcissism and agency became non-significant \((pr = -.03, \ p = .78)\), indicating that self-esteem does account for most of the variance in the relation between vulnerable narcissism and agency. This drop to non-significance does not exactly replicate the marginally significant partial correlation from Study 1. However, as two separate agency scales were

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5 I also computed partial correlations between narcissism type and self-esteem, controlling for agency. The partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem when controlling for agency became non-significant \((pr = .07, \ p = .50)\), while the partial correlation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem when controlling for agency remained significant \((pr = -.37, \ p < .001)\).
used between the two studies, subtle differences in the two scales may have contributed to this difference in partial correlations.

As an ancillary analysis, I again computed the partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism, controlling for agency\(^6\). Similar to the analysis in Study 1, when controlling for agency, the partial correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism was marginally significant and positive \((pr = .17, p = .08)\). I discuss this interesting finding further in the general discussion.

**Secondary Correlational Analyses.** To further probe the unpredicted relations between vulnerable narcissism and both communion and unmitigated agency, I examined correlations between vulnerable narcissism and the individual EPAQ communion and unmitigated agency traits.

Unlike in Study 1, vulnerable narcissism was uncorrelated with communion in Study 2. An examination of individual word correlations revealed that vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with the communion trait emotional \((r = .30, p < .01)\), and was negatively correlated with the communion traits easy to devote self completely to others \((r = -.20, p = .03)\) and warm in relations with others \((r = -.17, p = .08)\). These correlations indicate that vulnerable narcissists view themselves as emotional, but do not find it easy to devote the self to others and do not perceive themselves as warm in their relationships. The combination of many null correlations with communion trait words in addition to one positive and two negative correlations likely produced the null effect in this study.

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\(^6\) When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism was marginally significant and positive \((pr = .16, p = .09)\).
I also explored the individual trait word correlations for unmitigated agency to better understand the unexpected positive correlation with vulnerable narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with the unmitigated agency traits looking out for self ($r = .18, p = .06$), greedy ($r = .30, p < .01$), and cynical ($r = .21, p = .03$). These findings indicate that vulnerable narcissists perceive that they look out for themselves, and are greedy and cynical. Much like the previously found associations between vulnerable narcissism and non-communal words, these positive associations may also be indicative of vulnerable narcissists’ globally negative self-views, as these words also possess negative connotations. However, this particular combination of responses may indicate further support for the possibility that vulnerable narcissists have a hostile attribution bias. If they perceive that others are out to get them, then a tendency toward self-protection and cynicism may actually be viewed as adaptive.

**Mediation Models**

Study 2 did not contain an agency manipulation or another means to establish a causal sequence for the preferred mediation model found in Study 1. However, as I had measured all the variables included in the model, I tested the preferred model for replication purposes only. I again expected that the positive relation between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem would be mediated by agency, as would the negative relation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem.

A mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) and bootstrapping methods with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that the effect of grandiose narcissism on self-esteem was mediated by agency, indirect effect $b = .16$, BootSE = .05,
95% BootCI [.0750, .2644]. The tendency for people higher in grandiose narcissism to report higher explicit self-esteem was statistically accounted for by their higher self-evaluations of agency. Thus, the model for grandiose narcissism from Study 1 was replicated here.

A second mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) and bootstrapping methods with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that the effect of vulnerable narcissism on self-esteem was also mediated by agency, indirect effect $b = -.08$, BootSE = .04, 95% BootCI [-.1744, -.0142]. The tendency for people higher in vulnerable narcissism to report lower explicit self-esteem was statistically accounted for...
by their lower self-evaluations of agency. Therefore, the model for vulnerable narcissists from Study 1 was also replicated here.

The agency and self-esteem variables are also interchangeable in these models. Therefore, these models should be interpreted as replications of the models found in Study 1, but not as any further causal evidence that they represent the correct models.

Discussion

Study 2 provides a partial replication of Study 1. Grandiose narcissism was again positively associated with agency and uncorrelated with communion, as expected. Grandiose narcissism was also positively associated with unmitigated agency and uncorrelated with unmitigated communion. These results suggest that grandiose
narcissists view themselves as efficacious, in that they perceive themselves as highly capable of achieving their goals. The null correlations between grandiose narcissism and measures of communion and unmitigated communion align with past work which indicates that grandiose narcissists have significantly less communal concern than less narcissistic individuals (e.g., Campbell et al., 2007).

Vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with agency, either significantly or in the expected direction, across several measures of agency. Unlike in Study 1, however, vulnerable narcissism was uncorrelated with communion in Study 2, as well as unmitigated communion. Additionally, vulnerable narcissism manifested an unpredicted positive association with unmitigated agency. Thus, this study provided further evidence that vulnerable narcissists do not seem to have as consistent a strategy as grandiose narcissists. These individuals feel incapable of getting the things they want through agentic means, as shown across both studies. The lack of a positive correlation between vulnerable narcissism and communion across both studies suggests that contrary to my original hypothesis, these narcissists do not rely on communal efforts to garner positive evaluations from others. Instead, they rate themselves high on traits such as “quarrelsome” and “cynical”, suggesting that perhaps they are either focused on protecting the self from perceived social threats rather than ingratiating the self to others, or that their negative self-views lead them to rate themselves high in traits with negative connotations. Either way, these findings suggest that vulnerable narcissists do not perceive themselves to be as efficacious as their grandiose counterparts.
Chapter 4: Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 established that whereas grandiose narcissists perceive themselves as high in agency, vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as low in agency. Results are less clear for both types of narcissist in terms of communion, which was consistently uncorrelated with grandiose narcissism, but was negatively correlated with vulnerable narcissism in Study 1 and uncorrelated in Study 2.

Study 3 was designed primarily to help answer the question of why vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as low in agency. It is possible that vulnerable narcissists do not value agentic attributes highly, and thus rate themselves as low in agency. Alternatively, vulnerable narcissists may place a high value on agency, but perceive themselves as lacking this attribute. I find this possibility more likely, given that people generally place much importance on agency and similar constructs such as autonomy and self-determination (e.g., Wojciszke et al., 2011). Moreover, if vulnerable narcissists are simply unconcerned with agency, it is unclear why experiencing lower levels of agency should undermine their self-esteem, as suggested by the mediation models of the prior two studies. In contrast, if vulnerable narcissists do value agency, this would explain why feeling that they lack it undermines their self-esteem. This interpretation matches the self-centrality argument (Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2013), which states that if people value a trait and perceive themselves as possessing that trait, their self-esteem
should accordingly be high. Thus, I expected to find that vulnerable narcissists would rate agentic traits as generally good for people to have and as personally important for them to have, but to rate themselves again as low in agency. Also consistent with the self-centrality argument, I expected grandiose narcissists to rate agentic attributes as generally and personally desirable, and to again rate themselves as high in agency.

This design also allowed me to further explore the negative correlation between vulnerable narcissism and communion in Study 1, and the positive correlation between vulnerable narcissism and unmitigated agency in Study 2. Both of these trait lists contained some words with negative connotations (e.g., “cruel,” “greedy”), indicating that these unexpected correlations might reflect negative overall self-evaluations of vulnerable narcissists. Thus, if these correlations arose due to vulnerable narcissists’ global negative self-perceptions, then vulnerable narcissists should rate these traits as generally bad to have and rate themselves as high in these traits. However, if the previous correlations arose due to a hostile attribution bias, then vulnerable narcissists should rate these traits as generally or at least personally desirable, and rate themselves high in these traits.

Method

Participants

Participants were 127 undergraduate students at the Ohio State University, who completed the study in exchange for course credit. Three participants’ data were excluded
because they completed less than half of the study. Two participants’ data were excluded for indicating that they did not take the study seriously, reporting a 1 on a five-point scale from “not at all seriously” to “very seriously.” The final sample consisted of 122 participants (80 female, M age = 19.11).

Materials & Procedure

Participants were sent a link to the study at 9:00am and were instructed to complete the survey in one sitting before midnight of the same day. After completing a consent form, participants completed a series of self-report questionnaires. At the end of the study, participants were asked to report how seriously they took the study along with their demographics, and were then debriefed.

Measurement of vulnerable narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism was measured using the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS), as in Studies 1 and 2.

Measurement of grandiose narcissism. Grandiose narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), as in Studies 1 and 2.

Measurement of self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), as in Studies 1 and 2.

Measurement of agency and communion. Agentic and communal desirability ratings and self-perceptions were measured via a variety of self-rating items. Participants rated a list of agentic and communal words first for general desirability, then rated the same list of words for personal desirability, and finally provided self-evaluations on the same list of words. The trait list consisted of the same agency and communion words

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7 Results do not change if these participants’ data are included.
from Campbell and colleagues (2007) used in Study 1, as well as the agency, communion, and unmitigated agency words from the EPAQ used in Study 2 (see Appendix I).

**General Desirability.** Participants were first asked to rate the list of traits for general desirability. Participants were shown the following prompt: “Below you will see a list of adjectives and phrases that may be used to describe people’s traits. Please indicate the extent to which you think each trait is a good quality for a person to have. In other words, is this trait GENERALLY good or bad to have?” Participants provided ratings on a scale from 1 (“this is not at all a good quality to have”) to 5 (“this is a very good quality to have”). Agency and communion words from the Campbell and colleagues (2007) word list that reflected low agency or low communion were reverse-scored. Participants’ ratings on all agency words, on all communal words, and on all unmitigated agency words were summed to create separate scores of general agency desirability ($\alpha = .73$), general communion desirability ($\alpha = .87$), and general unmitigated agency desirability ($\alpha = .73$).

**Personal Desirability.** Participants were next asked to rate the same list of traits for personal desirability. Participants were shown the following prompt: “Now, please indicate how personally important each of these traits are to you. In other words, regardless of whether you think you do have this trait, how important is it to you to PERSONALLY have this trait?” Participants provided ratings on a scale from 1 (“this is not at all important to me”) to 5 (“this is very important to me”). Agency and communion words from the Campbell and colleagues (2007) word list that reflected low agency or
low communion were reverse-scored. Participants’ ratings on all agency words, on all communal words, and on all unmitigated agency words were summed to create separate scores of personal agency desirability ($\alpha = .79$), personal communion desirability ($\alpha = .90$), and personal unmitigated agency desirability ($\alpha = .82$).

**Self-ratings.** Finally, participants were asked to provide self-evaluations on the same list of traits. Participants were shown the following prompt: “Lastly, please rate yourself on each of these traits by indicating how much you feel each trait describes you.” Participants provided ratings on a scale from 1 (“this does not describe me at all”) to 5 (“this describes me very well”). Agency and communion words from the Campbell and colleagues (2007) word list that reflected low agency or low communion were reverse-scored. Participants’ ratings on all agency words, on all communal words, and on all unmitigated agency words were summed to create separate scores of agency self-ratings ($\alpha = .83$), communion self-ratings ($\alpha = .90$), and unmitigated agency self-ratings ($\alpha = .79$).

**Results**

**Correlations**

Table 3 outlines the bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of all variables used in the study. All continuous variables were mean-centered for analyses.

**General Desirability.** As predicted, grandiose narcissism was positively correlated with general agency desirability ($r = .39, p < .01$) and uncorrelated with general communion desirability ($r = -.09, p = .33$). Grandiose narcissism was also uncorrelated
### Table 3

**Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study 3 Variables**

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*Note. NPI: Narcissistic Personality Inventory. HSNS: Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale. RSES: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. GD: General Desirability. PD: Personal Desirability. SR: Self-rating. A: Agency. C: Communion. UA: Unmitigated Agency. **p < .01; *p < .05; †p < .10*
with general unmitigated agency desirability \(r = .14, p = .12\), though the association is trending in the predicted direction. Thus, participants higher in grandiose narcissism perceive agency to generally be a good trait to have, and do not have clear perceptions regarding whether or not communion and unmitigated agency are good traits to have. These results are consistent with my predictions and with the self-centrality hypothesis.

Vulnerable narcissism was marginally negatively correlated with general communion desirability \(r = -.16, p = .08\), and was uncorrelated with both general agency desirability \(r = -.09, p = .35\) and general unmitigated agency desirability \(r = .09, p = .35\).

Participants higher in vulnerable narcissism perceive communion to generally be a somewhat bad trait to have, and do not have clear perceptions regarding whether or not agency and unmitigated agency are good traits to have. Notably, these findings do not support my hypotheses. Contrary to predictions, vulnerable narcissists do not endorse agency as a trait that is generally good to have, nor do they endorse unmitigated agency as a trait that is generally bad to have. However, the marginal relation between vulnerable narcissism and communion may support the hostile attribution bias hypothesis presented earlier, as these narcissists may believe that being non-communal is an adaptive quality.

**Personal Desirability.** Also as predicted, grandiose narcissism was positively correlated with personal agency desirability \(r = .39, p < .01\) and personal unmitigated agency desirability \(r = .23, p = .01\). Grandiose narcissism was uncorrelated with personal communion desirability \(r = -.05, p = .56\). Participants higher in grandiose narcissism perceive agency and unmitigated agency to be personally desirable traits; in other words, grandiose narcissists view these traits as important to them personally to
have. These relationships again support the self-centrality hypothesis, with grandiose narcissists rating both agency and unmitigated agency as very personally important for them to have.

Vulnerable narcissism was uncorrelated with personal agency desirability \((r = - .13, p = .16)\), marginally negatively correlated with personal communion desirability \((r = - .17, p = .07)\), and marginally positively correlated with personal unmitigated agency desirability \((r = .16, p = .09)\). Participants higher in vulnerable narcissism perceive communion as somewhat unimportant to personally have and unmitigated agency as somewhat important to personally have, and these individuals do not clearly endorse possessing agency as personally important or unimportant. These relations between vulnerable narcissism and personal communion and unmitigated agency desirability may again suggest that these narcissists are focused on protecting the self from perceived social threats; thus, cultivating qualities like “quarrelsome” and “cynical” are desired and viewed positively. Interestingly, however, the trend for vulnerable narcissism and agency is in the opposite direction from predictions, indicating that vulnerable narcissists may believe that agency is personally unimportant for them to have. This trend casts further doubt on the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists do not believe they possess agency but wish that they did.

**Self-Ratings.** Consistent with Studies 1 and 2 and past work, grandiose narcissism was positively correlated with self-ratings of agency \((r = .58, p < .01)\) and unmitigated agency \((r = .38, p < .01)\) and uncorrelated with self-ratings of communion \((r = -.02, p = .83)\). Participants higher in grandiose narcissism evaluate themselves as higher in agency
and in unmitigated agency, but do not consistently evaluate themselves higher or lower in communion. Thus, my previous findings were replicated for grandiose narcissists in Study 3.

Also consistent with Studies 1 and 2, vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with self-ratings of agency \( (r = -0.35, p < 0.01) \) and positively correlated with self-ratings of unmitigated agency \( (r = 0.27, p < 0.01) \). Replicating Study 1, vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with self-ratings of communion \( (r = -0.30, p < 0.01) \).

Participants higher in vulnerable narcissism rated themselves as not very agentic, as not very communal, and as high in unmitigated agency. Thus, the self-rating findings in Study 3 again provide partial support of my hypotheses.

**Partial Correlations.** I again computed partial correlations to estimate the unique association between each narcissism type and agency, controlling for self-esteem\(^8\). When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and agency remained significant \( (pr = 0.52, p < 0.001) \), indicating that self-esteem accounts for very little variance in this association. When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between vulnerable narcissism and agency became non-significant, although trending in the same direction as the bivariate correlation \( (pr = -0.12, p = 0.18) \), indicating that self-esteem does account for some portion of variance in the relation between vulnerable narcissism and agency.

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\(^8\) I also computed partial correlations between narcissism type and self-esteem, controlling for agency. The partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem when controlling for agency became non-significant \( (pr = -0.01, p = 0.91) \), while the partial correlation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem when controlling for agency remained significant \( (pr = -0.36, p < 0.001) \).
As an ancillary analysis, I again computed the partial correlation between grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism, controlling for agency. Replicating the analyses in Studies 1 and 2, when controlling for agency, the partial correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism was significant and positive ($r = .38, p < .001$). I discuss this finding further in the general discussion.

**Secondary Correlational Analyses.** As in studies 1 and 2, I conducted additional analyses of correlations between vulnerable narcissism and each of the traits individually within the general desirability, personal desirability, and self-rating scales.

For the agency traits, no significant positive or negative correlations emerged between vulnerable narcissism and any single general desirability agency trait. Three interesting significant correlations emerged between vulnerable narcissism and the individual personal desirability agency traits: active ($r = -.25, p < .01$), very self-confident ($r = -.21, p = .02$), and withdrawn ($r = .19, p = .04$). In the self-ratings, vulnerable narcissists rated themselves as low in the following traits: independent ($r = -.17, p = .06$), active ($r = -.20, p = .03$), can make decisions easily ($r = -.27, p < .01$), never gives up ($r = -.23, p = .01$), very self-confident ($r = -.33, p < .01$), stands up well under pressure ($r = -.28, p < .01$), energetic ($r = -.28, p < .01$), and enthusiastic ($r = -.30, p < .01$). However, vulnerable narcissists rated themselves as high in the following traits: inhibited ($r = .20, p = .03$), withdrawn ($r = .27, p < .01$), and submissive ($r = .19, p = .04$).

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$^9$ When controlling for self-esteem, the partial correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism was also significant and positive ($r = .28, p = .002$).
Taken together, these findings suggest that vulnerable narcissists do not have clear perceptions about whether agentic traits are generally good to have, and they perceive being active and very self-confident as personally unimportant traits to have, but perceive being withdrawn as personally important. Their self-ratings are generally congruent with their personal importance ratings, although many additional significant correlations emerge with self-ratings which did not emerge with personal importance ratings. All together, these findings do not support my original prediction that vulnerable narcissists would value agency highly and perceive themselves as lacking it; instead, some congruence between personal importance and self-ratings emerged.

For the communion words, some interesting findings arose. Vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with the following individual general desirability communion traits: easy to devote self completely to others ($r = - .16, p = .07$), friendly ($r = - .20, p = .03$), generous ($r = - .16, p = .09$), pleasant ($r = - .15, p = .09$), and affectionate ($r = - .19, p = .04$); vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with the following individual general desirability communion traits: stingy ($r = .20, p = .03$), quarrelsome ($r = .21, p = .02$), and mean ($r = .15, p = .10$). In the personal desirability communion word list, vulnerable narcissism was negatively correlated with the traits easy to devote self to others ($r = - .20, p = .03$), gentle ($r = - .22, p = .02$), kind ($r = - .17, p = .07$), and friendly ($r = - .21, p = .02$). In the self-rating communion trait list, vulnerable narcissists rated themselves as low in the following traits: easy to devote self completely to others ($r = - .37, p < .01$), helpful ($r = - .25, p < .01$), kind ($r = - .23, p = .01$), aware of others’ feelings ($r = - .19, p = .04$), understanding of others ($r = - .23, p = .02$), warm in relations with
others \((r = -.20, p = .03)\), friendly \((r = -.21, p = .02)\), generous \((r = -.30, p < .01)\), and pleasant \((r = -.23, p = .01)\). However, vulnerable narcissists rated themselves as high in the following traits: emotional \((r = .26, p < .01)\), cruel \((r = .20, p = .04)\), grouchy \((r = .30, p < .01)\), quarrelsome \((r = .24, p = .01)\), and rude \((r = .20, p = .03)\).

Thus, the negative associations between vulnerable narcissism and general communion desirability, personal communion desirability, and communion self-ratings seem to be driven by a combination of negative correlations with communal words and positive correlations with non-communal words. Vulnerable narcissists seem to view many communal qualities (e.g., kind, friendly) as generally and personally undesirable, and accordingly self-rate themselves as low on those traits. In contrast, these narcissists endorsed some non-communal qualities (e.g., quarrelsome) as generally desirable, and rated themselves as high on some of those traits.

For the unmitigated agency traits, there again emerged no significant correlation between vulnerable narcissism and any single general desirability trait. Vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with the personal desirability traits arrogant \((r = .20, p = .03)\), greedy \((r = .17, p = .06)\), cynical \((r = .20, p = .03)\), and hostile \((r = .16, p = .09)\). Accordingly, vulnerable narcissists rated themselves as high on the traits greedy \((r = .29, p < .01)\), dictatorial \((r = .24, p = .01)\), cynical \((r = .33, p < .01)\), and hostile \((r = .18, p = .05)\).

These findings suggest that although vulnerable narcissists seem unsure of whether any traits related to unmitigated agency are generally desirable, they do perceive several of those words as personally desirable (e.g., cynical, hostile) and rate themselves
as high in those traits. This is again inconsistent with the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists rate themselves as high on trait words with negative connotations due to global negative self-views. Instead, in both the communion and unmitigated agency trait words lists, there emerged instead a tendency for vulnerable narcissists to rate those words as desirable. Thus, these findings are more consistent with the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists have a hostile attribution bias and are focused on self-protection, and thus view these traits as adaptive and desirable.

**Mediation Models**

I once again tested the replicability of my mediation model. I again expected that the positive relation between grandiose narcissism and self-esteem would be mediated by self-rated agency, as would the negative relation between vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem.

A mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) and bootstrapping methods with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that the effect of grandiose narcissism on self-esteem was mediated by agency, indirect effect $b = .24$, BootSE $= .05$, 95% BootCI [.1544, .3467]. The tendency for people higher in grandiose narcissism to report higher explicit self-esteem was statistically accounted for by their higher self-evaluations of agency. Thus, the model for grandiose narcissism from Studies 1 and 2 was replicated here.
A second mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) and bootstrapping methods with 5,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) showed that the effect of vulnerable narcissism on self-esteem was also mediated by agency, indirect effect $b = -0.14$, BootSE = 0.05, 95% BootCI [-0.2548, -0.0669]. The tendency for people higher in vulnerable narcissism to report lower explicit self-esteem was statistically accounted for by their lower self-evaluations of agency. Therefore, the model for vulnerable narcissists from Studies 1 and 2 was also replicated here.
The agency and self-esteem variables are also interchangeable in these models. Therefore, these models should be interpreted as replications of the models found in Studies 1 and 2, but not as any further causal evidence that they represent the correct models.

Discussion

The purpose of Study 3 was to further examine grandiose and vulnerable narcissists’ senses of agency and communion. Specifically, this study was designed to test whether both types of narcissist value agency highly but perceive themselves to possess different levels of it. I hypothesized that grandiose and vulnerable narcissists would both perceive agency as generally desirable and personally desirable. I expected to again find that grandiose narcissists would rate themselves as high in agency and
vulnerable narcissists would rate themselves as low in agency, as in Studies 1 and 2. I included measures of communion and unmitigated agency to further explore their association with vulnerable narcissists; specifically, to test whether vulnerable narcissists perceive these traits as generally or personally desirable.

My predictions for grandiose narcissists were supported, as these individuals consistently rated agency as generally and personally desirable, and rated themselves high in agency. The same pattern emerged for unmitigated agency, although this trend was non-significant when examining general desirability. These findings are consistent with the self-centrality argument (Gebauer et al., 2013), indicating that grandiose narcissists value agency and perceive themselves as possessing it, which contributes to their higher levels of self-esteem.

For vulnerable narcissists, the patterns are less clear. Vulnerable narcissism was uncorrelated with general agency desirability and personal agency desirability, but was negatively correlated with agency self-ratings. Thus, my hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists value agency highly but perceive themselves as coming up short was not supported in this study. In fact, the correlation between vulnerable narcissism and personal agency desirability was trending in the opposite direction, indicating that these narcissists may perceive agency as personally undesirable. It is possible that these results may be due to defense mechanisms, where vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves as non-agentic and thus accordingly perceive agency as somewhat personally undesirable. It is also possible that vulnerable narcissists truly do not perceive agency as an important characteristic to have, though this explanation is inconsistent with the mediation models
supported in Studies 1-3. Although this study does not answer that question, future studies may do so.

I also examined vulnerable narcissists’ perceptions of general and personal desirability of communion and unmitigated agency traits to see whether the surprising correlations between these variables in Studies 1 and 2 resulted from vulnerable narcissists’ negative self-views. Results from both of these analyses indicated that this explanation is unlikely. Instead, vulnerable narcissists seemed to view many communal traits as generally and personally undesirable, and to view many non-communal and unmitigated agency traits as desirable. These results align with past speculation that vulnerable narcissists exhibit a hostile attribution bias and focus their efforts on protecting the self against perceived social threats. Vulnerable narcissists may believe that others will take advantage of them given the opportunity, and thus may protect themselves by cultivating non-communal and unmitigated agentic qualities such as quarrelsomeness and cynicism.
Chapter 5: Study 4

In Studies 1-3, I found preliminary evidence for my preferred mediation model, where the link between grandiose or vulnerable narcissism and self-esteem is accounted for by perceived agency. Thus, grandiose narcissists experience positive self-esteem due to their high level of agency, whereas vulnerable narcissists experience low self-esteem due to their low level of agency. However, in all three studies, the variables of agency and self-esteem were interchangeable in the mediation model.

Study 4 was designed to directly examine the direction of causality implied by this model. To that end, I included a manipulation of agency in this study to induce high or low levels of agency in participants, followed by self-esteem scales. I expected to replicate the mediation models for grandiose and vulnerable narcissism found in the previous studies, this time following a causal chain of events. This finding would provide further support for my preferred model as the correct model.

Method

Participants

Participants were 109 undergraduate students at the Ohio State University, who completed the study in exchange for course credit. Four participants’ data were excluded for indicating that they did not take the study seriously, reporting a 1 on a five-point scale from “not at all seriously” to “very seriously.” Five participants’ data were excluded for
not writing anything in the memory recall manipulation of agency. The final sample consisted of 100 participants (64 female, M_{age} = 19.41).

**Materials & Procedure**

Participants were sent a link to the study at 9:00am and were instructed to complete the survey in one sitting before midnight of the same day. After completing a consent form, participants completed a series of self-report questionnaires, a short writing task that contained the manipulation of agency, another series of self-report questionnaires, and a manipulation check question. At the end of the study, participants were asked to report how seriously they took the study along with their demographics, and were then debriefed.

*Measurement of vulnerable narcissism.* Vulnerable narcissism was measured using the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS), as in Studies 1, 2, and 3.

*Measurement of grandiose narcissism.* Grandiose narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), as in Studies 1, 2, and 3.

*Manipulation of agency.* Agency was manipulated using a recall task. Participants were instructed to complete a brief writing prompt, which was presented as a memory task. Participants in the high agency condition were told: “In 5-10 sentences, please describe a time when you saw yourself as independent, outspoken, and competent.” Participants in the low agency condition were told: “In 5-10 sentences, please describe a time when you saw yourself as dependent, submissive, and incompetent.”

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10 Results do not change if these participants’ data are included.
Measurement of state self-esteem. State self-esteem was measured using the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; see Appendix J). This 20-item scale ($\alpha = .92$) measures current or state self-esteem, rather than trait self-esteem. The items load on three separate factors: performance, appearance, and social state self-esteem. Participants rate how true the statements are of them at the current moment, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“extremely”). Example items include “I feel confident about my abilities” (performance), “I am pleased with my appearance right now” (appearance), and “I feel displeased with myself” (reverse-scored; social).

Measurement of global self-esteem. Global self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), as in Studies 1, 2, and 3.

Manipulation check. A manipulation check was included at the end of the study. Participants were asked to indicate how they felt in the memory they had described earlier in the study on a scale ranging from 1 (“very incompetent”) to 5 (“very competent”).

Results

Manipulation Check

The purpose of the manipulation was to induce a temporary state of higher or lower agency. The effectiveness of this manipulation was assessed by analyzing how participants responded to the question at the end of the study asking how they felt in the memory they had described. Responses could range from 1 (“very incompetent”) to 5 (“very competent”). An independent samples t-test showed that participants in the high agency condition ($M = 0.65, SD = 1.10$) reported significantly higher competence.
feelings than those in the low agency condition ($M = -0.59, SD = 1.47$), $t(1,98) = -4.75, p < .001, d = 0.96$.

To determine whether the manipulation worked for grandiose and vulnerable narcissists specifically, I conducted the same t-tests split by high and low grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. Participants who scored one standard deviation above the mean on the NPI (high grandiose narcissists) reported feeling more competent in the memory they had described in the high agency condition ($M = 0.88, SD = 1.32$) compared to the low agency condition ($M = -0.67, SD = 1.31$), $t(16) = -2.51, p = .02, d = 1.25$. However, participants who scored one standard deviation above the mean on the HSNS (high vulnerable narcissists) did not report differences in competence rating based on condition, $t(12) = -0.28, p = .78, d = -0.16$. Therefore, although the manipulation was successful for high grandiose narcissists, it was not successful for vulnerable narcissists.

**Correlations**

Table 4 outlines the bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of all variables used in the study. All continuous variables were mean-centered for analyses.

**Multiple Regressions**

I performed a series of narcissism type (treated as a continuous variable) × recall condition multiple regressions on all self-esteem dependent variables. Although the manipulation check revealed that the agency recall condition was not successful for vulnerable narcissists, I conducted regression analyses regardless. Separate models were run to assess grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. Dependent variables included the State Self-Esteem Scale total score, the State Self-Esteem Scale performance
Table 4

**Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study 4 Variables**

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score, the State Self-Esteem Scale social score, the State Self-Esteem Scale appearance score, and global self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

**Grandiose Narcissism.** Multiple regression analyses revealed a main effect of grandiose narcissism on the State Self-Esteem Scale appearance score, $b = 0.16$, $t(95) = 2.58$, $p = .01$, and on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale score, $b = 0.13$, $t(95) = 1.71$, $p = .09$, such that participants higher in grandiose narcissism reported higher self-esteem regardless of agency recall condition. No main effect of condition emerged in any model (all $bs < 0.55$, all $ts < 0.79$, all $ps > .43$), indicating that participants did not report different self-esteem after recalling an experience of either high or low agency. No interaction between condition and grandiose narcissism emerged in any model (all $bs < 0.04$, all $ts < 0.68$, all $ps > .50$).

**Vulnerable Narcissism.** Multiple regression analyses revealed a main effect of vulnerable narcissism on all self-esteem DVs (all $bs < -1.50$. all $ts < -8.24$, all $ps < .001$),
such that participants higher in vulnerable narcissism reported lower self-esteem regardless of condition. No main effect of condition emerged in any model (all $bs < 0.59$, all $ts < 0.87$, all $ps > .39$), indicating that participants did not report different self-esteem after recalling an experience of either high or low agency. No interaction between condition and vulnerable narcissism emerged in any model (all $bs < 0.12$, all $ts < 0.93$, all $ps > .35$).

Discussion

The purpose of Study 4 was to establish the directionality of the mediation model presented in Studies 1-3. I expected that after recalling an experience of low (high) agency, both grandiose and vulnerable narcissists would report lower (higher) state self-esteem.

However, my predictions were not supported in this study. No significant main effects of recall condition emerged, indicating that recalling a past experience of high or low agency did not lead participants to experience higher or lower state self-esteem, nor did significant interactions between recall condition and narcissistic type. On each of the self-esteem dependent variables, a significant main effect of vulnerable narcissism did emerge, indicating that participants higher in vulnerable narcissism reported lower self-esteem, regardless of condition. Lastly, a significant main effect of grandiose narcissism on appearance-based state self-esteem and a marginally significant main effect of grandiose narcissism on global self-esteem emerged, indicating that participants higher in grandiose narcissism reported higher appearance-based self-esteem and somewhat higher
global self-esteem, regardless of condition. Thus, I was unable to establish the
directionality of the mediation model in the current study.

It is possible that rather than reflecting a true lack of directionality, this null
finding resulted from methodological issues. In particular, the manipulation of agency
was problematic. Notably, the manipulation check question revealed that the
manipulation was successful for grandiose narcissists but not vulnerable narcissists,
suggesting that vulnerable narcissists were not influenced by the agency recall task as
expected. In addition, the manipulation check did not assess participants’ current state of
agency; instead, the question instructed participants to report how competent they felt at
the time of the memory they recalled, rather than in the present time. The agency
manipulation also contained multiple words (e.g., incompetent, dependent, and
submissive) in order to accurately convey the meaning of high or low agency; however,
this may have confused participants who could not recall ever experiencing all three of
these states at one time. Thus, my first attempt at manipulating agency was somewhat
unsuccessful. Future attempts may be improved by editing the manipulation check to
assess current state, and by altering the manipulation to first provide a general definition
of agency and then ask participants to recall a time when they did or did not feel agentic.

Additionally, the memory recall task may have been incongruent with the state
self-esteem measure. The manipulation check indicated that some participants did indeed
report feeling more competent when they had recalled a time when they experienced high
agency, but as this task was memory-based rather than “live,” this feelings may not have
carried over into the state self-esteem scale, which specifically instructed participants to
report their current state rather than their state at the time of the memory. The lack of any main effects of recall condition may support this explanation, as condition did not have any effect on state self-esteem at all, regardless of narcissism type assessed. Future attempts to establish directionality of the mediation model may involve adapting the State Self-Esteem Scale and/or the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to assess the participant’s state at the time of the memory; alternately, moving away from a memory-based recall task and toward a present-time manipulation such as embodiment may be appropriate.
Chapter 6: General Discussion

The current research aimed to investigate whether grandiose and vulnerable narcissists perceive themselves differently in terms of agency and communion. Consistent with previous research, we predicted that grandiose narcissism would be associated with high self-rated agency, and would be either negatively associated or uncorrelated with self-rated communion. I tested new predictions for vulnerable narcissism, expecting that this type of narcissism would be associated with low self-rated agency and, possibly, with high self-rated communion. If supported, these hypotheses could help explain how it is possible for grandiose narcissists to experience positive self-views and other benefits, while vulnerable narcissists experience negative self-views and other detriments.

Study 1 provided partial support for these hypotheses. As expected, grandiose narcissism was associated with high self-rated agency and was unassociated with self-rated communion. Also as predicted, vulnerable narcissism was associated with low self-rated agency; this finding provided initial evidence that vulnerable narcissists view themselves as incapable of achieving their desired outcomes. Contrary to predictions, vulnerable narcissism was negatively associated with communion in this study; this
unexpected finding suggested that these narcissists likely do not behave in insincerely communal ways to garner positive evaluations from others, as I initially predicted.

Study 2 aimed to replicate and extend the results of Study 1 through the use of additional measures of agency and communion, as well as the addition of measures of unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion. Grandiose narcissism was positively associated with all measures of perceived agency and unmitigated agency, and was unassociated with perceived communion and unmitigated communion, as predicted. Replicating Study 1, vulnerable narcissism was again negatively associated with agency across several scales, either to a significant level or trending in the expected direction. In a failure to replicate Study 1, vulnerable narcissism was uncorrelated with communion in Study 2. Vulnerable narcissism was also uncorrelated with unmitigated communion and, surprisingly, was positively associated with unmitigated agency. Overall, the results from Study 2 provided a partial replication of Study 2, along with some unexpected findings which were further examined in Study 3.

Study 3 assessed whether grandiose and vulnerable narcissists similarly valued agentic and communal traits. I primarily predicted that grandiose and vulnerable narcissists would both endorse agentic traits as generally and personally desirable. As expected, grandiose narcissists endorsed agentic traits as generally and personally desirable, and unmitigated agentic traits as personally desirable; grandiose narcissism was uncorrelated with general and personal communion desirability ratings. Contrary to predictions, vulnerable narcissism was unassociated with general and personal agency desirability ratings; in fact, the association between vulnerable narcissism and personal
agency desirability ratings was trending in the opposite direction, suggesting that these narcissists may actually view agency as a personally undesirable trait. Vulnerable narcissists also tended to view communal traits as generally and personally undesirable, and unmitigated agency traits as personally desirable; these findings are in line with past speculation that vulnerable narcissists exhibit a hostile attribution bias, where they interpret the actions of others as malevolent.

Study 4 aimed to establish the directionality of the mediation model. However, I was unable to demonstrate directionality based on the results of this study. Although the agency recall manipulation was somewhat successful, there was no effect of condition or condition by narcissism type on self-esteem. Thus, additional research is needed to test the validity of the preferred model, where agency contributes to self-esteem, or the opposing model, where self-esteem contributes to agency.

These results suggest that grandiose and vulnerable narcissists experience life very differently, particularly in the realm of goal pursuit. Grandiose narcissists believe they are capable of achieving their desired outcomes through agentic means, as shown in each of the studies reported here along with much previous research. These individuals do not seem to feel at a disadvantage in the interpersonal domain either. Grandiose narcissists try to achieve their interpersonal goals through impressing others, making good first impressions, and gaining the admiration they desire, and do not seem to see a need for winning others over or gaining long-term friends.

Vulnerable narcissists, on the other hand, do not feel capable of achieving the outcomes they desire. Across the studies reported here, these individuals rated themselves
as low in agency. Thus, although these narcissists are equally entitled, they do not believe they possess the skills to orchestrate good outcomes for themselves. Importantly, some trending congruence emerged in Study 3 between self-evaluations and personal desirability ratings of agency for vulnerable narcissists, implying that these narcissists may view agency as undesirable. This unexpected finding may be interpreted in several ways. For example, it is possible that this finding arose due to defense mechanisms; specifically, vulnerable narcissists may endorse agency as somewhat personally undesirable simply as a way to reduce dissonance between the cognition that agency is good and the cognition that they lack agency. Alternately, this trend may be reflective of an other-focused sense of entitlement, where vulnerable narcissists believe that others are responsible for awarding them the outcomes they deserve.

In addition, vulnerable narcissists are known to depend greatly on the feedback of others, and yet this research shows that they see themselves as non-communal and view non-communal traits as desirable. Instead of using communion as a way to compensate for their perceived lack of agency (e.g., behaving warmly toward others to acquire positive evaluations), vulnerable narcissists seem to behave coldly toward others. Although this may be a self-protective stance, vulnerable narcissists are not doing themselves any favors by exhibiting such behaviors. Instead, the results of these studies suggest that these narcissists perceive themselves as both incompetent and cold, self-evaluating as low on both of the two fundamental dimensions of agency and communion.

The implication of these findings on grandiose and vulnerable narcissists’ self-esteem is still unclear. I hypothesized that the shared characteristics of entitlement and
self-absorption among the two narcissistic subtypes could lead to very different self-esteem outcomes on the basis of differential experiences of agency. Although the current studies did support differential experiences of agency among grandiose and vulnerable narcissists, I was unable to definitively support or disprove my prediction regarding directionality of the effect between agency and self-esteem. It is possible that instead of differences in agency leading to self-esteem outcomes, differences in self-esteem may lead to agency outcomes. Future research should continue to examine the directionality of these effects.

Notably, my ancillary analyses did provide additional support for the strong impact that agency differences has on grandiose and vulnerable narcissists. As previously mentioned, the constructs of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are typically uncorrelated, both in past research (e.g., Hendin & Cheek, 1997) and in all four of the studies presented here. Presumably, this null correlation may arise because although the two constructs share certain features (e.g., entitlement, self-absorption), they also diverge in others (e.g., self-esteem, proneness to negative emotionality). However, I found across three studies that when controlling for agency, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are indeed positively correlated. This association has never been shown before, and importantly, it suggests that the difference in perceived agency which was predicted and found in the current studies does represent a fundamental difference between the narcissistic subtypes. Consistent with the mediation models, this finding suggests that differential agency may account for much of the divergent experiences (such as self-
esteem, negative emotionality, etc.) which separate grandiose narcissists from vulnerable narcissists.

**Upward and Downward Spirals**

In fact, these constructs may all be tied up together for grandiose and vulnerable narcissists in self-perpetuating upward or downward spirals. A single demonstration of high or low agency likely does not lead to global, lasting high or low self-esteem. Rather, for grandiose narcissists, instances of high agency over time likely lead to continued bolstering of self-esteem; higher self-esteem likely produces corresponding increases in perceived agency. Thus, grandiose narcissists may enjoy an upward spiral of good outcomes, where their high perceived agency and high self-esteem work together to produce benefits for the self. Similarly, a downward spiral may exist for vulnerable narcissists; in this case, instances of low agency lead to dampened self-esteem, and this lowered self-esteem contributes to corresponding dampening of perceived agency. While the spiral produces benefits for grandiose narcissists, it likely produces detriments for vulnerable narcissists. Future research may involve testing this spiral more specifically than was done here; for example, a longitudinal study over one or two weeks involving daily reports of state self-esteem and agency ratings for the day’s activities may provide a test of the spiral across time.

**Strategic Communion**

Although not unexpected, the consistent null correlation between grandiose narcissism and communion in the current studies merits further investigation. If these narcissists simply do not behave in accord with communal qualities, we might have
expected a negative association between the two constructs. It is possible that the null correlations suggest instead that grandiose narcissists sometimes perceive that they behave communally and sometimes do not. Specifically, these narcissists may be “strategically communal”, whereby they behave communally when it stands to benefit them, and otherwise they behave non-communally. For example, a grandiose narcissist may behave warmly toward their boss in order to foster a good impression and eventually gain a promotion; however, to the office intern, the narcissist may feel free to exhibit non-communal qualities without consequences. Future studies are necessary to further investigate the question of whether grandiose narcissists are capable of discerning when communal behavior would benefit them and whether they act accordingly.

*Hostile Attribution Bias*

Importantly, as discussed previously, the results of these studies may provide some support for the hypothesis that vulnerable narcissists exhibit a hostile attribution bias. These individuals may perceive that others have malevolent intentions and will take advantage of them if given the opportunity; thus, vulnerable narcissists may work hard to prevent others from having that opportunity through non-communal behavior. If true, this hypothesis could help further illuminate the interpersonal interactions of vulnerable narcissists. Although the current studies may be interpreted as providing some support for this hypothesis, they were not designed specifically to test it. Future research may focus primarily on testing whether vulnerable narcissists do truly exhibit this bias and, if they do, why these individuals also rely so heavily on other’s feedback.

*Limitations*
A primary limitation of the current research is the absence of established directionality of the mediation models shown in Studies 1-3. Though this was attempted in Study 4, I was not wholly successful in supporting or failing to support the model. Future research may rectify this limitation. To be circumspect, future research may also test the directionality of the alternate mediation model, where self-esteem mediates the association between narcissism type and agency. As the current work was unable to establish the validity of the preferred model, the alternate model may instead prove to be correct.

Additionally, I did not account for the effects of socially desirable responding in the current studies. It is possible that vulnerable narcissists do not respond in socially desirable ways, which may have impacted their responses to the agentic and communal self-ratings in the studies presented here. This may help explain why grandiose narcissism was consistently uncorrelated with communion, whereas vulnerable narcissism was generally negatively correlated with communion—grandiose narcissists may possess the foresight to respond to these self-ratings in somewhat socially desirable ways, while vulnerable narcissists may not. Future studies should incorporate measures of social desirability to assess this possibility.

Conclusion

In sum, the present research demonstrates the importance of self-perceptions to differential outcomes for the two types of narcissist. Specifically, the perception that one possesses or does not possess agency represents a fundamental distinction between grandiose and vulnerable narcissists, where grandiose narcissists possess agency and
experience positive outcomes, while vulnerable narcissists do not possess agency and experience negative outcomes. Thus, this difference in perceived agency may provide the answer to the question of why one type of narcissist is more adaptive than the other; in short, grandiose narcissists are capable of achieving the outcomes they desire, while vulnerable narcissists are not. This work paves the way for further investigation of the implications of these characteristics in various settings, including business or work, interpersonal relationships, and even therapeutic contexts. In any scenario where agency comes into play, grandiose and vulnerable narcissists are likely to undergo very different experiences and attain very different outcomes.
References


Appendix A: Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS)

1. I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others.

2. My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or by the slighting remarks of others.

3. When I enter a room I often become self-conscious and feel that the eyes of others are upon me.

4. I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others.

5. I dislike being with a group unless I know that I am appreciated by at least one of those present.

6. I feel that I am temperamentally different from most people.

7. I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way.

8. I easily become wrapped up in my own interests and forget the existence of others.

9. I feel that I have enough on my hands without worrying about other people’s troubles.

10. I am secretly ‘‘put out’’ when other people come to me with their troubles, asking me for my time and sympathy.
Appendix B: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)

1. A. I have a natural talent for influencing people.  
   B. I am not good at influencing people.

2. A. Modesty doesn't become me.  
   B. I am essentially a modest person.

3. A. I would do almost anything on a dare.  
   B. I tend to be a fairly cautious person.

4. A. When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed.  
   B. I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.

5. A. The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.  
   B. If I ruled the world it would be a better place.

6. A. I can usually talk my way out of anything.  
   B. I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.

7. A. I prefer to blend in with the crowd.  
   B. I like to be the center of attention.

8. A. I will be a success.  
   B. I am not too concerned about success.

9. A. I am no better or worse than most people.  
   B. I think I am a special person.

10. A. I am not sure if I would make a good leader.  
    B. I see myself as a good leader.

11. A. I am assertive.  
    B. I wish I were more assertive.

12. A. I like to have authority over other people.  
    B. I don't mind following orders.

13. A. I find it easy to manipulate people.
B. I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.

14. A. I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.  
B. I usually get the respect that I deserve.

15. A. I don't particularly like to show off my body.  
B. I like to show off my body.

16. A. I can read people like a book.  
B. People are sometimes hard to understand.

17. A. If I feel competent I am willing to take responsibility for making decisions.  
B. I like to take responsibility for making decisions.

18. A. I just want to be reasonably happy.  
B. I want to amount to something in the eyes of the world.

19. A. My body is nothing special.  
B. I like to look at my body.

20. A. I try not to be a show off.  
B. I will usually show off if I get the chance.

21. A. I always know what I am doing.  
B. Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing.

22. A. I sometimes depend on people to get things done.  
B. I rarely depend on anyone else to get things done.

23. A. Sometimes I tell good stories.  
B. Everybody likes to hear my stories.

24. A. I expect a great deal from other people.  
B. I like to do things for other people.

25. A. I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.  
B. I take my satisfactions as they come.

26. A. Compliments embarrass me.  
B. I like to be complimented.

27. A. I have a strong will to power.  
B. Power for its own sake doesn't interest me.

28. A. I don't care about new fads and fashions.  
B. I like to start new fads and fashions.

29. A. I like to look at myself in the mirror.
B. I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror.

30. A. I really like to be the center of attention.
   B. It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention.

31. A. I can live my life in any way I want to.
   B. People can't always live their lives in terms of what they want.

32. A. Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me.
   B. People always seem to recognize my authority.

33. A. I would prefer to be a leader.
   B. It makes little difference to me whether I am a leader or not.

34. A. I am going to be a great person.
   B. I hope I am going to be successful.

35. A. People sometimes believe what I tell them.
   B. I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.

36. A. I am a born leader.
   B. Leadership is a quality that takes a long time to develop.

37. A. I wish somebody would someday write my biography.
   B. I don't like people to pry into my life for any reason.

38. A. I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.
   B. I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go out in public.

39. A. I am more capable than other people.
   B. There is a lot that I can learn from other people.

40. A. I am much like everybody else.
   B. I am an extraordinary person.
Appendix C: Agency Trait List

1. Assertive
2. Active
3. Energetic
4. Outspoken
5. Dominant
6. Enthusiastic
7. Quiet (R)
8. Reserved (R)
9. Silent (R)
10. Withdrawn (R)
11. Submissive (R)
12. Inhibited (R)
Appendix D: Communion Trait List

1. Kind
2. Friendly
3. Generous
4. Cooperative
5. Pleasant
6. Affectionate
7. Mean (R)
8. Rude (R)
9. Stingy (R)
10. Quarrelsome (R)
11. Grouchy (R)
12. Cruel (R)
Appendix E: Hope Scale

1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
2. I energetically pursue my goals.
3. I feel tired most of the time.
4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
5. I am easily downed in an argument.
6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
7. I worry about my health.
8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
10. I’ve been pretty successful in life.
11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.
Appendix F: Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire

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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very warm in relations with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all hostile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very hostile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes to pieces under pressure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Stands up well under pressure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Revised Unmitigated Communion Scale

1. I always place the needs of others above my own.
2. I never find myself getting overly involved in others’ problems. (R)
3. For me to be happy, I need others to be happy.
4. I worry about how other people get along without me when I am not there.
5. I have no trouble getting to sleep at night when other people are upset. (R)
6. It is impossible for me to satisfy my own needs when they interfere with the needs of others.
7. I can’t say no when someone asks me for help.
8. Even when exhausted, I will always help other people.
9. I often worry about others’ problems.
Appendix H: Self-Liking/Self-Competence Revised Scale

1. I tend to devalue myself. (R)
2. I am highly effective at the things I do.
3. I am very comfortable with myself.
4. I am almost always able to accomplish what I try for.
5. I am secure in my sense of self-worth.
6. It is sometimes unpleasant for me to think about myself. (R)
7. I have a negative attitude toward myself. (R)
8. At times, I find it difficult to achieve the things that are important to me. (R)
9. I feel great about who I am.
10. I sometimes deal poorly with challenges. (R)
11. I never doubt my personal worth.
12. I perform very well at many things.
13. I sometimes fail to fulfill my goals. (R)
14. I am very talented.
15. I do not have enough respect for myself. (R)
16. I wish I were more skillful in my activities. (R)
Appendix I: Combined Agency, Communion, and Unmitigated Agency Trait Lists

1. Arrogant
2. Independent
3. Emotional
4. Looks out for self
5. Active
6. Egotistical
7. Easy to devote self completely to others
8. Gentle
9. Helpful
10. Boastful
11. Competitive
12. Kind
13. Aware of others’ feelings
14. Can make decisions easily
15. Greedy
16. Never gives up
17. Very self-confident
18. Feels very superior
19. Dictatorial
20. Understanding of others
21. Cynical
22. Warm in relations with others
23. Hostile
24. Stands up well under pressure
25. Assertive
26. Inhibited
27. Cruel
28. Energetic
29. Outspoken
30. Friendly
31. Grouchy
32. Reserved
33. Silent
34. Generous
35. Stingy
36. Quarrelsome
37. Dominant
38. Withdrawn
39. Rude
40. Submissive
41. Cooperative
42. Pleasant
43. Quiet
44. Affectionate
45. Mean
46. Enthusiastic
Appendix J: State Self-Esteem Scale

1. I feel confident about my abilities.
2. I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure. (R)
3. I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.
4. I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance. (R)
5. I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read. (R)
6. I feel that others respect and admire me.
7. I am dissatisfied with my weight. (R)
8. I feel self-conscious. (R)
9. I feel as smart as others.
10. I feel displeased with myself. (R)
11. I feel good about myself.
12. I am pleased with my appearance right now.
13. I am worried about what other people think of me. (R)
15. I feel inferior to others at this moment. (R)
16. I feel unattractive. (R)
17. I feel concerned about the impression I am making. (R)
18. I feel that I have less scholastic ability right now than others. (R)

19. I feel like I’m not doing well. (R)

20. I am worried about looking foolish. (R)