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Narcissism and its relationship with counterproductive work behavior: Mediation effects of psychological entitlement and subjective well-being

Abstract: This paper describes the results of a study that examined if psychological entitlement and hedonic well-being mediated relationships between counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) and grandiose narcissism. More specifically, the mediation effects of both types of narcissism on CWB via psychological entitlement and hedonistic subjective well-being (SWB) were examined. This study is based on self-reported, cross-sectional study on 119 working adults. Agentic and communal narcissism were positively related to CWB in parallel way, while simultaneously and indirectly decreasing CWB levels via higher SWB. Current paper is the first attempt to include agentic-communal narcissism model to explain the levels of CWB. The theoretical and practical implications of presented findings are discussed here in terms of the agency-communion model of narcissism and the “mixed blessing” effects of grandiose narcissism on subjective well-being.

Keywords: subjective well-being, entitlement, communal narcissism, counterproductive work behaviors, agentic narcissism

Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviors

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) are defined as behaviors that are harmful for an organization and/or for people working in that organization (Spector & Fox, 2005). Due to its negative impact on effectiveness and interpersonal relations at work, CWB are of increasing interest to the field of work and organizational psychology (Spector, 2011). CWB are linked both to situational and personal factors, like: aggression (Spector, 2011), entitlement (Fisk, 2010; Harvey & Martinko, 2009), narcissism (Penny & Spector, 2002). Spector (2011) proposed a broad model of CWB, integrating different aspects of personality with emotional and cognitive variables. He focused on negative affect and anger, assuming that anxiety and aggression lead to CWB. Narcissism, along with hostile attribution bias, was

assumed to influence appraisal attributions, which was assumed to be an antecedent of anger. In the current paper we propose to supplement Spector’s model by completing a more in-depth analysis of narcissism. First, we assumed that the trait of narcissism has both negative and also positive consequences in terms of increasing subjective well-being (SWB, Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, & Maltby, 2015). Secondly, we proposed inclusion of trait entitlement as an important outcome of narcissism, which in turn could have a negative impact on CWB. Finally, we employed an agentic-communal model of grandiose narcissism (Gebauer, Sedikides Verplanken, & Maio, 2012) to shed light on the plausible effects of narcissism on CWB. More specifically, we examined whether agentic and communal narcissism work in a parallel manner on CWB levels, via both psychological entitlement (increasing CWB) and via higher SWB (decreasing CWB).

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Narcissism and its relationship to counterproductive organizational behaviors

Narcissism is typically defined as a grandiose self-view that is related to such motives as need for esteem, power, and entitlement, and conceptualized as an individual difference (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). High levels of grandiose narcissism is related to high self-esteem, positive affect and low neuroticism, whereas the vulnerable form is accompanied by low self-esteem, negative affect and high neuroticism (Miller et al., 2011). The grandiose form seems to have mixed effects on social functioning and life satisfaction (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015).

The agency-communion model of grandiose narcissism assumes two parallel forms of grandiose narcissism, the agentic and the communal (Gebauer et al., 2012). Agentic narcissism is based on a positive self-view in an agentic domain (like intelligence, bravery, or physical attractiveness), whereas communal narcissism is based on an overly positive self-evaluation in a communal domain (like morality, empathy, or benevolence). Recently, several studies confirmed that these forms are parallel, but distinct (Gebauer et al., 2012; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015).

Narcissism is a popular research subject in the work context (see Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011 for a review). Generally, narcissism is assumed to have numerous negative consequences on satisfaction with work, organizational behaviors, or leadership. For instance, Spector (2011) assumed a positive relationship between CWB and narcissism, as narcissism was supposed to evoke ego-threatening reactions toward co-workers. However, Campbell et al. (2011) note the heterogeneous effect of narcissism in the work context. Narcissism could be partially beneficial for the individual, as it increases the chances of getting work (Campbell, 2005) or becoming a leader due to self-confidence and social skills (Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984). Moreover, narcissism has both a positive (via self-esteem) and negative (via psychological entitlement) influence on leadership (Campbell et al., 2011).

In addition to its relationship with leadership roles, narcissism affects the organizational behaviors of employees. Narcissism is positively related to rivalry, psychological entitlement, and a focus on self-enhancement (Miller et al., 2011). Campbell et al. (2011) reported studies linking higher narcissism with higher counterproductive organizational behaviors (CWB). In general, CWB are linked with narcissism via interpersonal factors, like anger (Penny & Spector, 2009) or reactions to threats on their exaggerated self-esteem (Spector, 2011). Szalkowska, Żemojtel-Piotrowska, and Clinton (2015) also found a positive relationship between narcissism and CWB.

The focus on the negative interpersonal effects of narcissism is one possible source of inconsistent findings on the relationship between organizational behaviors and narcissism. However, narcissism is partially beneficial for the individual due its positive effect on life satisfaction (Rose, 2012; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015). As one of the sources of CWB is negative affectivity (Spector, 2011),

narcissism could lead to lower levels of CWB via positive affectivity. Thus, the positive effect of narcissism on higher hedonic well-being could also lead to lower levels of CWB.

Most of the aforementioned effects of narcissism on CWB are reported for the agentic form of grandiose narcissism. However, there is no evidence that communal narcissism works in a similar way. Since communal narcissism is based on inflated self-esteem in a communal domain, it is interesting to examine whether communal narcissists would manifest lower levels of CWB due to the potential impact on their self-presentation. Former studies have indicated that communal narcissism is fundamentally related to agentic narcissism (Gebauer et al., 2012; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015) and that its relationship with subjective well-being is similar (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015). However, the social functioning of communal narcissists seems to be different than agentic ones, as their motives are satisfied by communal self-presentation (Gebauer et al., 2012). Thus, manifesting high levels of CWB could be costly for communal narcissists, contrary to their agentic counterpart.

Psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behaviors

Psychological entitlement and narcissism are commonly linked (Campbell et al., 2004; Crowe, LoPilato, Campbell, & Miller, 2015). The distinction between grandiose and vulnerable forms of narcissism is further reflected in the functioning of the entitled (Crowe et al., 2015). Grandiosely-entitled individuals report higher self-esteem, more positive affect, and more anti-social behavior. Vulnerable-entitled individuals report lower self-esteem, more negative affect and psychopathology. However, both forms of entitlement are positively related to Machiavellianism, antagonism, and narcissism (Crowe et al., 2015).

Psychological entitlement is defined as the expectation of special treatment based on the belief that the individual deserves more than others and that he/she is entitled to more (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). A very similar conceptualization of entitlement can be found in work and organizational psychology. For instance, Fisk (2010) focuses on excessive entitlement, which is very similar to its narcissistic or psychological counterparts. Excessive entitlement, defined as a tendency to formulate unjustified demands, is positively related to CWB.

The negative effects of psychological entitlement are not limited to the CWB. Entitlement decreases satisfaction with work (Byrne, Miller, & Pitts, 2009), increases conflicts with supervisors (Harvey & Martinko, 2009), hostility and conflicts with others (Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009). Thus, psychological entitlement has negative effects on CWB directly – through interpersonal functioning – and indirectly through negative affect. Since the tendency to formulate high demands toward co-workers and supervisors could result in frustration, it naturally is observed to decrease job satisfaction.

Subjective well-being and counterproductive work behaviors

Subjective well-being is a complex phenomenon, encompassing both hedonic and eudaimonic aspect (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Within hedonic well-being Diener et al. (1985) differentiate between its cognitive and affective component. Here we will focus on its hedonic part, related to positive evaluation of own life and to positive emotional balance (Carruthers & Hood, 2004). Stress experienced at work is a crucial part of CWB model, as it is associated to interaction stressor-personality (Zhou, Meier, & Spector, 2014). Especially, emotional stability moderates CWB in that way, that among low emotionally stable workers negative effects of interpersonal conflicts were more apparent than among highly emotionally stable workers (Zhou et al., 2014). Therefore, affect regulation and reaction on stressors at work is an important factor shaping reactions toward people and organization (Cullen & Sackett, 2003; Spector & Jex, 1998). However, most research focus on negative affectivity in predicting CWB (Fox et al., 2001; Penny & Spector, 2005). In general, affectivity was included in former CWB studies, but rather indirectly, as a factor interacting with personality.

The current study

In the current study, we propose a mediational model that explains how grandiose narcissism in agentic and communal forms might affect CWB levels. We regard psychological entitlement – as the “dark side” of grandiose narcissism – and hedonic well-being – as a “bright side” of grandiose narcissism – as possible mediators of these relationships.

First, we assume that agentic and communal narcissisms are both related to CWB in distinct ways. Manifesting high community is an important aspect of one’s self view for communal narcissists. For this reason, manifestation of high levels of CWB is threatening for the self-presentation of communal narcissists. Agentic narcissists, however, are not interested in communion (i.e., positive relationships with others, avoiding conflicts at work or benevolence). Therefore, this agentic narcissism is supposed to be related to higher levels of CWB. Further, we assume that the two forms of narcissism are positively related both to psychological entitlement and to hedonic well-being. For this reason, we expected an indirect 1) positive effect of both forms of narcissism on CWB via psychological entitlement and, 2) negative effect of narcissism on CWB via hedonic well-being. In the measure of hedonic well-being, we include both affective and cognitive aspects, following Diener (1984). Recent research suggests relative independence of these aspects of SWB, since the emotional aspect is more present-focused while cognitive aspect is more general (Luhman, Hawkey, Eid, & Caccioppo, 2012). Affectivity was assumed to be an influential factor for CWB (Spector, 2011; Zhou et al., 2014). Former studies indicated also positive relationship between grandiose narcissism and satisfaction with life (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015).

Methods

Sample and procedure

One hundred and nineteen working adults (80 women, 39 men) from Poland ranging in age from 18 to 64 years ($M=29.35$, $SD=9.15$) participated in the study. Among them, 13.3% worked in the public sector, and 86.7% worked in the private sector. Participant professions were categorized in the following manner: trade (11.8%), production (6.7%), and services (81.5%). Most of them had a university education (MA or BA, 61.3%), 1% had an elementary education, and 37.8% had a secondary school education. In terms of position at work, 22% were managers and 81.7% were subordinates. The length of time of their current employment ranged from 1 month to 38 years ($M=3.88$ years, $SD=6.67$).

Participants completed the survey in a paper-pencil form at their convenience in their homes. They were informed about the aim of the study, anonymity, and the option to withdraw from the study at any time. They did not receive any remuneration for taking part in the study.

Instruments

Agentic narcissism

This form of narcissism was measured by *Narcissistic Personality Inventory-13* (the NPI-13; Gentile, Miller, Hoffman, Reidy, Zeichner, & Campbell, 2013). This scale serves as a measure of agentic narcissism and is abbreviated form of the NPI-40. The NPI-13 consists of 13 pairs of two opposite statements (e.g. “*I find it easy to manipulate people*”. vs “*I don’t like it when I find myself manipulating people.*”). Participants choose the statement they more agree with. The scale indicated high reliability and proven validity (Gentile et al., 2013). Polish version of scale was adapted by using back translation procedure with participation of native speaking personality psychologist. CFA analyses confirmed three-factor structure of scale, measurement invariance between Polish and English version, as well as indicated positive correlation to psychological entitlement and self-esteem (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Rogoza, Hitokoto, Baran, & Maltby, 2016).

Communal narcissism

It was measured by *Communal Narcissism Inventory* (Gebauer et al., 2012), comprised by 12 items referring to grandiose self-view of communal traits (e.g. *I’m amazing listener*) and to phantasy about future impact on human welfare (e.g. *I will bring a freedom to humanity*). Participants answered on 7-point scale (from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 7 – *strongly agree*). Scale has proven validity and reliability, also in regard to Polish version (Gebauer et al., 2012; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Czarna, Piotrowski, Baran, & Maltby, 2016).

Psychological entitlement

It was measured by *Psychological Entitlement Scale* (Campbell et al., 2004). PES consists of nine items, one is reversely scored. It refers to belief that individual

deserves more and he/she is entitled to more than others (e.g. *I deserve the best*). Participants answered on 7-point scale (from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 7 – *strongly agree*). The scale has demonstrated validity and reliability (Campbell et al., 2004). Polish version of scale indicated the same factor structure as English version, high reliability as well as the same pattern of correlations to external variables to these reported by Campbell et al. (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, & Baran, 2016; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Ciecuch et al., 2016).

Counterproductive work behaviors

The CWB were measured by Counterproductive Organizational Behaviors Scale (COBS, Czarnota-Bojarska, 2012). Scale consists of 33 items describing counterproductive behaviors referring to actions against productivity and interpersonal relations (e.g. *Use of company equipment for private purposes; Prolongation of breaks in work*). Participants indicate the frequency with which they engage in these behaviors on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – *never*, to 5 – *very often*). Scale has proven validity and reliability (Czarnota-Bojarska, 2012; Szalkowska et al., 2015).

Hedonic well-being

Hedonic SWB was measured by two scales reflecting its cognitive and affective aspect. *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) serves as a measure of general life satisfaction. The scale consists of 5 statements (e.g. *I am satisfied with my life*), with answer ranged from 1 – *I disagree* to 5 – *I agree*. Scale has proven validity and reliability (Diener et al., 1985).

Mental Health Continuum Short Form (the MHC-SF, Keyes, Wissing, Potgieter, Temane, Kruger, & van Rooy, 2008; Polish version by Karaś, Ciecuch, & Keyes, 2014).

The scale consists of 14 items representing both hedonic and eudaimonic SWB. In the current study we used an emotional well-being scale, which consists of three items referring to positive affect (e.g. *I'm happy*). We choose this scale as it is intend to measure general positive affect and it

does not refer to any specific emotion. Participants indicate how often they experienced particular state within past month on the scale from 1 – *never* to 6 – *every day*. The MHC-SF has proven validity and reliability (Keyes et al., 2008).

Results

Correlational analyses

We calculated zero-order manifest correlations for narcissism, communal narcissism, life satisfaction, emotional well-being, and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). These correlations are presented in Table 1. Both communal and agentic forms of narcissism were positively related to each other and they both correlated positively to CWB. Congruent with our assumptions, both forms of narcissism were positively related to psychological entitlement and to emotional well-being, however psychological entitlement was not related to CWB, contrary to our assumptions.

Mediational analyses

To examine indirect effects of agentic and communal narcissism on CWB we conducted mediation analyses using Process macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) with a bootstrapping procedure ($n=1000$). This procedure allows to examine mediational effects in case of relatively low number of participants.

For testing mediation there are necessary to check three assumptions: (1) predictor and outcome variable should be correlated; (2) predictor should be correlated to mediator; (3) mediator should be correlated to outcome variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). As both forms of narcissism were uncorelated to life satisfaction, we did not examine mediational effects of agentic and communal narcissism on CWB via SWL as single mediator. Also psychological entitlement was uncorrelated to CWB (see Table 1). Additionally we conducted two separate regression analyses with CWB as outcome variable, where agentic narcissism and communal narcissism respectively were introduced in the first step, and psychological entitlement introduced in the second step. In both cases psychological entitlement was unrelated to CWB, $\beta=-.17$,

Table 1. Zero-order correlations and Cronbach's alpha reliabilities

	Narcissism	ComNar	ENT	SWL	EWB	CWB	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Narcissism	$\alpha = .74$						0.33	0.23
ComNar	.36***	$\alpha = .92$					3.69	1.09
Entitlement	.39***	.44***	$\alpha = .88$				3.90	1.17
SWL	.10	.10	.11	$\alpha = .88$			3.36	0.76
EWB	.20*	.29**	.07	.51***	$\alpha = .87$		4.10	1.23
CWB	.27***	.20*	-.04	-.21*	-.01	$\alpha = .93$	1.63	0.51

Note. ComNar = Communal narcissism; ENT = entitlement; SWL = satisfaction with life; EWB = emotional well-being; CWB = counterproductive work behaviors.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Mediation analyses

	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Sobel Z	p value
agNar → EWB → CWB	.01	.031	[-.04 .090]	-0.66	.511
agNar → EWB → SWL → CWB	-.03	.021	[-.09 .002]		
comNar → EWB → CWB	.02	.036	[-.05 .100]	-0.74	.455
comNar → EWB → SWL → CWB	-.04	.028	[-.13 -.001]		

Note. agNar=agentic narcissism; comNar=communal narcissism; EWB=emotional well-being; SWL=satisfaction with life; CWB=counterproductive work behaviors

$t(117) = 1.74$, $p = .085$, after controlling for agentic narcissism, and $\beta = -.15$, $t(117) = -1.52$, $p = .113$ after controlling for communal narcissism.

We focused on four mediational effects: (1) agentic narcissism on CWB via EWB and SWL on CWB; (2) agentic narcissism via psychological entitlement on CWB, and (3) communal narcissism on CWB via EWB and life satisfaction on CWB. There were no justification for testing mediational effects of psychological entitlement. For single mediations we used Model 4, and for multiple mediations we used Model 6.

The results are reported in Table 2. Mediation paths for agentic and communal narcissism via emotional well-being and satisfaction with life on CWB were significant (Hayes, 2013).

Further analyses revealed that grandiose narcissism was indirectly related to CWB by decreasing its levels and that this indirect effect was sequential in character, i.e. both form of narcissisms were positively associated to emotional well-being, and emotional well-being was associated to higher levels of life satisfaction, which, in turn, was negatively related to the CWB levels. Model for agentic narcissism predicting CWB via emotional well-being followed by satisfaction with life allowed for explaining 13% of variance, $F(3; 117) = 19.96$, $p = .001$. However, there were no mediational effects for agentic narcissism, nor for single mediations (via emotional well-being) and for sequential mediation (see Table 2). Direct effect of agentic grandiose narcissism on CWB was $B = .62$ ($SE = .20$), $p = .002$, 95% CI [.23; 1.02].

Analogical model for communal grandiose narcissism allowed for explaining 10% of variance, $F(3; 117) = 3.97$, $p = .010$. Direct effect of communal narcissism on CWB was positive, i.e. higher levels of communal narcissism was associated to higher levels of CWB, $B = .10$ ($SE = .044$); $p = .029$; 95% CI [.01; .18]. Only sequential mediation was significant, therefore, communal agentic narcissism was associated to lower levels to CWB via higher levels of emotional well-being, which was positively associated to life satisfaction, which in turn was negatively related to CWB. However, in general, communal narcissism was associated positively to CWB, as total effect (both direct and indirect) was positive, $B = .09$ ($SE = .042$); $p = .034$; 95% CI [.01; .18]. It was smaller, than parallel effect of agentic narcissism to CWB, $Z = 2.61$, $p = .010$.

Discussion

This study aimed to supplement current knowledge about the relationship between grandiose narcissism and CWB. We formulated several research questions and posited hypotheses related to mechanisms underlying these relationships. First, we examined the impact of grandiose narcissism in two forms, agentic and communal, on CWB levels. We assumed that both forms would be related to CWB in different ways since agentic narcissism is based on a grandiose self-view in the competence domain, while communal narcissism is a logical opposite to hostile relationships with others at work. Despite these assumptions (see also Spector, 2011; Szalkowska et al., 2015), we have found that both forms of narcissism were related to higher levels of CWB; however the effect of communal narcissism on CWB was smaller than the analogical effect of agentic form.

Two further assumptions were related to plausible mediational effects of grandiose narcissism on CWB. We assumed psychological entitlement would be negatively related to and emotional well-being would be positively related to (via higher life satisfaction) CWB. In line with previous research, we assumed that psychological entitlement would be responsible for the negative effects of agentic and communal narcissism on CWB. Despite a positive relationship between the two forms of narcissism and psychological entitlement, the relationship between psychological entitlement and CWB was insignificant. However, the results obtained in this study were opposite of the authors' assumption that negative effects of psychological entitlement both for interpersonal relationships (Campbell et al., 2004) and for productivity (Lessard, Greenberger, Chen, & Faruggia, 2011) would be observed. Since only grandiose narcissism was included in the current study, psychological entitlement could be its emotionally-stable form, related positively to self-esteem and positive affectivity (Crowe et al., 2015). Thus, psychological entitlement associated to grandiose narcissism could be positively related to assertiveness at work and positive experiences resulting from the self-enhancing functions of the entitled, thereby not leading to more counterproductive behaviors.

The second examined mediational path was related to positive aspects of agentic narcissism on CWB via increased levels of subjective well-being. This assumption

was confirmed only for communal narcissism. Mediation analyses confirmed significant two-fold mediation (assuming the impact of EWB on life satisfaction) for communal but not agentic narcissism on CWB. Therefore, communal grandiose narcissism was negatively associated to CWB via higher levels in positive affect and, in turn, by enhancing life satisfaction and negative association to the CWB levels.

The current study has several limitations. The most important is the cross-sectional character of the data. For this reason, any causal interpretations are impossible. Our sample was relatively small and consisted of people work in service-related positions where interpersonal skills are particularly important for successful professional performance. Thus, the generalization of our findings to other types of occupations is difficult. Finally, we used self-report data, which is particularly problematic in the measurement of undesirable behaviors like CWB. Therefore, the current study is strictly preliminary in character and should be supplemented by behavioral indices of CWB, such as absence from work or reported number of conflicts with supervisors.

The current study contributes to existing knowledge in the field in several ways. First, it revealed similarities between agentic and communal narcissism on negative functioning at work. In general, communal narcissism seems to influence organizational behaviors to a lesser extent than agentic narcissism, also via its positive association to subjective well-being. However, also direct effect of communal narcissism was weaker than its agentic counterpart. It could be related to the nature of communal narcissism, as it does not include exploitive component in its measurement (Gebauer et al., 2012; Gebauer & Sedikides, 2017; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2015), contrary to agentic narcissism (Ackerman et al., 2011; Brown & Tamborski, 2011).

Secondly, we assumed two mediational effects of grandiose narcissism on CWB, where negative effect via entitlement occurred to be unconfirmed. Ultimately, we could only confirm an indirect beneficial effect of communal narcissism on undesirable work behaviors which stem from higher levels of SWB. These results partially confirm the mixed effects of narcissism on work behaviors (Campbell et al., 2011), at least for its communal form. Finally, although we did not posit a negative or lack of relation between psychological entitlement and CWB, our results are to some extent congruent with recent data differentiating between vulnerable and grandiose entitlement (Crowe et al., 2015) and with observations of the important role of self-assertive entitlement beliefs among grandiose narcissists (Szalkowska et al., 2015). Therefore, the actual importance of entitlement in shaping organizational behaviors requires more complex conceptualization of this variable, as well as distinguishing between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism in agentic and communal forms.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the

ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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