Collective narcissism: antecedents and consequences of exaggeration of the ingroup image.

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Collective narcissism pertains to individual difference in a belief in exaggerated greatness of one’s own group contingent on external recognition (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009; Golec de Zavala, 2011, 2012). This definition extends the concept of individual narcissism as an exaggerated self-image dependent on admiration of others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) onto the social level of self. People who score high on the Collective Narcissism Scale agree that their group’s importance and worth are not sufficiently recognized by others, their group deserves special treatment and they insist that their group must obtain special recognition and respect (Table 1, Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009). Rather than contributing to their in-
group’s welfare, collective narcissists engage their energy to monitor whether the
greatness and uniqueness of their in-group is sufficiently acknowledged and recognized
by others.

When Theodore Adorno first proposed that collective narcissism motivated
support for the Nazi politics in Germany, he argued that the exaggerated sense of
national entitlement compensated for hidden weakness of the self. He maintained that,
by dissolving in an idealized and omnipotent group, the ‘weak egos’ sought protection
from the sense of alienation, powerlessness and self-blame. Unfortunately, once
legitimized by national authorities, unrestrained collective narcissism led to support for

Recently, appeals to national collective narcissism could be observed in political
campaigns alarming about the loss of national greatness in the US (“Make America
great again”) and in the UK (“Take back control”). Collective narcissism predicted the
Brexit vote in the UK because of the perception that the country was threatened by
immigrants and foreigners (Golec de Zavala, Guerra & Símão, 2017). Collective
narcissism predicted an increase in conspiratorial thinking during Donald Trump’s
presidential campaign (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2017) and the Trump vote in the
2016 American presidential election (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2017).

This chapter reviews previous studies examining the link between collective
narcissism and intergroup hostility. Next, the chapter presents recent results pointing to
collective narcissistic vulnerability and compensatory nature and differentiating
collective narcissism from in-group satisfaction - taking pride in being a member of a
worthy group (Amiot & Aubin, 2013; Leach, et al., 2008). However, first the chapter
differentiated national collective narcissism from a related concept of nationalism.
Collective narcissism vs. Nationalism

People can be collective narcissistic about various social groups (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009). When applied to a national group, collective narcissism may make similar predictions regarding intergroup attitudes as nationalism: a desire for national supremacy (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). However, there are reasons to think that the two constructs refer to different psychological realities. First, nationalists are openly dominant and deny weakness. They are convinced that their nation should dominate others (Blank and Schmidt, 2003; Mummendey, Klink & Brown, 2001; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Pehrson, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009). Collective narcissists emphasize weakness and lack of in-group recognition to justify their hostility (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2017). In addition, when the overlap between nationalism and national collective narcissism was controlled, collective narcissism, not nationalism, was related to hypersensitivity to intergroup threat and retaliatory hostility (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2016). Finally, in line with this finding, recent results indicate that collective narcissism and nationalism may be underlain by different motivations. Unlike collective narcissism, nationalism was related to individual grandiose narcissism (i.e. a sense of agentic superiority over others), and only inasmuch as it was associated with grandiose narcissism was it also related to high self-esteem. Otherwise, nationalism was related to low self-esteem. Collective narcissism was related to low self-esteem via vulnerable narcissism (i.e. frustrated and unfulfilled sense of self-entitlement, Golec de Zavala, et al., 2017).

Thus, both collective narcissism and nationalism, seem to be underlain by low self-esteem and both are likely to use their national identity instrumentally to compensate for deficits in their sense of self-worth. However, they engage in intergroup hostility in different ways and for different reasons. While nationalistic intergroup
hostility is actively aggressive and openly dominant, collective narcissistic intergroup hostility is subjectively defensive. Collective narcissists protect the in-group’s image rather than assert the in-group’s dominance (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2016). This does not make their hostility more justified. The same atrocities would be motivated by nationalistic belief in the in-group’s right to dominate and the collective narcissist’s belief that the in-group image needs to be protected from external threats. However, it is important to recognize that dominant nationalists may use the rhetoric of intergroup threat and loss of national greatness to mobilize defensive collective narcissists to fight their wars.

**Previous studies: Collective narcissism, hypersensitivity to intergroup threat and retaliatory intergroup hostility**

Results converge to indicate that collective narcissism, not individual narcissism or personal sense of entitlement, predicts hostile intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Cai & Gries, 2013; Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013; Golec de Zavala, Pekker, Guerra, & Baran, 2016). Specifically, collective narcissism predicts retaliatory hostility to past, present, actual and imagined offences to the in-group (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009, 2013a, 2016).

Collective narcissism predicts retaliatory intergroup hostility after the in-group image is undermined by other groups. For example, American collective narcissism predicted support for military intervention in Iraq in 2003 because American collective narcissists felt besieged by hostility of other countries (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). However, out-group aggression is not the only threat that triggers collective narcissistic intergroup hostility. Collective narcissistic prejudice is underlain by the perception of
targeted groups as threatening to the in-group’s image, position or narrowly defined identity. For example, the link between collective narcissism and anti-Semitism in Poland was explained by the belief that Jews conspire against Poles (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Collective narcissism in Poland was also linked to homophobia. This link was mediated by religious fundamentalism. Such findings indicate that collective narcissistic narrow definition of the ‘true’ Polish national identity – Catholic and heterosexual (Graff, 2010) – is threatened by Jews and homosexual Poles (Golec de Zavala & Mole, 2017; see also Górska & Mikołajczyk, 2015). In China, collective narcissists disliked American celebrities portrayed on the covers of Chinese magazines. This result was interpreted as their rejection of American cultural intrusion into the ‘pure’ Chinese culture (Gries, et al. 2015).

In addition, collective narcissism uniquely (in comparison to individual narcissism, right wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, national in-group identification and blind and constructive patriotism) predicts hostile retaliation to in-group criticism. For example, in an experimental study, American participants were presented with a fictional interview with a foreign exchange student. After reading unfavorable (vs. favorable) comments about their country, American collective narcissists expressed the intention to engage in hostile behaviors towards all compatriots of the exchange student. In another experiment, Polish collective narcissists advocated hostile confrontation with a team of British scientists with whom Polish scientists allegedly discovered new chemical elements but disagreed over how to name them. Polish collective narcissists preferred hostile strategies only after participants were previously exposed to critical comments about anti-Semitism in Poland issued by the British press. Participants chose conciliatory approach to the same conflict in the control conditions, after the critical comments were attributed to the Austrian press.
In another study, collective narcissists reported that they thought negative opinions about their in-group were threatening to them personally. In retribution, collective narcissists made resource distribution decisions that harmed the criticizing out-group. The perception of the in-group criticism as personally threatening mediated the relationship between collective narcissism and retaliatory aggression (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2013a).

Collective narcissists retaliate not only in response to incontrovertibly intentional intergroup threat or criticism. They feel threatened in ambiguous intergroup situations or even such that require a stretch of imagination to be perceived as insulting. For example, Mexican collective narcissists felt offended by the construction of the wall along Mexican-American border in 2006 (Note that the 2006 attempt to justify the wall was more subtle than 2016 one by president Trump who unambiguously insulted Mexicans). According to the American government at the time, the wall was constructed to protect against the terrorist threat. Nevertheless, Mexican collective narcissists wanted to boycott American companies and engage in destructive actions against American institutions in Mexico because they perceived the construction of the wall as an insult to Mexico and Mexicans (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Similarly, in Turkey, collective narcissists rejoiced in the European economic crisis after feeling humiliated by the Turkish wait to be admitted to the European Union. In Portugal, collective narcissists supported hostile actions towards Germans and rejoiced in the German economic crisis because they perceived Germany’s position in the European Union as more appreciated than the position of Portugal.

Stretching the definition of intergroup offence even further, in Poland, collective narcissists supported hostile actions towards the makers of a movie which alluded to one of the least laudable moments in the national history: Polish anti-Semitism during
the Second World War. Even after a transgression as petty as a joke made by a Polish celebrity about the country’s government, Polish collective narcissists threatened physical punishment and engaged in schadenfreude, openly rejoicing in the misfortunes of their “offender” (Golec de Zavala, et al, 2016). Such results indicate that collective narcissists are hypersensitive to signs of the in-group image threat and perceive an insult to the in-group even when it is debatable, not perceived by others, or not intended by the other group. Collective narcissists do not have a sense of humor as far as their in-group is concerned and they are disproportionately punitive in responding to what they consider the in-group image threat.

Such findings are important in the light of analyses suggesting that feeling humiliated in the name of one’s own group is one of the most frequently-reported motives for political radicalization and violence (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Indeed, analyses presented by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (supported by the US Department of Homeland Security) showed that collective narcissism mobilized support for terrorist violence in radical social networks in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Morocco. In radicalized social contexts, either due to the past involvement in political violence (LTTE in Sri Lanka), current ideological climate (Morocco), or explicit ideological agenda (Islamists and Jihadists in Indonesia), collective narcissism predicted support for violent political extremism.

Participants who scored high on the Collective Narcissism Scale and were embedded within the extremist networks felt their group had not received the appreciation it deserved and supported intergroup violence as a means of advancing their in-group’s goals (Jaśko, Webber, & Kruglanski, 2017).

**New developments: Collective narcissism and weaknesses of the Self**
In line with Adorno’s suggestion, recent studies suggest that collective narcissists protect their in-groups’ exaggerated greatness so vehemently because they regard those in-groups as vehicles for fulfilment of their frustrated sense of entitlement. Previous studies linked collective narcissism to the conviction that other groups do not appreciate the in-group sufficiently and to lack of positive automatic associations of the in-group’s symbols with positive stimuli (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009). In addition, collective narcissism was linked to low sense of personal control - not having the ability to influence the course of one’s own life (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Temporarily lowered sense of personal control resulted in heightened collective narcissism suggesting that increased investment in in-group’s exaggerated greatness may be a way of compensating for loss of personal control (Cichocka, Golec de Zavala et al., 2017).

Recent studies, conducted on large and nationally representative samples in Poland and Russia, showed that collective narcissism was related to low self-esteem via individual vulnerable narcissism and it was not related to individual grandiose narcissism (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2017). The dominance analysis and two other relative importance analyses indicated that the role of personal control in explaining variance in collective narcissism was negligible in comparison to vulnerable narcissism (.01 vs. .07) and self-esteem (.02 vs. .07), respectively (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). Collective narcissism was also associated with self-criticism, low self-acceptance, negative affectivity and a tendency to react strongly to environmental stimuli (Golec de Zavala, 2017). Such findings suggest that engaging in the protection of inflated in-group greatness may seem essential to collective narcissists who feel entitled to special treatment but concurrently feel unrecognized and disempowered.

Such results indicate also that collective narcissism may be underlain by deficits in the ability to constructively face adversity, and soothe and restore after threat. Since
collective narcissists may not be able to protect themselves from aversive effects of individual hardship, they may invest their sense of self-worth in a group. When their in-group is undermined their sense of self-worth is destabilized. Thus, they monitor signs of threat to in-group image and overreact when they detect them. Since their emotionality is mostly negative, their reactions are as well. They express anger, contempt, hostility and aggression.

**Collective narcissism vs. in-group satisfaction**

When President Kennedy famously asked Americans, to think not what their nation can do for them but what they can do for their nation, he recognized that a non-instrumental, intrinsically motivated group identity can coexist with one that is instrumental and compensatory. Research on collective narcissism shows that feeling proud and satisfied to be a member of a valuable group are correlated. Correlations between collective narcissism and private collective self-esteem (participant’s own opinion about the in-group, Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) ranged from .31 in Turkey to .50 in Poland (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009; 2013a; 2016). Correlations with in-group satisfaction (feeling glad and satisfied to belong to a valuable group, Leach, et al., 2008), ranged from .48 to .63 in Poland (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2016; Golec de Zavala, et al., 2017). However, research also suggest that these constructs are functionally distinct: they make different predictions for intergroup attitudes and they are related to different emotional profiles. In addition, those two constructs are related to different attitudes towards the self.

Studies showed that in-group satisfaction suppressed the link between collective narcissism and rejection of out-groups. After the overlap was accounted for, the link between collective narcissism and rejection of out-groups became stronger. In addition,
collective narcissism suppressed the link between in-group satisfaction and positive attitudes towards out-groups. In-group satisfaction predicted more positive attitudes towards out-groups after its overlap with collective narcissism was accounted for (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala et al, 2013b). Collective narcissism with in-group positivity partialled out can be interpreted as group-based entitlement without the comfort of the sense of belonging to a valuable group. In-group satisfaction with collective narcissism partialled out can be interpreted as a confident positive evaluation of the in-group, independent of external recognition and resilient to threats and criticism. Indeed, unlike collective narcissism, in-group satisfaction did not predict hypersensitivity to intergroup threat (Golec de Zavala et al, 2016), it was not related to conspiracy beliefs about Jews or Siege mentality (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012) and it was negatively related to the belief in conspiracy explanations of intergroup situations (Cichocka et al., 2016).

Recent studies showed also that unlike collective narcissism, in-group satisfaction was associated with positive affectivity, psychological well-being and greater life-satisfaction. In-group satisfaction was also associated with feeling safe and grounded in social networks and the tendency to experience gratitude. The differences were found when zero order correlations were analyzed and when the positive overlap between in-group satisfaction and collective narcissism was controlled for. However, some of the relationships changed when residual variables were analyzed. For example, the link between collective narcissism and gratitude changed direction suggesting that this link was suppressed by the positive overlap between collective narcissism and in-group satisfaction (Golec de Zavala, 2017). In addition, the link between in-group satisfaction and high self-esteem was strengthened after the overlap between in-group satisfaction and collective narcissism was controlled for suggesting that collective
narcissism partially suppressed the positive link between in-group satisfaction and high self-esteem (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2017).

Findings linking in-group satisfaction to positive affectivity and high self-esteem and collective narcissism with negative affectivity, vulnerable narcissism and out-group hostility are in line with the application of self-determination theory to understand the social identity processes. This literature suggests that nonself-determined motivations to identify with the social group – such as collective narcissistic investment of one’s self-worth in group identity – are linked with in-group bias, defensiveness and negative attitudes towards outgroups. Positive, non-contingent, intrinsic in-group satisfaction is related to high self-esteem and intergroup tolerance (Amiot & Aubin, 2013; Amiot & Sansfaçon, 2011; Legault & Amiot, 2014).

**Future directions**

Collective narcissists engage in intergroup hostility because they invest their sense of self-worth in their group identities and feel motivated to protect their in-groups to protect the vulnerability of their self-images. However, investment of the self-worth in the group identity is not the only way of coping with personal vulnerability. Evidence suggests that there are other ways to stabilize emotional regulation and facilitate resilience to threat, such as self-affirmation (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Future studies could explore whether such interventions can weaken the link between collective narcissism and retaliatory intergroup hostility by fortifying collective narcissistic fragile self-image. Studies indicated that self-affirmation reduced the link between individual grandiose narcissism and interpersonal aggression among adolescents (Thomaes, et al, 2009). Perhaps such intervention could also reduce the link between collective narcissism and compensatory intergroup hostility. Future research could also explore
whether the impact of collective narcissism in shaping intergroup attitudes can be emphasized. Studies indicate that, negative consequences of collective narcissism for intergroup relations are reduced when collective narcissism overlaps with in-group satisfaction (Cichocka, et al., 2016; Golec de Zavala, et al., 2013b, 2016). Future studies would do well to examine how and when in-group satisfaction can be emphasized over collective narcissism in inspiring intergroup attitudes.

Future studies could also advance our understanding of the nature of collective narcissism as an individual difference variable. It is not yet entirely clear whether collective narcissism is a general tendency to form narcissistic attachment to all social groups to which people belong or whether some groups inspire collective narcissism more than others. Groups which possess reified existence - such as national, ethnic or religious groups, or political parties - may be more likely to inspire collective narcissism. However, even members of more mundane and loosely defined groups (students of a certain university, workers in the same organization) were shown to be collective narcissistic about their groups (Galvin, et al., 2015; Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009; 2013a, 2013b).

Another issue that requires further clarification is whether levels of collective narcissism can be changed by situational factors. One unpublished study indicated that negative feedback to the in-group (university students) increased collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2010). Intensification of political rhetoric emphasizing social divisions and idealizing certain groups may increase collective narcissism with respect to this group. Intergroup conflicts may also increase collective narcissism with reference to the in-group engaged in the conflict but not to other in-groups. Moreover, collective narcissism may be increased in groups experiencing relative deprivation (Guerra., et al., 2017). In the context of perceived disadvantage and deprivation, future studies should
carefully distinguish between conditions that increase collective narcissism and retaliatory intergroup hostility from conditions that increase commitment to engage in peaceful social protest, resistance and civil disobedience on behalf of the valued in-group.

Finally, future studies could advance our understanding of the link between collective narcissism and grandiose narcissism. The summary presented in Table 2 suggest that collective narcissism is related to individual grandiose narcissism in the U.S. and the UK but not in Poland, Russia or China. This data is in line with the proposition that the relationship between individual and collective narcissism may be shaped by cultural contexts (Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009). It seems that individualistic cultural contexts that allow for the development of a strong ego may enhance the positive relationship between individual grandiose narcissism and collective narcissism. In line with this proposition, this relationship was found in individualistic cultures, where the projection of perceived individual greatness onto in-groups could be more likely. In collectivistic cultures, commitment to the in-group may be associated with the submission of individual needs or goals thus diminishing the association of grandiose individual narcissism and collective narcissism.

To sum up, collective narcissism is a distinct form of positive attitude towards an in-group uniquely predicting intergroup hostility in the context of intergroup threat. It accounts for intergroup hostility better than individual narcissism, self-esteem or other forms of positive attitudes towards the in-group. National collective narcissism can be distinguished from nationalism on the level of the antecedents and predictions. Collective narcissism suppresses the link between in-group satisfaction and positive attitudes towards out-groups. This suggest that non-contingent in-group satisfaction
refers to a different psychological reality than collective narcissism and can serve as a platform on which to build harmonious intergroup relations.
References


Table 1. Collective Narcissism Scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I wish other groups would more quickly recognize the authority of [my group].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I will never be satisfied until [my group] gets the recognition it deserves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I insist upon [my group] getting the respect that is due to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It really makes me angry when others criticize [my group].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If [my group] had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I do not get upset when people do not notice achievements of [my group] (R).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of [my group].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The true worth of [my group] is often misunderstood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(R) Denotes a reverse coded item.
Table 2. Summary of the relationship between collective narcissism and grandiose individual narcissism as measured by Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) and vulnerable individual narcissism measured by the Hyper-Sensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS). * Denotes significant correlations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>NPI</th>
<th>r (grandiose)</th>
<th>r (vulnerable)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Golec de Zavala, et al., 2013, Study 3</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Golec de Zavala, et al., 2013, Study 4</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Golec de Zavala, et al., 2013, Study 1</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Golec de Zavala, et al., 2009, Study 2</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Golec de Zavala, et al., 2013, Study 2</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cai &amp; Gries, 2013, Study 1, NPI</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cai &amp; Gries, 2013, Study 1, NPI</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cichocka, et al., 2015, Study 2, NPQC</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meta-analytical summary of the data for the relationship between collective narcissism and grandiose narcissism indicates a small effect (0.09). The weighted mean effect estimated by random effect model was significantly larger than 0 (SE=0.03, 95%CI[0.03;0.15]; z=3.20, p=.004, k=13) with a significant heterogeneity between countries ($Q(12)=53.03$, p<.001). Collapsing the relationship in USA and UK vs. Poland, Russia and China indicated significant difference in average effects between those two groups of countries ($Q(2)=42.46$, $p<.001$) and no significant variance within countries ($Q(10)=10.61$, $p=.39$). The relationship exists in USA and UK ($p=0.25$, SE=0.04, 95%CI[0.18;0.31]; $z=7.26$, $p<.001$, $k=5$), but does not exist in Poland, Russia and China ($p=0.01$, SE=0.02, 95%CI[-0.03;0.04]; $z=0.35$, $p=.77$, $k=8$).

Meta-analytical summary of the data for the relationship between collective narcissism and vulnerable narcissism indicates a small effect (0.19). The weighted mean effect estimated by random effect model was significantly larger than 0
(SE=0.03, 95%CI[0.13;0.25]; z=6.06, \( p<0.001, k=6 \)) with a significant heterogeneity (\( Q(5)=17.9, p=0.003 \)).