

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM

INSIGHTS FROM SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

AGNIESZKA GOLEC DE ZAVALA



# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM

*The Psychology of Collective Narcissism* is a ground-breaking text that presents a new theory of collective narcissism, a belief that exaggerated greatness of one's own group should be but is not sufficiently appreciated by others.

The book presents this concept against the background of social identity theory and research. It explores antecedent as well as social and political consequences of collective narcissism. The author discusses how this burgeoning theory and research can help to elucidate a wide range of psychological dynamics involved in pressing societal issues, such as the declining appeal of democracy, increasing populism, decreasing social solidarity, increasing societal polarization and prejudice, intergroup hostility and political violence, social inequality, and fake news and belief in conspiracy theories. Also referring to societal problems exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this highly topical work explores socially shared beliefs as risk factors when predicting responses to crises and highlights conditions in which collective narcissism can be expected. The author also reviews research on interventions reducing the link between collective narcissism, prejudice, and retaliatory intergroup hostility focusing on her recent research on mindfulness.

This is a valuable read for academics and students in psychology and the social sciences, those interested in societal processes as well as professionals dealing with the impact of collective narcissism.

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Insights from Social Identity  
Theory

*Agnieszka Golec de Zavala*



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# INTRODUCTION

## How psychological research on collective narcissism came to be

The majority of current psychological research on collective narcissism – the belief that the exaggerated greatness of one’s own group (the ingroup) is not sufficiently recognized by others – is based on the conceptualization and operationalization of collective narcissism I presented in an empirical paper in 2009 (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) and a subsequent theoretical paper (Golec de Zavala, 2011), and a chapter in *Encyclopaedia of Peace Psychology* (Golec de Zavala, 2012, see Table 0.1). It makes sense to me to start this book by acknowledging my inspirations.

### The idea

My first discussions of collective narcissism took place in Philadelphia during the Summer Institute of the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at University of Pennsylvania in 2005. The Institute brought together scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution, civic servants, and activists in this field to discuss the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation of ethno-national conflicts and forge new paths of interdisciplinary cooperations. Inevitably, we talked about nationalism, defined in political psychology as “*an orientation toward national dominance*” (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 271). As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, the rise of nationalism often precedes political conflict and violence. My colleague, David Goodwin, a clinical psychologist who worked with victims of ethno-national conflicts commented that to him nationalism looks very much like narcissism: obsessions with national greatness that inevitably harms others, including co-nationals. We discussed the possible mechanisms and consequences of the narcissistic dynamic manifesting itself on the social level of the

**TABLE 0.1** Basic assumptions of collective narcissism theory

*Basic assumptions of collective narcissism theory (Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2012; 2018)*

- 1 Collective narcissism is a belief about any social group
- 2 Collective narcissism is relatively stable, individual difference variable
- 3 Collective narcissism is a case of motivated social cognition
- 4 National collective narcissism predicts nationalism
- 5 Collective narcissism predicts (retaliatory) intergroup aggression and hostility
- 6 Collective narcissism predicts prejudice and outgroup derogation (over and above ideological orientations, other aspects of ingroup identification, and individual narcissism)
- 7 Collective narcissism undermines the ingroup's welfare
- 8 Collective narcissism predicts the perception of intergroup aggression and hostility as defensive
- 9 Collective narcissism is an aspect of positive ingroup evaluation, distinct from other aspects of ingroup identification and positive evaluation of the ingroup
- 10 Collective narcissism is a "destructive" ingroup love: It suppresses the potential of "genuine" ingroup love to predict positive attitudes toward outgroups and the ingroup
- 11 Non-narcissistic, "genuine" positive ingroup identification suppresses the link between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility
- 12 Collective narcissism is associated with extrinsic, non-self-determined motivations to identify with the social group, in contrast to non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction that is associated with intrinsic motivation
- 13 Collective narcissism is negatively associated with psychological wellbeing, whereas non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction is positively associated with psychological wellbeing
- 14 Collective narcissism compensates for low and vulnerable self-esteem
- 15 Collective narcissism predicts hypersensitivity to and a tendency to exaggerate intergroup threat, especially to the threat of the ingroup's image
- 16 Collective narcissism increases in response to situations that threaten the ingroup's image, which collective narcissists see as personally threatening
- 17 Collective narcissism predicts conspiratorial mindset and specific conspiracy beliefs

self. In other words, we discussed what would happen if people were narcissistic about their groups. This is how I began the scientific research on the possibility of collective narcissism.

### The levels of the self-concept

The idea that the dynamic characterizing what people think about themselves may be paralleled in what they think about groups they belong to may be derived from self-categorization theory. This theory posits that the self can be categorized at different levels of abstraction: personal, social, and human. People can think about themselves in terms of what is specific to them in comparison to other people. This is thinking at the "I", personal

level of the self. On the social level of the self, group members differentiate themselves from members of other groups, e.g., women as opposed to men, Black people as opposed to White people, etc. People can also think about what makes them human in comparison to other species. At each level, the content of the self-concept is somewhat different and bears consequences for different domains of human behavior (Turner et al., 1987).

Another model, proposed by personality psychologists, posits a tripartite, hierarchical organization of self-related beliefs: the individual self (i.e., what we believe is unique about us and differentiates us from others), the relational self (i.e., what characterizes us in interpersonal relations and what makes those relations unique), and the collective self (i.e., what characterizes us as group members, similar to other members of the same group but different from members of the outgroup, Sedikides et al., 2013). While the self-concept is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (e.g., Arens & Schmidt, 2019), processes underlying self-beliefs on different levels of the self may be the same or at least similar. However, depending on the level of the self, they would have different consequences for cognition, motivation, emotions, and behavior.

### The Frankfurt school

To the best of my knowledge – and I did some literature-digging – Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm were the first to write extensively about collective or group narcissism. They relied on this concept to explain the appeal of fascism in Germany before the Second World War. Adorno used the term collective narcissism to describe the sentiments evoked by Richard Wagner’s music that the Nazis extensively used during their rallies. Adorno wrote: “*Collective narcissism amounts to this: individuals compensate for the consciousness of their social impotence ( ... ) by making themselves, either in reality or merely in their imaginations, into members of a higher, more comprehensive being. To this being they attribute the qualities they themselves lack, and from this being they receive in turn something like a vicarious participation in those qualities*” (Theodor Adorno, 1997, p. 114). Along the same lines, Erich Fromm wrote: “*Even if one is the most miserable, the poorest, the least respected member of a group, there is compensation for one’s miserable condition in feeling ‘I am a part of the most wonderful group in the world. I, who in reality am a worm, become a giant through belonging to the group.’ Consequently, the degree of group narcissism is commensurate with the lack of real satisfaction in life*” (Erich Fromm, 1973, p. 204).

This work inspired the prediction that collective narcissism is motivated by low self-esteem and threatened and vulnerable self-image (Golec de Zavala, 2011). This prediction has been supported by empirical evidence (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2022). Moreover, I hypothesized that collective narcissism should predict intergroup aggression

and its biased perception as the ingroup defense (Golec de Zavala, 2011). Multiple studies confirm this is the case (e.g., Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2016). In addition, the association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility and aggression should also be stronger when group members feel the image or the status of their ingroup are threatened. Again, empirical evidence aligns with this prediction (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016; Hase et al., 2021). I discuss the findings regarding the emotional profile and motivational underpinnings of collective narcissism in Chapter 5 and the relationship between collective narcissism, intergroup antagonism, and intergroup threat in Chapters 4 and 5.

### The status theorists

My colleague, a political scientist, Chris Federico pointed me to the work of status theorists. Their work inspired the prediction that collective narcissism should be particularly preoccupied with the respect and recognition of the ingroup's image, its honor, and status and intolerant to the slightest affronts to the ingroup's exaggerated image (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016; 2021). I expected that hostility and aggressiveness associated with collective narcissism should be driven by perceived threat to the ingroup's image. I discuss research on the association of collective narcissism with hostility, aggression, and hypersensitivity to the ingroup's image threat in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 9. Collective narcissistic hypersensitivity to the ingroup image threat is also seen in the tendency to exaggerate animosity of others, invent enemies, and spin theories about outgroups conspiring against the ingroup. I discuss this association in more detail also in Chapter 10.

Status theories also inspired the prediction that collective narcissists should be susceptible to exaggerated moral panics (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994) targeting individuals or outgroups. Pursuit of status can be framed in moral terms and used to signal a social identity that excludes people who pursue different values as immoral. Empirical evidence aligns with this prediction (Bocian et al., 2021). Collective narcissism may become a belief defining social identity as illustrated by the rise of ultraconservative populism using national collective narcissism to define the (good) "people" and differentiate them from immoral "elites." I discuss the morality of collective narcissism and the role of national collective narcissism in the rise of ultraconservative populism in Chapter 7.

Inspired by writings of Joseph Gusfield (1963), I expected that people would endorse collective narcissisms about any social group, regardless of its relative power and status and use any excuse to believe their ingroup is more unique, exceptional, and deserving than others. In fact, collective narcissism can use the ingroup's suffering, defeat, and low status to believe in and parade the

ingroup's superiority. Many studies confirmed that collective narcissism with reference to various social identities is the same variable that makes the same predictions for inter- and ingroup behaviors and attitudes (e.g., Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2013; Golec de Zavala, 2022; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). Collective narcissism is laden with emotions. Emotions inspire action. Thus, I predicted that collective narcissism should inspire behavior and behavioral intentions including to engage in collective action to pursue greater ingroup's status. In case of advantaged social groups, this means support for supremacist, reactionary social movements. However, in case of disadvantaged groups, this signifies support for social movements for greater equality or revolutionary social movements advocating violent hierarchy reversals. In all social movements collective narcissism would be associated with the sense of moral righteousness of the group cause and acceptance of political violence (e.g., Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). I discuss this topic in more detail in Chapter 4 when I talk about terrorism, Chapter 7 on populism, and in Chapter 9 where I focus on collective action for equality.

### ***The Collective Narcissism Scale***

The writings of the Frankfurt Scholar and the status theorists gave base to the formulation of collective narcissism theory and inspired now burgeoning research. Most of this research uses the Collective Narcissism Scale (Table 0.2). I constructed this scale using items from the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory—III (Millon, 2006) and the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventories proposed by Emmons (1987) and Raskin and Terry (1988). To create the Collective Narcissism Scale, where it made sense, I applied the items of those measurements to the group rather than to the self. For example, the item from the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory that read “*People have never given me enough recognition for the things that I have done*” became “*Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of my group*” (See Table 0.1 for all versions of the scale). I was helped by my colleagues Roy Eidelson and Nuwan Jayawickreme to collect the first American dataset. I collected data in Poland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. One study that examined the association of collective narcissism and explicit and implicit collective self-esteem was conducted with assistance of my undergraduate students in Poland, Aleksandra Cichočka, and Jan Swierszcz. Professor Irena Iskra-Golec, my mom, helped me to collect data on the project investigating the link between collective narcissism and retaliatory aggression. I had invaluable discussions on the concept of collective narcissism with Bob Schatz. Author of the concept of blind and constructive patriotism, Bob Schatz was a discussant of the first conference paper I gave on collective narcissism at the International Society of Political Psychology Annual Meeting in Portland, USA, in 2007.

**TABLE 0.2** The Collective Narcissism Scale based on Golec de Zavala et al. (2009)

<b>The Collective Narcissism Scale</b>	
<i>Please think about X group while responding to the items of the scale and indicate to what extent you agree with them</i>	
<i>1 = Totally disagree to 6 = Totally agree</i>	
We researched national, ethnic, ideological, religious groups and groups defined as students of the same university. In some studies we asked participants to first read the items first and assess whether they refer to any group they belong. In some studies we inserted the ingroup's name directly into the items, e.g., "Black people/White people in America/women/Poles deserve special treatment."	
All versions of the scale are available on <a href="https://collectivenarcissism.com/">https://collectivenarcissism.com/</a>	
9 item version (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009)	<p>I wish other groups would more quickly recognize authority of my group.</p> <p>My group deserves special treatment.</p> <p>I will never be satisfied until my group gets all it deserves.</p> <p>I insist upon my group getting the respect that is due to it.</p> <p>It really makes me angry when others criticize my group.</p> <p>If my group had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place.</p> <p>I do not get upset when people do not notice achievements of my group. (reversed)</p> <p>Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of my group.</p> <p>The worth of my group is often misunderstood.</p>
5 item version (based on Golec de Zavala et al., 2009 first used in Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016; 2020)	<p>My group deserves special treatment.</p> <p>I will never be satisfied until my group gets the recognition it deserves.</p> <p>It really makes me angry when others criticize my group.</p> <p>If my group had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place.</p> <p>Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of my group.</p>
3 item version (based on Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, first used in Mole et al., 2021 psychometric details available at <a href="https://collectivenarcissism.com/">https://collectivenarcissism.com/</a> )	<p>My group deserves special treatment. Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of my group. I will ever be satisfied until my group gets the recognition it deserves.</p>

To the best of my knowledge, three more instruments to assess collective narcissism have been proposed by other scholars. Items to assess group narcissism were independently developed by Patricia Lyons and colleagues (2010). A multifaceted Collective Narcissism Scale was proposed by Matthew Montoya and colleagues (2020). A scale to assess Communal Collective Narcissism was designed by Magdalena Žemojtel-Piotrowska and colleagues (2021). I believe those instruments tap to the same concept and research that uses them will extend the collective narcissism theory I am outlining in this book. Collective narcissism theory inspired multiple conceptual replications of findings supporting the original hypotheses and demonstrations of generalizability of the theory to many different contexts. This body of literature has been summarized by my former students (e.g., Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). It has also been creatively reinterpreted to generate new hypotheses (e.g., Jaško et al., 2020; Žemojtel-Piotrowska, 2021). In this book, I am attempting to integrate those perspectives on psychological research on collective narcissism.

### The contribution

The research on collective narcissism proved relevant to understanding why group members hate (Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020, see Chapters 4, 5, 7, and 9), defy logic, science, and reason to construct and spread conspiracy theories (Golec de Zavala et al., 2022, see Chapter 10), to understand how people behave in crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the climate change crisis (Bertin et al., 2021; Federico et al., 2021; Sternisko et al., 2021; van Bavel et al., 2022, see Chapter 7), under intergroup threat (Golec de Zavala, 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016, Chapters 4 and 6); to understand populism and support for ruthless leaders (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021, see Chapters 7 and 8), to understand the dynamics of exclusion and collective action for social justice (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023, see Chapters 6 and 9) and to differentiate aspects of ingroup identification making opposite predictions for intergroup hostility vs. tolerance (Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019, see Chapter 2). Collective narcissism research and theory provides explanation of many contradictory findings in social and political psychology. To understand its implications it is important to understand what collective narcissism is.

### There is such a thing as collective narcissism

In psychological literature the term collective narcissism has been used to denote various things, different from what I understand as collective narcissism (e.g., collective version of self-serving, Putnam et al., 2018; Zaromb et al., 2018; nationalism, Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). On another hand, I

think different terms tap into how I understand collective narcissism (e.g., White nationalism, Reyna et al., 2022; group entitlement, Endevelt et al., 2021). I believe theory of collective narcissism reveals psychological motivation that underlies nationalism, White nationalism, or group entitlement. National narcissism is nothing else than collective narcissism with reference to a national group (Cai and Gries, 2013; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020), but collective narcissism can refer to other, intersecting groups. I discuss the importance of this fact especially in Chapter 9.

### ***Individual difference variable***

Collective narcissism is an individual difference variable. Just as individual narcissism, it characterizes people with relative degree of stability across social identities, time, and situations. I discuss the similarities, differences, and the relationship between individual and collective narcissism in Chapter 1. As we belong to many groups at the same time, we endorse collective narcissism with reference to many groups at the same time. The tendency to endorse collective narcissism with reference to one social group predicts a tendency to endorse collective narcissism with reference to other social groups we belong to. However, there are certain asymmetries in these predictions shaped by differences in groups' relative status, which I discuss in Chapters 7 and 9. For example, the positive overlap is stronger between American and White collective narcissism than between American and Black collective narcissism or between Polish and male collective narcissism than among Polish and female collective narcissism.

Longitudinal studies that measured the levels of collective narcissism of the same people at different points in time show that those levels do not change significantly over time (Federico et al., 2021; 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; Górska et al., 2020; 2022). Thus, levels of collective narcissism “characterize” us as individuals. However, collective narcissism can also characterize groups. This happens when collective narcissism is embraced by group members as a normative interpretation of their shared identity, a lens through which they want to see the core of what brings them together and makes them think about themselves as “us.” I discuss how narcissism becomes collective in this sense in more detail in Chapters 1 and 7.

### ***A belief about a group, any group***

As this aspect of collective narcissism theory sometimes gets misinterpreted, I think it is important to emphasize that collective narcissism is a belief about any social identity. National narcissism is not a qualitatively different phenomenon but rather collective narcissism with reference to a national group. In fact, the majority of existing research on collective narcissism examined

national collective narcissism. However, from the very beginning, I conceptualized collective narcissism as a belief that can be held about any group people identify with. Indeed, in one of my first studies to test and validate the Collective Narcissism Scale, I asked participants to first read the statements of the scale that used the generic term “my group” and then think whether they apply to any group they belong to. Participants named groups such as a nation, a religion, a school, a university, or a social class. In all those groups the items formed a coherent scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009).

In another study, collective narcissism was assessed as an aspect of identification with a university (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). In the first British study, collective narcissism was measured with reference to ethnic groups (Black people and White people) in the United Kingdom (Golec de Zavala, 2007; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Those studies showed that the items of the Collective Narcissism Scale tapped to a common latent factor and indicated the same underlying variable with a high degree of coherence and reliability. In other words, the Collective Narcissism Scale is reliable and valid: its items coherently measure what they are supposed to measure, in all social groups it was applied to. Studies also showed that the Collective Narcissism Scale is invariant across countries, social identities, and times. This means it measures the same concept in different countries (Cichocka et al., 2022; Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2021), social groups (e.g., men and women, Golec de Zavala, 2022, White people and Black people, Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023), and time-points (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023).

Collective narcissism was assessed with reference to religious groups (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; Mole, et al., 2021; Mashuri et al., 2022; Yustisia et al., 2020), ideological groups (Jasko et al., 2020; Putra, et al., 2022), political parties (Bocian et al., 2021; Gronfeldt et al., 2022), sport teams fans (Larkin et al., 2021), gender groups (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023), groups defined by sexual orientation (Bagci et al., 2022; Górska et al., 2020), and ethnic and racial groups (Bagci et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022; West et al., 2022). In all those groups collective narcissism made the same predictions with reference to intergroup beliefs and behavior.

### ***An aspect of ingroup identification***

Collective narcissism is an aspect of ingroup identification. Social or ingroup identity denotes the group a person belongs to. In this sense we have various intersecting social identities because we belong to various intersecting groups. However, not all those groups are equally important or consequential to us. Ingroup identification is the degree to which one’s social identity is psychologically consequential (Ellemers et al., 2002; Leach et al., 2008). Apart from

having different strength, ingroup identification has also different aspects (Ashmore et al., 2004; Leach et al., 2008). Collective narcissism is one of them. More specifically, collective narcissism is an aspect of positive ingroup evaluation, which is an aspect of psychological investment in the ingroup. A lot of valuable insights come from differentiating the opposite predictions of otherwise positively associated collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction, a non-narcissistic, unpretentious positive evaluation of the ingroup. I discuss collective narcissism in the context of other concepts tapping various aspects of ingroup identification in Chapter 2.

### ***Motivated social cognition***

Collective narcissism is an evaluative, emotionally laden, and unrealistic (biased) belief about an ingroup (it can be any group we belong to). It pertains to overly positive evaluation of the ingroup, belief in its greatness, exceptionality, uniqueness, entitlements, and deservingness. It is laden with resentment because the ingroup's entitlements are never seen as satisfactorily met and externally recognized. The ingroup image is so unrealistically inflated that collective narcissists need others to help them buttress it. They need everyone else to confirm it and hold it with them. Thus, the ingroup's assumed greatness is contingent on recognition of others, recognition that is never perceived as sufficient.

The function of collective narcissism is not to adequately represent reality but to satisfy psychological needs. Thus, collective narcissism represents a case of motivated social cognition. I discuss this in detail in Chapter 10 concluding the book. Collective narcissism generates and expresses specific (to arrive at a specific conclusion) and nonspecific (to arrive at any conclusion fast) cognitive motivations. Collective narcissists are motivated to arrive at two specific conclusions: that the ingroup is exceptional despite not being universally recognized and that the ingroup's hostility is defensive, righteous, and justified. They need to believe their ingroup is exceptional to compensate low self-esteem and vulnerable self-image (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020, 2023; Chapter 5). Their nonspecific motive is the need to engage in meaning-making activity that follows violation of a committed belief (that the ingroup is extraordinary) by another belief (that nobody recognizes it).

Specific and nonspecific motivations bias social cognition. In consequence, collective narcissism is associated with a number of distinctly delusional beliefs about the ingroup, the outgroups, and the intergroup contexts. In Chapter 4, I discuss how collective narcissism motivates the belief that the world is against "us" therefore our aggression is defensive, justified, and righteous. In Chapters 7 and 8, I discuss findings suggesting that national collective narcissists see themselves as revolutionaries challenging the established status quo even when they represent groups traditionally

advantaged by the status quo. Those “*revolutionaries in reverse*” challenge the establishment that does not allow them to discriminate against others as much as they would like and feel entitled to.

### Situations that increase collective narcissism

Although collective narcissism is an individual difference variable, relatively stable across time and social identities, there are situational factors that can increase collective narcissism. To the best of my knowledge, studies are yet to demonstrate whether collective narcissism can be decreased. I am proposing how this could be done in Chapters 5 and 8. Existing research identified situations that affect collective narcissism in a longer and a short run. Just as group membership and ingroup identification (Mullen et al., 1992; Thomas et al., 2020), higher level of collective narcissism is typically predicted by disadvantaged group membership (Bagci et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Higher levels of national identification and national narcissism are also predicted by shorter experience with nationhood (as in postcolonial countries) and lower levels of globalization (Cichocka et al., 2022).

Experimental research has also shown that manipulations that increase the salience of threat to social identity may temporarily increase collective narcissism. I discuss this research in Chapter 4, pointing to the importance of specifying which conditions increase collective narcissism without simultaneously increasing other aspects of ingroup identification (Guerra et al., 2022; 2023, cf. Bertin et al., 2022). This is because it is collective narcissism *specifically* (in contrast to other aspects of ingroup identification) that links intergroup threat to hostility toward the threatening others (Bagci et al., 2021; Bertin et al., 2022; Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Guerra et al., 2022), reliably predicts hypersensitivity to intergroup threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016), distress in reaction to intergroup exclusion (Golec de Zavala, 2022; Hase et al., 2021), greater retaliatory hostility under intergroup threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013), and conspiratorial mindset (Golec de Zavala, 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018). The overlap between non-narcissistic ingroup identification (particularly non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction) typically suppresses predictions of collective narcissism. I discuss those findings in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

To study specific and unique effect of collective narcissism it is crucial to experimentally change collective narcissism without confounding it with other aspects of ingroup identification. It is also important to remember that many studies failed to manipulate collective narcissism. To the best of my knowledge, no studies so far examined how collective narcissism as an individual difference characteristic develops over time. In comparison to the

developmental dynamics of individual narcissism, developmental aspect of collective narcissism is unknown and understudied. What seems to be clear though is that collective narcissism is distinct from individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2023). I discuss the relationship between individual and collective narcissism in more detail in Chapter 1.

Differentiating collective narcissism as an aspect of ingroup identification allowed disentangling many contradictory findings in intergroup psychology and findings pertaining to the role of ingroup identification in inter- and intragroup processes as well as in shaping group members beliefs and wellbeing. As the aim of psychological science is to gain clarity and precision in our understanding of mechanisms of human behavior, I believe collective narcissism research makes a solid contribution to psychological science which this book aims to outline and summarize.

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# 1

## HOW DOES NARCISSISM BECOME COLLECTIVE?

### Narcissism and destruction of democratic societies

When Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, David Brooks, New York Time columnist characterized Putin's identity politics as 'narcissistic'. The proposition that political leaders' narcissism is responsible for one country waging a war on another and committing atrocities in the process is not uncommon. Psychiatrist and survivor of Nazi and Stalinist occupation in Poland, Andrzej Łobaczewski (2006) coined a term "*ponerology*," a study of political expressions of evil. He argued that political violence is perpetrated by a state that allows people with psychological disorders to occupy positions of power. One form of psychopathology commonly attributed to ruthless leaders is what Erich Fromm (1964) and then psychiatrist Otto Kernberg (1984) called "*malignant narcissism*," a manifestation of narcissistic personality disorder associated with cruelty and sadism. Historian Ian Hughes (2018) argued that malignant narcissism of politicians such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, or Donald Trump brought about destruction of democratic systems in their respective countries. Political violence perpetrated by terrorists and extremists has also been explained in terms of their narcissistic features (Bushman, 2018; Post, 1984; Tschantret, 2020). Virulent prejudice such as racism has been interpreted as an expression of individual narcissism of those who endorse it (Bell, 1980). This tendency to individualize what is a societal problem is in contrast to the emerging consensus that psychological profiling of perpetrators of political violence is not supported by evidence (Kruglanski et al., 2019).

Can a personality feature of one individual be responsible for the upsurges in political hatred? Sick and malignant individuals, even powerful ones,

cannot wage wars, commit atrocities on a mass scale, perpetrate all hate crimes, and produce all hate speech. Hateful regimes require immense societal coordination, which cannot be achieved by one person. Societies are not managed by dictates of maniacs but by shared ideas. What coordinates societies is a sense of common identity, a unifying ideology, an understanding of who “we” are and why what “we” do as a group is good. Psychiatrist Robert Lifton (1986) used a term “*malignant normality*” to denote widely accepted moralizing ideology that elicits societal polarization and enables hatred of groups and political violence. This idea points to what I think is the better representation of reality: that narcissistic antagonism may become collective, and this is when it becomes a societal problem.

Can narcissism characterize groups and societies? Political leaders may play an important role in propagating narcissistic ideas, but they would not be rulers if they were only imposing and not at all inspiring ideological changes captivating imagination and motivations of their followers. Leaders shape what the group imagines itself to be, but only to the extent to which the group has shaped the leader to best express its identity (Hogg, 2001). Thus, the most important question about the Russian invasion in Ukraine is not about individual pathology of Vladimir Putin but about beliefs and motivations that the multiple enablers, followers, and obligers of Putin share. In order to better understand how societies hate, we need to understand collective narcissism and differentiate it from individual narcissism. Individual narcissism is a personality feature. Collective narcissism is a belief about the ingroup, an aspect of ingroup identity, and an element of ideology uniting group members. Collective narcissism is a belief about the ingroup endorsed by group members who may differ in the levels of intensity with which they endorse this belief.

The proposition that narcissism can be collective has been articulated in the literature in several different ways. Some authors have argued that societies become narcissistic because of the relentless spread of narcissistic characteristics among their members (e.g., Campbell, et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). It has also been also proposed that groups can have narcissistic features and act in narcissistic ways (e.g., Adorno, 1951; Baumeister, 2002). Collective narcissism theory integrates those suggestions and describes the process by which narcissism becomes collective.

### Individual narcissism: Disorder and personality feature

American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-5* (APA, 2013) defines narcissistic personality disorder as “*pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), a constant need for admiration, and lack of empathy*” (p. 669). According to statistics, about 5% of Americans “have” narcissistic disorder, and 75% of

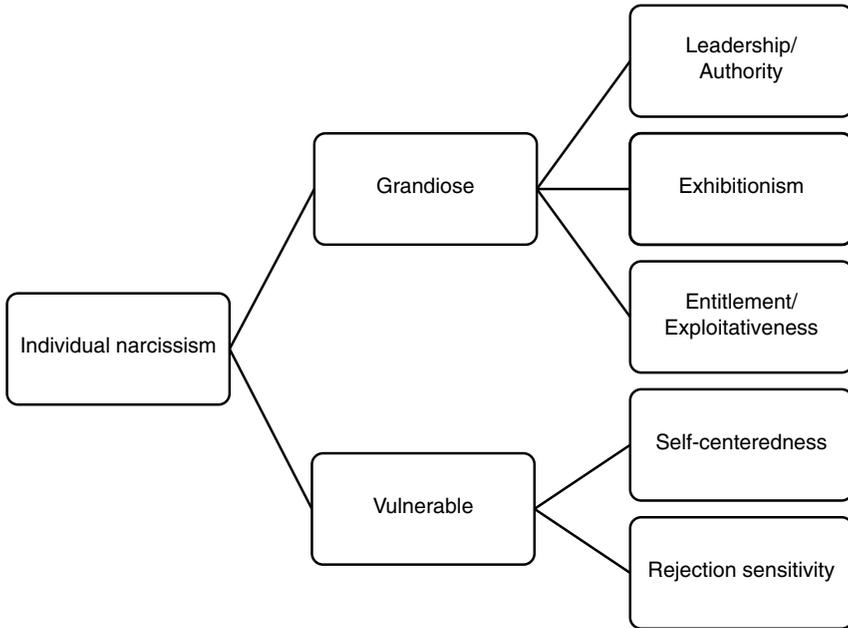
them are men. Narcissistic personality disorder comprises two forms between which narcissists fluctuate in response to life events: grandiose, when they feel validated, mighty, and energetic and vulnerable, when they feel unappreciated and frustrated (Pincus, 2013).

Narcissism is also a personality feature whose latent structure is continuous: “normal” people differ in the degree of their narcissism, and the vast majority centers around the mean (Aslinger et al., 2018). In other words, psychological researchers assume that apart from those disordered narcissists who lost touch with reality, “normal” people can exhibit narcissistic features. Based on where these people stand on the narcissistic continuum, we can predict how they will behave. Whether clinical (i.e., the disorder) vs. non-clinical (i.e., the personality characteristic) narcissism are two distinct categories or a continuum is a matter of ongoing discussion (Miller et al., 2017; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). But even the narcissistic personality, as opposed to narcissistic disorder, is difficult to concisely define. Narcissus has several faces and masks (Sedikides, 2021).

### Models of narcissistic personality

A classic model of individual narcissism is sometimes called “a doughnut” or “a mask” model. It is rooted in psychodynamic psychology. It suggests that narcissistic self-aggrandizement covers internal fragility of the narcissistic ego, not always known to narcissists themselves. Empirical support for this model is debated. Rather than inherently wounded and self-doubting, narcissism is more adequately interpreted as contingent on, or even addicted to, admiration of others (Kuchynka & Bosson, 2018). Individual narcissism has been defined as an excessive self-love or inflated, grandiose view of oneself that requires continual external validation (e.g., Crocker & Park, 2004; Emmons, 1987; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). In recent conceptualizations narcissism is defined as “*entitled self-importance*” (Krizan & Herlache, 2018, p. 6) or as a composite of “*egocentric exceptionalism*” and “*social selfishness*” (Sedikides, 2021). Narcissistic people think they are so unique and important that they are in position to demand special treatment and recognition from others. However, the modern models of narcissistic personality recognize also its vulnerable aspects.

Authors agree that all narcissism is characterized by antagonistic pursuit of recognition and privileged status as well as the lack of empathy and care for others (Grapsas et al., 2020; Mahadevan & Jordan, 2022; Mahadevan et al., 2019; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019). The dualistic model of narcissism (Figure 1.1) assumes that narcissists pursue status in different ways. Grandiose narcissists use cunning, manipulation, and straightforward coercion to assert their dominance and recognition from others. This presentation of narcissism is characterized by high self-esteem, open expression of self-entitlement, self-



**FIGURE 1.1** Aspects of individual narcissism according to the dual model.

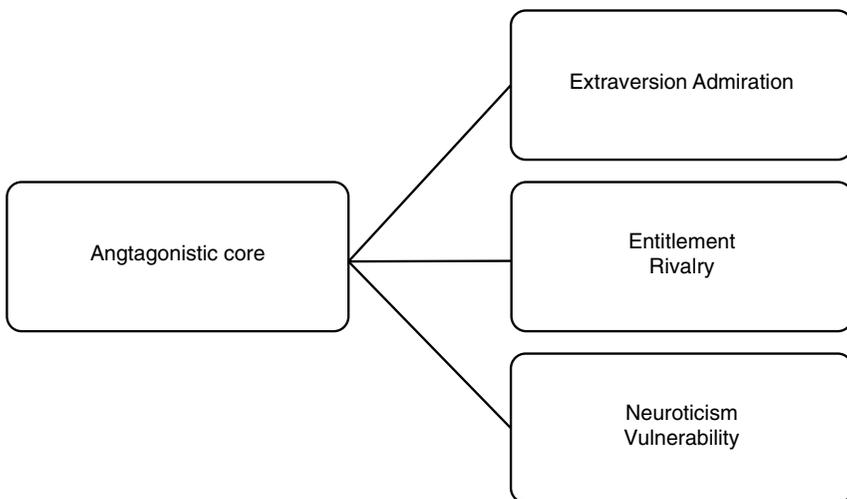
aggrandizement, vanity, and exploitativeness. Grandiose narcissists are seen by others as arrogant. Vulnerable (also labeled hypersensitive) narcissists use personal humiliation and suffering to pursue recognition and status. Vulnerable narcissism is associated with shame, frustration, detachment from others, defensive hostility, and passive resentment. Unlike grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism is negatively associated with self-esteem (Krizan & Herlache, 2018) but positively associated with perceived victimhood, a tendency to exaggerate own disadvantages and to perceive oneself as a perpetual victim (Kaufman, 2020). Unlike grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism is associated with neuroticism, a trait pertaining to chronically negative emotionality, high reactivity to stress, and inability to constructively regulate emotions (Miller et al., 2011; 2017).

A somewhat similar differentiation of admiration (well-adapted, happy, self-focused self-aggrandizing through charm, assertiveness, and personal dominance) and rivalry (maladaptive, unhappy and frustrated, competitive self-aggrandizing through devaluing of others) aspects of (grandiose) narcissism has also been proposed (Back et al., 2013; but see Du et al., 2022, for the classification of admiration as grandiose and rivalry as vulnerable aspect of narcissism). While some authors maintain grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are two uncorrelated presentations of narcissistic personality (Miller et al., 2011), others propose that individual narcissism oscillates

between grandiose and vulnerable states in response to situational pressures (Giacomin & Jordan, 2016; Pincus et al., 2014).

Research also indicates that narcissists use various excuses to demand special recognition. For example, they demand special treatment because of what they perceive as their unprecedented skills and competences (agentic aspect) or because of their exceptional charity and generosity (communal aspect, Gebauer et al., 2012). Agentic narcissists perceive themselves as more effective, intelligent, and skilled than others and demand constant admiration of their expertise and problem-solving triumphs whose uniqueness they exaggerate. Communal narcissists demand admiration for their generosity, charity, devotion, and actions on behalf of others. However, the prosocial, others-oriented façade of communal narcissism is misleading. Communal narcissists use charity to obtain recognition and status. Narcissistic charity, though is not motivated by compassion, which is a self-transcending desire to ease the suffering of others. Instead, narcissistic charity is an impression management strategy that is not performed when others are not looking (Crocker & Canevello, 2018). Individual narcissism may even be expressed by self-harming, pathological altruism: ostentatiously placing the needs of others over one's own. This form of altruism is linked to vulnerable narcissism (Bachner-Melman, & Oakley, 2016).

Most authors agree that the different expressions of narcissism share the same antagonistic core (Krizan & Herlache, 2018; Miller et al., 2017). In an effort to articulate what all aspects of individual narcissism have in common, psychological researchers proposed also a trifurcated model of individual narcissism (Krizan & Herlache, 2018; Miller et al., 2021, Figure 1.2). They



**FIGURE 1.2** Aspects of individual narcissism according to the trifurcated model.

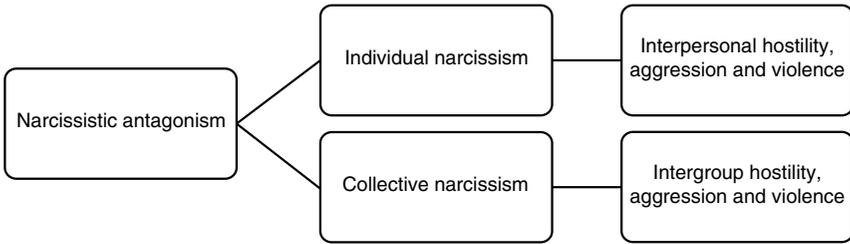
argue that “*the heterogeneity in narcissism is optimally captured using three dimensions, and the trifurcated model uses three underlying factors to conceptualize narcissism: agentic extraversion (also called admiration), interpersonal antagonism (also called entitlement or rivalry), and neuroticism (also called vulnerability)*” (Du et al., 2022 p. 575). Indeed, extensive empirical evidence indicates that narcissistic interpersonal antagonism robustly predicts interpersonal aggression (Vize et al., 2019).

### Narcissism and interpersonal aggression

Three recent literature reviews meta-analytically summarized evidence behind the association between individual narcissism and interpersonal aggression. One of them looked at the association between individual narcissism (all presentations and measurements) and aggression (behavior attempting to harm another sentient being that does not wish to be harmed) and violence (extreme aggression with the purpose to cause physical harm, injury, or death) in over 300 studies (Kjærвик & Bushman, 2021). Aggression is typically assessed in psychological studies by self-report measures of aggressive behavioral intentions or behavioral measures such as intensity of a noise blast administered to an opponent. Violence is typically assessed by convictions for violent crimes and self-reported measures of acceptance of violence in others. Overall, individual narcissism is robustly and positively related to interpersonal aggression and violence. This association is stronger when narcissists feel excluded, undermined, or provoked. In other words, individual narcissism reliably predicts retaliatory aggression in interpersonal relations (Kjærвик & Bushman, 2021).

Another meta-analysis examined the relationship between individual narcissism and aggressive behavior in laboratory experiments (Hyatt et al., 2019). It found that a positive association between individual narcissism and interpersonal aggression was only slightly smaller than the one found in analyses that included self-reported measures of hostile or violent intentions (.20 vs. .25, respectively). A third meta-analytical review looked at associations of three aspects of individual narcissism (vulnerable rivalry, narcissistic antagonism and narcissistic extraversion) with interpersonal aggression and hostility in over a hundred of studies (Du et al., 2022). It specified that vulnerable narcissistic rivalry is associated with reactive, provoked retaliatory aggression. Narcissistic antagonism underlying grandiose and vulnerable presentations of individual narcissism was the strongest predictor of interpersonal aggression. Narcissistic agentic extraversion characterizing grandiose narcissism was only weakly associated with interpersonal aggression after the antagonism factor was taken into account (Du et al., 2022).

In sum, psychological research suggests that individual narcissism (whatever its presentation or aspect) has interpersonal antagonism in its core and predicts

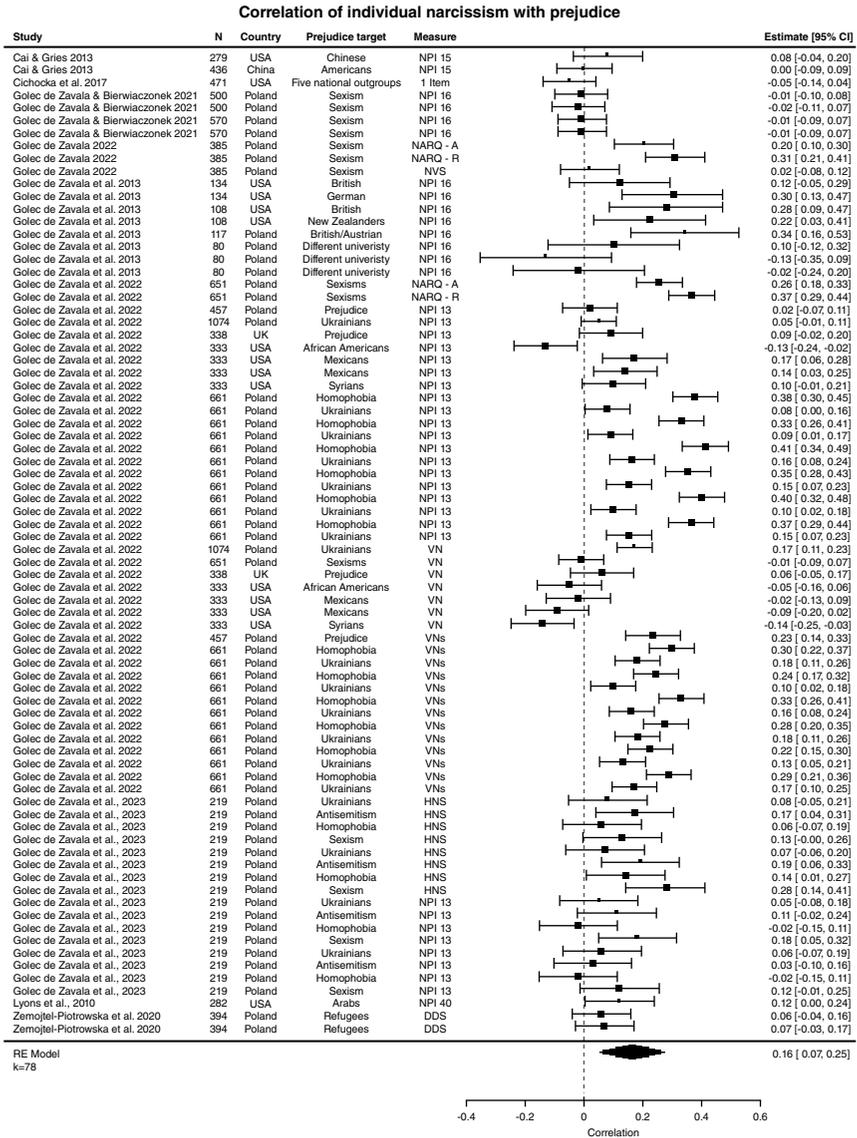


**FIGURE 1.3** The parallel associations between individual narcissism and interpersonal hostility and collective narcissism and intergroup hostility.

interpersonal aggressiveness and predilection towards violence. Does this mean that individual narcissism should also predict outgroup hatred? In psychology, hatred of groups is labeled prejudice. Whether it is implicit (not openly expressed and sometimes not known to a person that endorses it), explicit (available in introspection and self-report), or blatant (openly endorsed), prejudice justifies social inequalities and it is linked to political violence, behavior with intention to harm other people *because* they are members of hated outgroups. Intergroup aggression and violence are different than interpersonal aggression and violence. On intergroup levels others are hated not because we know and despise them but because they belong to a group we hate and despise. Given the vast psychological research on individual narcissism, and suggestions that prejudice is narcissistic (Bell, 1980; Emmons, 1987), there is surprisingly little empirical evidence linking individual narcissism to prejudice, intergroup aggression, or political violence (Hodson & Dhont, 2015). Instead, evidence suggests that outgroup hate and intergroup hostility are directly predicted by collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). Thus, individual narcissism may be implicated in prejudice because of its link with collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023). Figure 1.3 presents a theoretical model of how narcissistic core of individual and collective narcissism finds different expressions in interpersonal and intergroup aggression and hostility.

### Narcissism and outgroup hate

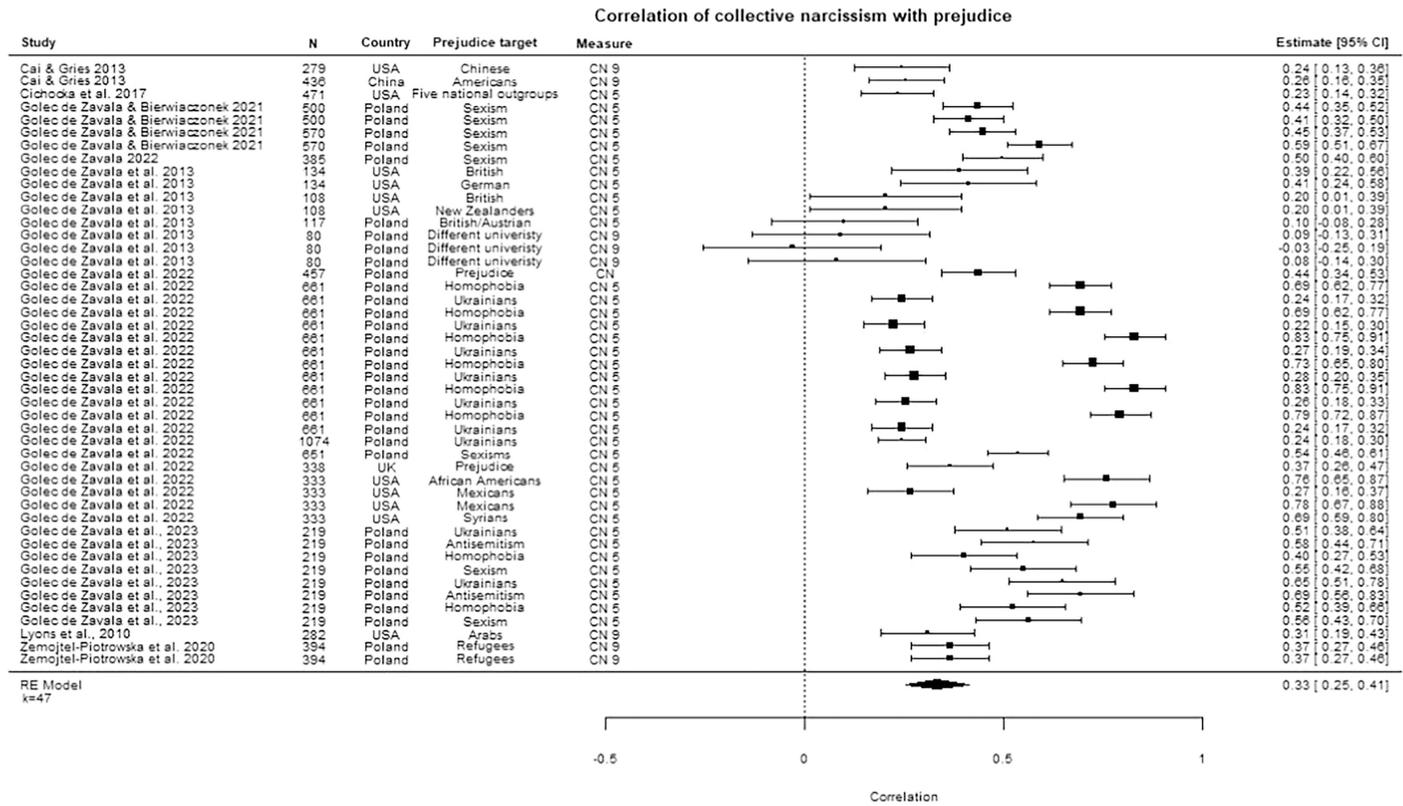
Collective narcissism is an intergroup expression of narcissistic antagonism, featuring in escalating intergroup conflict and symptomatic of societal polarization. Multiple studies showed that collective narcissism – with reference to a nation and among advantaged groups (for a review see Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023) is associated with prejudice, intergroup aggression, and political violence (see Chapters 4 and 5 for details). Up-to-date over 20 separate studies in various countries examined the associations among individual and collective narcissism and prejudice and intergroup hostility. Those studies allow comparisons of the



**FIGURE 1.4** The summative association between individual narcissism and prejudice.<sup>1</sup>

contribution of individual and collective narcissism to explaining variance in prejudice. The summary of the associations between individual narcissism and prejudice can be seen in Figure 1.4.

In comparison, Figure 1.5 presents the associations between collective narcissism and prejudice. The effects closer to the right are larger and



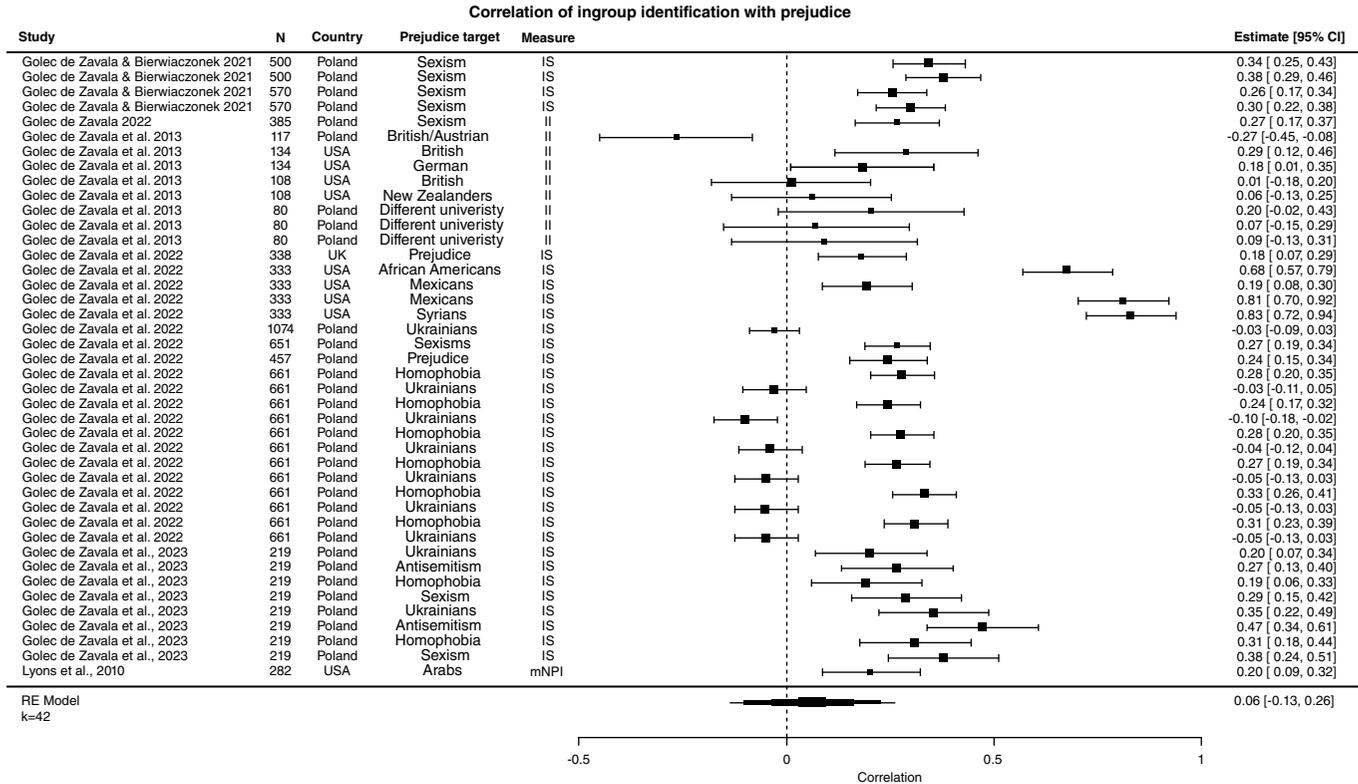
**FIGURE 1.5** The summative association between collective narcissism and prejudice.

statistically significant. As those figures illustrate, the average association between (national) collective narcissism and prejudice is over twice as large as the (barely significant) association between individual narcissism and prejudice (.33 for collective narcissism and .16 for individual narcissism). Those findings are consistent across various forms and targets of prejudice and across diverse measurements of prejudice.

Figure 1.6 summarizes the associations between non-narcissistic aspects of ingroup identification and prejudice analyzed in the reviewed studies. As can be seen, collective narcissism is a more robust predictor of prejudice not only in comparison to individual narcissism but also in comparison to other aspects of ingroup identification.

The results of the meta-analytical summaries align with results of commonality analyses on primary data that allow for separating unique contribution of multiple predictors of prejudice. Those results indicate that individual narcissism predicts prejudice only inasmuch as it is related to collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023, cf Mayer et al., 2020). The findings linking collective narcissism, rather than narcissistic personality, to outgroup hate align with the emerging consensus that perpetrators of hate crimes or political violence (e.g., terrorism) do not share a common personality disorder (Gill & Corner, 2017) or personality syndrome that directly predisposes them toward political violence (Monahan, 2015). Instead, outgroup hate and support for political violence are predicted by people's beliefs about their social identity, social system, and justice (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Vergani et al., 2020; Webber et al., 2020). Perhaps perpetrators of outgroup hate-motivated killings, like the one perpetrated by a White supremacist against the protesters of the alt-right Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville on August 12, 2017, display narcissistic features (Bushman, 2018). However, this is not crucial for our understanding of the roots of political violence. Instead, better understanding collective narcissism may be.

Careful consideration of manifestos issued by hate crime perpetrators indicates that they are inspired by the collective narcissistic sense of the group's entitlement rather than a conviction about personal deservingness (Feinberg et al., 2019). For example, in his "Letter to the American People," Osama bin Laden who inspired the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington in 2001 called for the moral betterment of Western civilization under the guidance of fundamentalist Islam and warned that resistance would meet with violence (Full text: Bin Laden's "Letter to America," 2002). The letter expresses Bin Laden's belief that the group he represents is superior to others. It should therefore dominate and guide other groups. Moreover, this group is entitled to punish members of other groups for the lack of proper recognition of this group's extraordinary characteristics and privileged position. What perpetrators of political violence have in common is collective rather than individual narcissism. If we want to understand how narcissistic personality is implicated in political violence, we need to consider how narcissism becomes collective.



**FIGURE 1.6** The summative association between other aspects of ingroup identification and prejudice.

## How does narcissism become collective?

### **The “narcissistic epidemic”**

One suggestion in psychological literature is that narcissism becomes collective because more and more group members display features of narcissistic personality. Psychologist Jean Twenge and her colleagues (2008) argued that levels of individual narcissism have been steadily increasing in the United States between 1970s and the first decade of the new millennium. They famously reported results of a temporal meta-analysis based on 85 studies that revealed a significant increase in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory scores among American college students between 1979 and 2006. While individual levels of narcissism decline throughout adulthood (Foster et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2010), the mean of individual narcissism scores between different age cohorts has seemingly increased. Authors also pointed to the increases in the frequency in which the “I,” “me,” “mine,” and “my” pronouns in comparison to “we” and “us” and other narcissistic phrases were used in American books (Twenge et al., 2012; 2013).

The consequence of the “narcissistic epidemic” would be that more and more narcissists project their grandiose egos on their ingroups and exaggerate the image of their ingroups similarly to the way they exaggerate their self-image. People tend to project their self-esteem on the groups they belong to (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005; Otten, 2002; Van Veelen et al., 2011). However, there is also evidence that people with narcissistic personality use their ingroups instrumentally. They bask in the ingroups glory as long as the ingroups are positively evaluated by others but distance themselves from ingroups that are criticized and can no longer serve to boost the narcissistic ego (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2008). Thus, narcissists are not loyal ingroup members, and they do not have problems leaving the groups that no longer serve their needs. In contrast collective narcissists cannot separate themselves from the ingroup in which their superiority needs are invested. Their self-evaluation depends on the ingroup’s image. Rather than projecting, collective narcissists seem to be investing their self-views in the image of their ingroups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; 2020; 2023).

As soon as the “narcissistic epidemic” was announced in the United States and other countries in the world, the robustness of the findings was questioned. Analyses on larger and nationally representative samples of American college students including various measures of narcissistic personality and self-enhancement, and controlling for temporal invariance (statistical analyses of whether the psychological measurement assesses the same construct at different points in time) showed little increase in narcissistic features between 1982 and 2015 (Roberts et al., 2010; Trzesniewski et al., 2008; Wetzel et al., 2017; cf Twenge & Foster, 2008). Moreover, studies have suggested that expressions of narcissistic personality may be affected by cultural, social, and economic conditions.

### ***“The culture of narcissism”***

The idea that the culture may be narcissistic because narcissistic behaviors are widely accepted and admired was captured by journalist and writer Tom Wolfe in his 1976 “‘Me’ decade” essay (Wolfe, 1976) and historian Christopher Lasch (1979), the author of the bestselling book *“The Culture of Narcissism.”* Wolfe and Lasch attributed growing self-focus and narcissism in Western societies to the normative changes brought about by the “*Age of Aquarian,*” the 1960s counterculture and its focus on individual freedoms and self-realization. Jean Twenge (2006) in her book *“Generation Me”* pointed to the increases in narcissistic features among people born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s – children of those who came of age during the turbulent and paradigm-shifting 1960s.

However, results of subsequent studies questioned the existence of a simple linear increase in individual narcissism started by the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Evidence suggests instead that broader societal norms and economic structures shape how openly individual narcissism is expressed and accepted (Jauk et al., 2021). One study compared cohorts from former West and East Germany. Participants who came of age before the German reunification in 1989 in individualist, capitalist, and prosperous West Germany displayed more narcissistic features than participants who came of age in communist, collectivist, but also poorer East Germany during the same time (Vater et al., 2018). Two aspects of socio-economic context were captured by those studies: socio-cultural norms and economic prosperity. Those aspects are interrelated. Economic prosperity fosters individualism, independence, and self-focus, while economic hardship demands interdependence and humility and emphasizes communal values (Greenfield, 2009; Santos et al., 2017).

Studies showed that while individual economic prosperity is related to higher individual narcissism (Piff, 2014), times of recession tempering individual economic achievements and expectations render less narcissistic expectations. Meta-analytical summaries show that people who entered adulthood during economic recessions in the 1930s, after the Second World War in the late 1940s and in the early 1980s display less narcissistic features and behaviors than people who came of age in times of economic prosperity. Participants in American states that experienced economic hardship displayed lower narcissism levels than participants in states that fared better during the same time (Bianchi, 2014; 2015). A similar pattern was also found in cross-temporal meta-analysis that extended the findings of Twenge and Foster (2008) with additional 75 samples of American students collected after 2013. While levels of individual narcissism increased since 1982 and were the highest around 2008, they dropped steadily after the Recession of 2008–2009 (Twenge et al., 2021).

### Individual belief about the ingroup

Thus, findings suggest that narcissistic self-views are shaped by societal and economic conditions that define how we see ourselves in relation to others. Similarly, psychological research suggests that we derive what we think about ourselves from what we believe about groups we belong to (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2022; Otten, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2021). Self-categorization theory argues that people extract self-knowledge from the content of their social identities, what they believe their groups are about, and value (Turner & Reynolds, 2011). Social identity theory expects that group members' beliefs about the ingroup's relative position in intergroup relations affect group members' self-evaluation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Indeed, collective self-esteem affects personal self-esteem (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). We also found evidence that collective narcissism increases individual (vulnerable) narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023).

Table 1.1 presents results of a six-wave longitudinal study that looked at prejudice, collective, and individual narcissism in the same, nationally representative group of participants, assessed every two weeks during the 12-week period during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The results show that individual narcissism (grandiose or vulnerable) did not predict collective narcissism across times of measurement. Instead, collective narcissism predicted an increase in vulnerable narcissism over time. Non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction predicted a decrease in vulnerable narcissism over time. Such results suggest that group members' evaluations of the ingroup shape their narcissistic self-evaluations, especially in their vulnerable presentation. The longitudinal evidence in Table 1.1 is instructive but should be interpreted with caution in light of the recent criticism of this analytical method as inflating the importance of longitudinal changes within participants (Hamaker et al., 2015).

There are only two experimental studies, I am aware of that demonstrate increases in vulnerable narcissism as a consequence of experimentally manipulated collective narcissism. Rita Guerra and colleagues (2023) have shown that the ingroup misrecognition threat increases national collective narcissism but not other aspects of national identification. Misrecognition happens when the ingroup is mistaken with another, not recognized in its uniqueness and distinctiveness (for more details see chapter 4). The misrecognition threat in Poland was introduced by suggesting to Polish participants that foreigners do not differentiate between Poland and Russia. This manipulation increased Polish collective narcissism and individual vulnerable narcissism, but not grandiose narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023). This is consistent with findings that group members use their groups as a source of self-knowledge, especially when their self-image is undermined (Kruglanski 2006, American Psychiatric Association 2013).

**TABLE 1.1** Standardized estimates of cross-lagged relations among individual narcissism, national narcissism, national ingroup satisfaction, and prejudice

	<i>Predictors</i>				<i>Prejudice toward LGBTIQ+</i>
	<i>CN</i>	<i>IS</i>	<i>VN</i>	<i>GN</i>	
<i>Wave 2</i>					
Collective narcissism (T1)	.66**	.04	.08	.05	.16**
Ingroup satisfaction (T1)	.10*	.78**	-.10*	-.04	-.03
Vulnerable narcissism (T1)	.03	-.03	.59**	.04	-.02
Grandiose narcissism (T1)	.02	-.06	.11*	.76**	-.01
Prejudice (T1)	.15**	.05	.00	.00	.71**
<i>Wave 3</i>					
Collective narcissism (T2)	.69**	.07*	.15**	.09*	.22**
Ingroup satisfaction (T2)	.04	.78**	-.12**	-.04	-.06**
Vulnerable narcissism (T2)	.00	-.05	.57**	.01	-.01
Grandiose narcissism (T2)	.04	.02	.07	.77**	.00
Prejudice (T2)	.18**	.03	.04	.04	.70**
<i>Wave 4</i>					
Collective narcissism (T3)	.72**	.05	.05	.03	.15**
Ingroup satisfaction (T3)	.10**	.83**	-.05	-.05	-.04
Vulnerable narcissism (T3)	.02	-.03	.61**	.05	.00
Grandiose narcissism (T3)	.03	-.06*	.09*	.81**	-.05
Prejudice (T3)	.08	.04	-.01	.02	.74**
<i>Wave 5</i>					
Collective narcissism (T4)	.72**	.07*	.03	.06	.14**
Ingroup satisfaction (T4)	.06*	.83**	-.02	-.02	.02
Vulnerable narcissism (T4)	-.01	.02	.69**	.00	-.01
Grandiose narcissism (T4)	.07**	-.02	.10**	.82**	.05
Prejudice (T4)	.13**	.02	-.03	.01	.74**
<i>Wave 6</i>					
Collective narcissism (T5)	.70**	-.02	.11*	.05	.10**
Ingroup satisfaction (T5)	.10**	.84**	-.08*	.02	-.04
Vulnerable narcissism (T5)	.03	-.05	.69**	.04	-.01
Grandiose narcissism (T5)	.03	.04	.08*	.77**	.00
Prejudice (T5)	.12**	.07*	.03	.01	.83**

*Note:*  $N = 661$ . CN = Collective Narcissism, IS = Ingroup Satisfaction, VN = Vulnerable Narcissism, GN = Grandiose Narcissism, Prej = Prejudice against LGBTQIA+, T1 = wave 1, T2 = wave 2, T3 = wave 3, T4 = wave 4, T5 = wave 5. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Thus, findings suggest that vulnerable narcissism may be more volatile and susceptible to the influence of socially shared beliefs. Collective narcissism, an evaluative belief about social identity shared with group members, reinforces the view that the ingroup is insufficiently recognized by others. It may lead susceptible group members to believe this is also their individual predicament. Sharing frustrated entitlements with others may not only

validate but also perpetuate vulnerable aspect of individual narcissism. In the vicious circle of reciprocal reinforcement people obsessing over personal humiliations link those obsessions to the belief that the whole nation is undermined and humiliated by the lack of external recognition. Their personal experience becomes collective and political. Groups obsessing about their lack of external recognition risk the collective beliefs becoming personalized by enhancing vulnerable narcissistic features of group members.

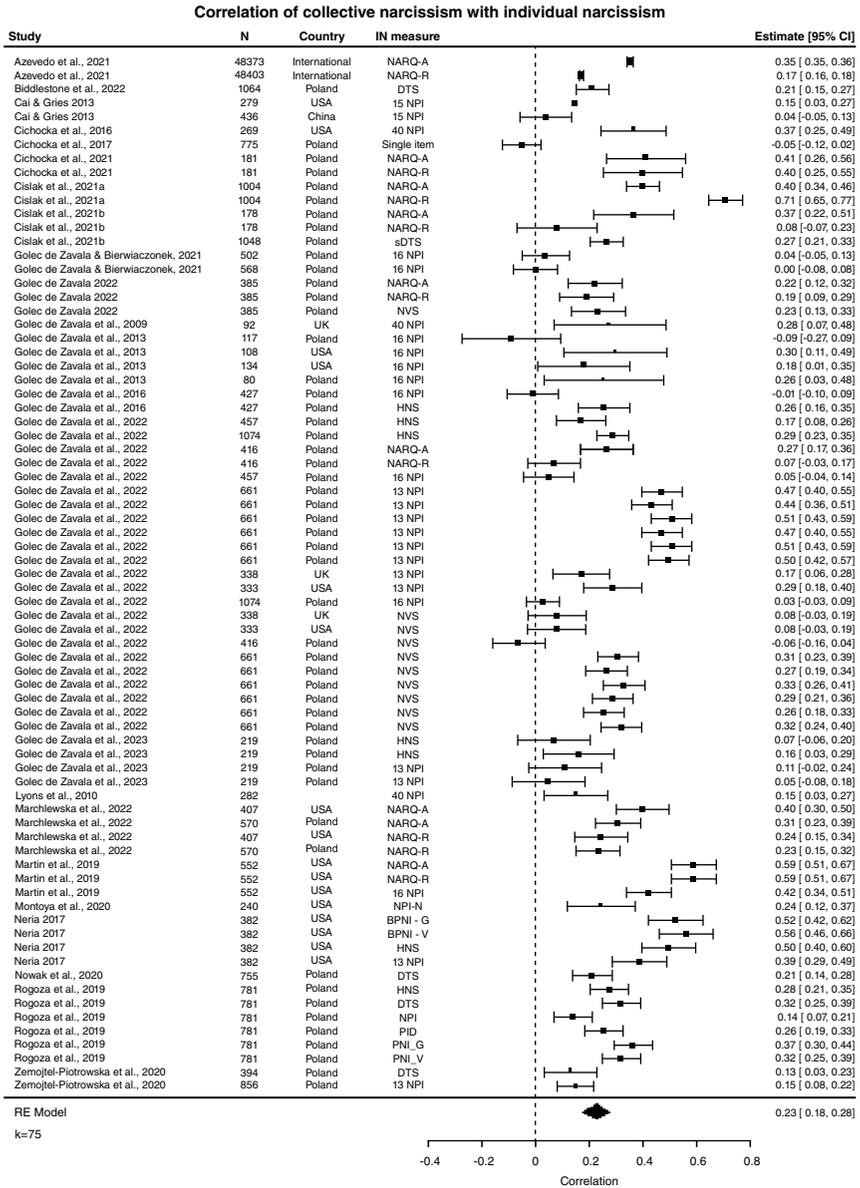
Political leaders, who act as social identity “*entrepreneurs*” (Haslam et al., 2010; Mols & Jetten, 2016; Reicher & Haslam, 2017), may advocate organizing social identity around the narcissistic belief that the exceptional ingroup deserves, but does not obtain, special treatment and recognition. They may also define those who are to blame for the ingroup’s undermined status, thus setting the targets for the outgroup hate. When they are successful in propagating this narration groups they lead and inspire can become collectively narcissistic. For example, as discussed in chapter 7, the recent wave of ultraconservative populism has effectively rendered national collective narcissism a normative belief about national identities in many countries (e.g., Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018).

### A chance for a non-narcissistic culture?

Figure 1.7 shows the results of a meta-analytical review of over 30 studies that assessed individual narcissism, collective narcissism, and non-narcissistic aspects of ingroup identification. It illustrates that while individual narcissism is associated with collective narcissism, it is not associated with non-narcissistic aspects of ingroup identification, especially non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction. Moreover, studies have shown that when the overlap between collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction is removed, the unique association between ingroup satisfaction and individual narcissism is negative (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023).

Summative results from many studies illustrated by Figure 1.7 suggest that individual narcissism may decrease when group members focus on positive sense of belonging to highly valued ingroup without the demand for privileged treatment or special recognition of the ingroup. This is because, as mentioned above, the beliefs group members hold about their ingroup shape their beliefs about themselves. Group members constantly negotiate what their ingroup stands for, what beliefs and values should be the most important in defining their social identity. Thus, the importance of bringing forward the narration that emphasizes positive codependence of group members and a sense of belonging to a valuable community over the narcissistic exaggeration of the ingroup’s image for the others to admire cannot be overstated. Group members being satisfied by belonging to a valuable ingroup are more likely to endorse positive but not narcissistic self-views.

### 34 How does narcissism become collective?



**FIGURE 1.7** The summative association between individual and collective narcissism (left panel) and between individual narcissism and ingroup identification (right panel).

Correlation of ingroup identification with individual narcissism

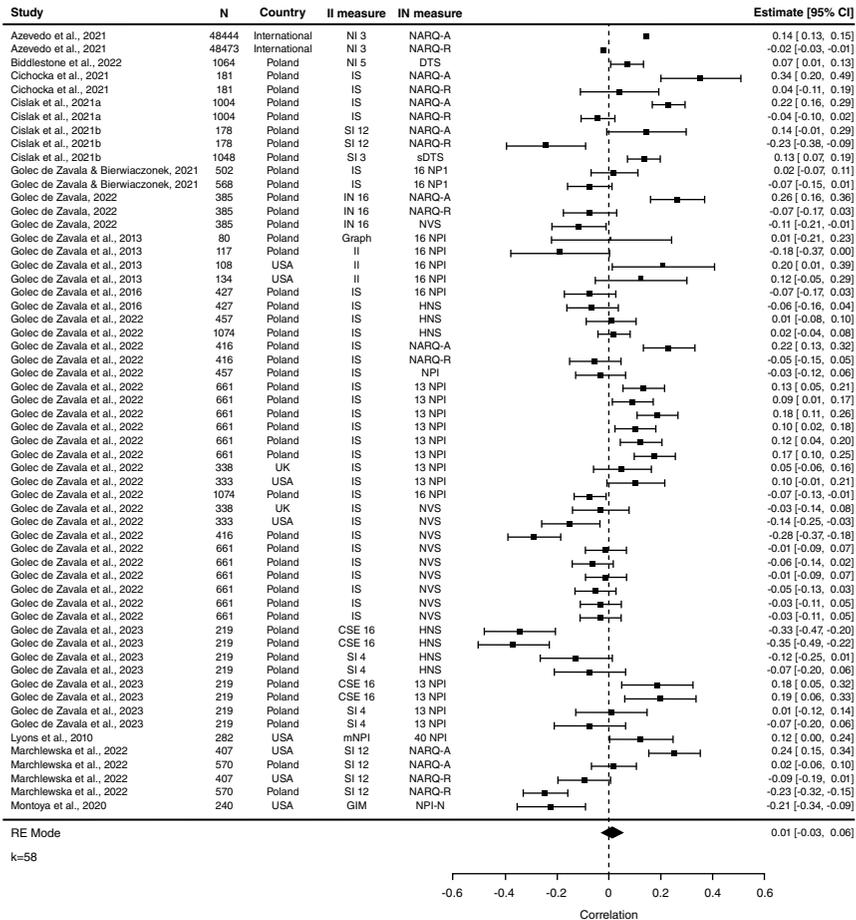


FIGURE 1.7 (continued)

While more experimental research should test directly whether narrations that emphasize non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction curb group members' individual narcissism, robust evidence suggests that non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction boosts positive self-views, wellbeing, and mental health (Cruwys et al., 2014; Jetten et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Collective narcissism captures the narcissistic dynamic at the social level of the self. This dynamic is closer to the profile of vulnerable grandiose presentation of individual narcissism: the neurotic, frustrated, exploitative, and competitive expression of superiority needs. Collective narcissism represents a case of

motivated social cognition in which the ingroup image is used to satisfy psychological motive to be recognized and admired as better than others. People endorse this motivated belief in different degrees. Collective narcissism can characterize groups as a shared, normative belief about the ingroup identity. In other words, group members may come to a consensus that it is crucial to demand that the exceptionality of their ingroup is recognized by everyone. Instead of pursuing their own status like individual narcissists do, collective narcissists emotionally invest in pursuing recognition of the exaggerated importance of their ingroups. After all, it is more socially acceptable to demand privilege and special treatment for the group rather than oneself. To demand privileged status and special treatment due to one's group membership may become a societal norm, truism whose legitimacy group members never question. It conduces to prejudice and outgroup hate. It also increases individual narcissism. Advocating non-narcissistic ingroup identification, a sense of belonging to a positively valued community, and positive interdependence with others may discourage formation and expression of collective and individual narcissism. Negative consequences of collective narcissism can be curbed by emphasizing its overlap with non-narcissistic positive evaluation of the ingroup.

## Note

1 *Note for all figures presenting results of metaanalyses in this chapter. K – number of effects; IN measure – individual narcissism measure; II measure – ingroup identity measure; CSE 16 – 16-item collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992); GIM – group identification measure (Henry et al., 1999); Graph – 1-item graph (Tropp & Wright, 2001); IN 16 – ingroup Identification Scale (Leach et al., 2008); II – 4-item Ingroup Identification Scale (e.g., Jetten et al., 2003); IS – IS from Ingroup Identification Scale (Leach et al., 2008); mNPI – 14 items adapted from NPI (Emmons, 1987); NI 3 – NI, 3 items (based on Cameron, 2004); NI 5 – NI, 3 items (based on Cameron, 2004); SI 12 – 12-item Social Identity Scale (Cameron, 2004); SI 3 – shortened 3-item Social Identity Scale (Cameron, 2004); SI 4 – 4-item subscale from Social Identity Scale (Leach et al., 2008); 13 NPI – NPI-13 (Gentile et al., 2013); 15 NPI – 15-item NPI; 16 NPI – 16-item NPI; 40 NPI – 40-item NPI; BPNI - G – Grandiose Brief Pathological Narcissism Inventory (BPNI, Schoenleber et al., 2015); BPNI - V – Vulnerable Brief Pathological Narcissism Inventory (BPNI, Schoenleber et al., 2015); DTS – Dark Triad Dirty Doze scale (Narcissism subscale) (Jonason & Webster, 2010); sDTS – from short Dark Triad Scale (Narcissism subscale) (Jones & Paulhus, 2014); HNS – Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HNS, Hending & Cheek, 1997); NARQ-A – Admiration 6-item NARQ, subscales Admiration and Rivalry (Back et al., 2013); NARQ-R – Rivalry 6-item NARQ, subscales of admiration and rivalry (Back et al., 2013); NVS Narcissistic Vulnerability Scale (Crowe et al., 2018); PID - Personality Inventory for DSM-5; PNI\_G - PNI\_G, Pathological Narcissism Inventory-Grandiosity; PNI\_V - PNI\_V, Pathological Narcissism Inventory-Vulnerability, CN 9-item or 5 item version of Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), IS – ingroup satisfaction subscale (Leach et al., 2008); II – other measures of ingroup identification.*

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# 2

## “DARK SIDE OF INGROUP LOVE”

### Collective narcissism and ingroup identification

Collective narcissism is a specific aspect of ingroup identification. To better understand its intergroup consequences and psychological motives it satisfies, it is important to define its place among the other aspects of ingroup identification. Henri Tajfel, the author of the influential social identity theory defined social identity as “*the part of an individual’s self-concept, which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group membership*” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Our social identities are part of our identity, “*the subjective concept of oneself as a person*” (Vignoles et al., 2006, p. 309). Ingroup identification is the degree to which people’s membership in a social group is “*psychologically affecting and socially consequential*” (Leach et al., 2008, p. 144). These definitions suggest that ingroup identification comprises elements of self-knowledge, motivation, ingroup evaluation, and emotional attachment to the ingroup and its members.

There have been several attempts to systematically differentiate and classify aspects (Ashmore et al., 2004; Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., 2008), forms and modes of ingroup identification (Jackson & Smith, 1999; Roccas et al., 2008) to find a common framework for its diverse conceptualizations and operationalizations (see Table 2.1 for summary and definitions). Better conceptual differentiation and more precise measurement of the specific aspects of ingroup identification allow for more fine-grained analyses of their specific roles in shaping human behavior in intergroup contexts (Leach et al., 2008). As Sonia Roccas and her colleagues, who differentiated ingroup glorification from ingroup attachment, put it: “*By examining multiple modes of identification simultaneously, it was possible to disentangle the distinctive, opposing effect of each*” (Roccas et al., 2008, p. 303).

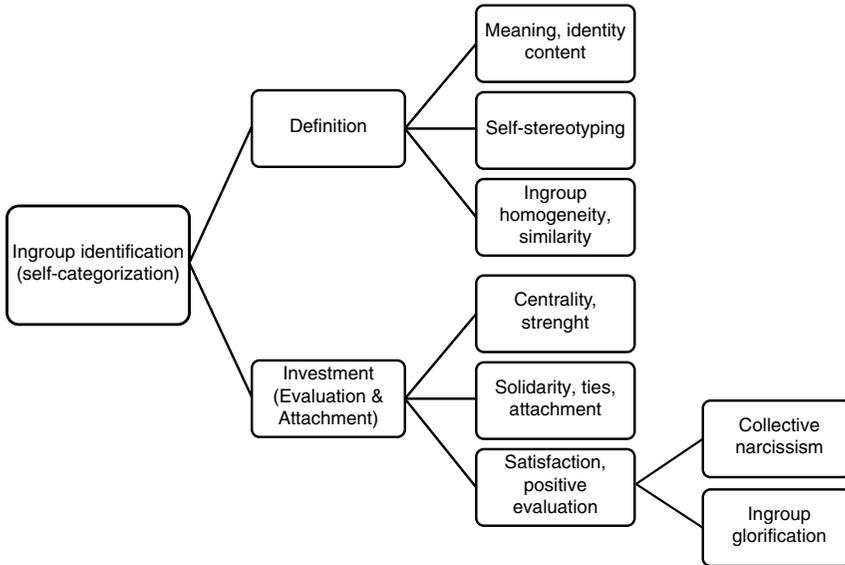
**TABLE 2.1** Collective narcissism and related concepts: Identity

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Collective narcissism	<i>"Collective narcissism is a belief that one's own group (the ingroup) is exceptional and entitled to special recognition and privileged treatment but it is not sufficiently recognized by others."</i> (Golec de Zavala, 2011)	Entitlement to and resentment for the lack of recognition
Insecure ingroup identity	<i>"( ... ) someone feels strong affective ties to the in-group, perceives his or her fate to be intertwined with the in-group, experiences a high degree of depersonalization, and perceives a strongly competitive intergroup context."</i> (Jackson & Smith, 1999, p. 123)	Positive ingroup affect, perceiving oneself as a group member tied to others in common fate in intergroup competition
Secure ingroup identity	<i>"( ... ) someone with equally strong affective ties to the in-group does not perceive high levels of common fate, depersonalization, or intergroup competition or conflict."</i> (Jackson & Smith, 1999, p. 123)	Positive ingroup affect
Private collective self esteem	<i>"one's personal judgements of how good one's social groups are."</i> (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Ingroup evaluation
Public collective self esteem	<i>"one's judgement of how other people evaluate one's social groups."</i> (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Meta ingroup evaluation: evaluation of other's evaluation of the ingroup
Membership collective self esteem	<i>"individual's judgements of how good or worthy they are as members of their social groups."</i> (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1990, p. 305)	Evaluation of oneself as group member
Identity collective self esteem	<i>"the importance of one's social group memberships to one's self concept."</i> (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Subjective importance of the ingroup to the self

(Continued)

TABLE 2.1 (Continued)

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Collective self esteem contingent competition	<i>"the extent to which the positive regard a person draws from his or her group membership is dependent on his or her in-group's standing in comparison to out-groups. ( ... ) it taps into individuals' tendency to base their self-worth on their in-group's superiority over out-groups following intergroup comparisons."</i> (Amiot and Hornsey, 2010, p. 64)	Self-esteem derived from the ingroup being better than outgroups
Ingroup glorification	<i>"Viewing the national in-group as superior to other groups and having a feeling of respect for the central symbols of the group ( ... )"</i> (Roccas et al., 2006, p. 700).	Superiority and internal cohesion
Group/racial entitlement White nationalism	<i>"stable and pervasive belief that one's ingroup deserves more and qualifies more than other groups."</i> (Endevelt et al., 2021, p. 352) <i>"the belief that one's self or group is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment because of their race."</i> (Reyna et al., 2022, p. 87)	Entitlement and deservingness Entitlement and deservingness
Ingroup attachment	<i>"People who are highly identified in this sense define themselves in terms of their group membership and extend their self-concept to include the group. They feel emotionally attached to the group and want to contribute to it."</i> (Roccas et al., 2006, p. 700)	Emotional attachment and contribution
Ingroup satisfaction	<i>"one's positive feelings about the group and one's membership in it."</i> (Leach et al., 2008, p. 146)	Pride and liking



**FIGURE 2.1** Aspects of ingroup identification.

This chapter places the research on collective narcissism in the context of the multifaceted model of ingroup identification presented in Figure 2.1. Collective narcissism expresses the frustrated need to have the ingroup seen as better than others. This motive differentiates collective narcissism from other aspects of ingroup identification. Groups satisfy multiple psychological motives, and different aspects of ingroup identification satisfy some motives better than others (Vignoles et al., 2006).

### Aspects of ingroup identification

Self-categorization as a member of a social group is a precondition and a basis of ingroup identification: *“identifying self as a member of, or categorizing self in terms of, a particular social grouping (is) essentially the precondition for all other dimensions of collective identity”* (Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 84). Recognizing that we have a social identity has significant psychological consequences. Our social identities serve various functions, and groups satisfy a number of identity motives, i.e., *“pressures toward certain identity states and away from others, which guide the processes of identity construction”* (Vignoles et al., 2006, p. 309). Different identity motives correspond to different aspects of ingroup identification broadly divided into ingroup definition and ingroup investment (Leach et al., 2008). The ingroup definition, cognitive aspect of ingroup identification, corresponds to the motive of identity

distinctiveness (uniqueness and differentiation), its continuity (across time and situations), and meaning ("*the need to find significance or purpose in one's own existence,*" Vignoles et al., 2006, p. 311). The ingroup investment, probably the best in its attachment and solidarity aspects, corresponds to the motive of belonging (closeness and acceptance), whereas the ingroup evaluation aspect corresponds to the motives of self-esteem (to maintain "*a positive conception of oneself,*" Vignoles et al., 2006, p. 309) and efficacy (need for competence and control).

### **Meaning**

The notion that groups are "*epistemic authorities*" providing group members with a lens through which to interpret their experience has a long tradition in psychological science (Festinger, 1954; Lewin, 1965; Sherif, 1936; for a review see Kruglanski et al., 2006). Agreeing and sharing the understanding of reality with others helps group members to manage the aversive aspects of cognitive uncertainty (Hogg, 2000; van den Bos et al., 2005), including ultimate uncertainty rooted in the specifically human awareness of own mortality (Greenberg et al., 1997; Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Groups are also among the important sources of self-knowledge. According to the self-categorization theory, people extract self-knowledge from the content of their social identities (Turner & Reynolds, 2001). They achieve a sense of personal uniqueness by identifying with groups that are sufficiently different from others and dis-identifying with those that are not (Brewer, 1991). Being a group member means perceiving oneself as similar to other group members, a carrier of the same features and characteristics (the self-stereotyping and homogeneity aspects in Figure 2.1): "*Identifying with a group in terms of self-definition should be manifested in individuals' perceptions of themselves as similar to an in-group prototype. Group-level self-definition should also be manifested in individuals' perception of their in-group as sharing commonalities*" (Leach et al., 2008, p. 148). Thus, groups share a common understanding of who "*we*" are, and what "*we*" are like.

Moreover, groups share worldviews and ideologies, beliefs that help group members understand their place in relation to other people, and reality in a broader sense (Ashmore et al., 2004). Thus, the ingroup-definition aspect of ingroup identification addresses not only the basic human need for self-definition but also the need for meaningful and unique existence and a sense of identity continuity (Vignoles et al., 2006). Cognitive aspect of ingroup identification refers to the social identity content, the meaning attributed to being the member of the ingroup with associated normative prescriptions for desirable behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2004; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008).

### **Centrality, attachment, and solidarity**

Another aspect of ingroup identification pertains to the relationship between the person and the group. One aspect of this relationship is its centrality, how important belonging to a given group is to a person. To express this aspect authors often use terms such as “*strength of identification*,” “*subjective, explicit and implicit importance*” (Ashmore et al, 2004), “*chronic salience*,” or “*centrality*” (Cameron, 2004; or identity collective self-esteem, Luhtanen & Crocker, 1990). This aspect of ingroup identification pertains to how psychologically invested group members are in the given social identity, how salient and important their membership in this group is to them, and how what happens to this group affects them personally, how important, threatening or stimulating it is to them (Leach et al., 2008). Salience and centrality of the ingroup identity lie between the cognitive, knowledge providing aspect of ingroup identification and the emotional, attachment aspect of belonging to the group.

The emotional aspect of ingroup identification is tapped by the concept of ingroup attachment, which comprises feeling emotionally related to the group and wanting to contribute to its welfare (Roccas et al., 2006). This aspect of ingroup identification corresponds to the belonging, closeness, and acceptance needs (Vignoles et al., 2006) that group members need to balance with their needs for distinctiveness and unique identity (Brewer, 1991). Ingroup attachment is sometimes linked to solidarity with ingroup members: “*As solidarity is based in a psychological bond with, and commitment to, fellow in-group members, it should be associated with a sense of belonging, psychological attachment to the in-group, and coordination with other group members*” (Leach et al., 2008, p. 147). Although both pertain to the ingroup investment, they may not be exactly the same and there are reasons to differentiate them.

For example, collective narcissists report high ingroup attachment and ingroup centrality (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2019). However, their instrumental preoccupation with the ingroup’s image means that they are sometimes willing to harm and sacrifice the welfare of the ingroup and its members for the sake of protecting the grandiosity of the ingroup. Indeed, collective narcissism is negatively associated with ingroup solidarity and loyalty to the ingroup members (Federico et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2020) and the instrumental treatment of other group members to maintain and protect the positive ingroup image (Biddlestone et al., 2022; Cichocka et al., 2022; Gronfeldt et al., 2022). Thus, collective narcissism may be positively associated with one aspect of ingroup investment but negatively associated with another.

### **Value and esteem**

A separate aspect of ingroup investment pertains to the ingroup evaluation. This aspect refers to the attitude or “*favorability judgment*” regarding the ingroup (Ashmore et al., 2004). Although some authors differentiate ingroup

evaluation as a singular aspect of ingroup identification (Leach et al., 2008), there is also an extensive body of research and theorizing suggesting that simple positive evaluation of the ingroup is only one part of the story. Ingroup evaluation, in itself an aspect of ingroup identification, can be further differentiated in several different ways. Various ways of distinguishing "destructive" and "constructive" forms of "ingroup love" and esteem account for a large part of psychological research on ingroup identification (Amiot & Hornsey, 2010; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2012; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Roccas et al., 2006; 2008).

Positive ingroup evaluation is represented by ingroup satisfaction (Leach et al., 2008), also labeled private collective self-esteem ("*one's personal judgements of how good one's social groups are,*" Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305), positive ingroup affect (Cameron, 2004) or positive ingroup regard (Ashmore et al., 2004), defined as "*positive feelings about the group and one's membership in it*" (Leach et al., 2008, p. 146). As Ashmore and colleagues (2004) note, ingroup satisfaction is assessed as feelings of satisfaction and pride associated with belonging to positively valued groups: "*Adjectives used in statements include glad, happy, proud, and satisfied. Although slight connotative differences may exist between them, all would be expected to be endorsed if one were favorable toward one's identity*" (Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 87). Thus, one way of thinking about positive ingroup evaluation is as group members' satisfaction and pride of their membership in a valuable ingroup (Leach et al., 2008).

Evaluating the ingroup positively satisfies the need for self-esteem (Vignoles et al., 2006). For example, the social cure model posits that positive ingroup identification is a resource that helps to boost self-esteem and maintain psychological well-being (Cruwys et al., 2014; Jetten et al., 2014). The self-esteem motive also features importantly at the heart of the social identity theory, which posits that group members' beliefs about the ingroup's relative position in intergroup relations shape their self-evaluation (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Group members are motivated "*to differentiate their own groups positively from others to achieve a positive social identity*" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 42). This formulation of the so-called "*self-esteem hypothesis*" makes intergroup comparisons essential to achieving positive ingroup identity and thus, maintaining positive self-esteem. To put otherwise, the achievement of self-esteem via group membership is made necessarily contingent on the outcome of the intergroup comparison and the motive behind outgroup derogation. According to social identity theory, mere self-categorization as a member of an ingroup produces outgroup derogation motivated by the need to achieve and maintain positive self-esteem. However, this assumption of social identity theory has been contested, challenged by evidence, and refined. What social identity theory calls the self-

esteem motive does not seem to be self-esteem motive at all. Instead it seems to be the superiority motive associated with collective narcissism.

First, while social identity theory argues that group members should be motivated to improve self-esteem by ingroup derogation, studies indicated that the relationship between self-esteem and outgroup derogation is uncertain. Literature reviews and meta-analyses of multiple studies have revealed that, on average, the relationship between self-esteem and outgroup derogation is close to zero. While there is more support for the expectation that outgroup derogation increases self-esteem, there is essentially no evidence that low self-esteem motivates outgroup derogation (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Martiny & Rubin, 2016 cf. Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Second, while social identity theory argues that group members should be automatically motivated to improve their ingroup evaluation by outgroup derogation, empirical evidence has indicated that mere self-categorization as a group member is not reliably associated with outgroup derogation (Mummendey et al., 1992). Moreover, positive ingroup evaluation is not reliably associated with outgroup derogation (e.g., Brewer, 1999; Brown, 2000; Pehrson et al., 2009). Positive ingroup evaluation is linked to outgroup derogation only when it is derived from comparisons with other groups (Amiot and Hornsey, 2010; Mummendey et al., 2001), and low self-esteem is linked to outgroup derogation only via collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

*The link between self-esteem and collective narcissism*

The differentiation of collective narcissism as a separate aspect of positive ingroup evaluation distinct from ingroup satisfaction helps to clarify one of the reasons why empirical findings have been inconsistent with the social identity theory’s “*self-esteem hypothesis*.” A research program consisting of seven studies has indicated that low self-esteem is uniquely associated with collective narcissism, and via this association, it indirectly predicts outgroup derogation. To put otherwise, low self-esteem reliably predicts outgroup derogation because it increases collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

Research also showed that the positive overlap between collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction suppresses the unique, negative association between self-esteem and collective narcissism. In contrast to collective narcissism, the zero-order correlations between ingroup satisfaction and self-esteem are usually positive (Amiot & Aubin, 2013). The overlap between collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction also suppresses the positive association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility. In contrast to ingroup satisfaction, the zero-order correlations between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility are usually positive (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2020; 2023). Thus, to better understand the role of ingroup

identification in shaping self-esteem and well-being of group members as well as in shaping intergroup relations, it is important to differentiate narcissistic and non-narcissistic aspects of positive ingroup evaluation. It is important to differentiate collective narcissism from ingroup satisfaction.

It is also important to consider that while collective narcissism may be a response to undermined self-esteem, it does not improve self-esteem. For example, in a longitudinal study conducted across three time points, low self-esteem predicted collective narcissism eight weeks later, but collective narcissism did not predict self-esteem eight weeks later (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). Thus, investing into exaggerated ingroup image is not an effective way to satisfy the self-esteem motive. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, collective narcissism seems to correspond to a different psychological motive entirely.

### **Superiority and entitlement**

While ingroup satisfaction and collective narcissism both pertain to positive evaluation of the ingroup, ingroup satisfaction is linked to the motive of self-esteem, whereas collective narcissism expresses the motive to feel superior, better in comparison to others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2016; 2020; 2023). A similar idea that the positive evaluation of the ingroup may be used to satisfy narcissistic entitlement has been expressed in work on group entitlement (Endevelt et al., 2021) or racial entitlement (Reyna et al., 2022).

The idea that groups may serve narcissistic needs with negative intergroup consequences is not novel in social science. When William Sumner popularized the term ethnocentrism, he defined it as “(t)he sentiment of cohesion, internal comradeship and devotion to the in-group, which carries with it a sense of superiority to an out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group” (Sumner, 1911, p. 11). According to Sumner, ethnocentrism was a common feature of societies and a common aspect of ingroup positive evaluation. Sumner’s predecessor, Ludwig Gumplowicz claimed ethnocentrism was a delusion, a “subjective need of human beings to glorify their own and nearest and at the same time humiliate and sully what is foreign and distant” (Gumplowicz, 1883, pp. 252–253 in Bizumic, 2014, p. 4). The concept of ethnocentrism descriptively bounded the narcissistic conviction about the ingroup’s superiority to derogation of outgroups. Given that the two were necessarily the part of the same concept it was impossible to study them separately to clarify that group level expression of narcissistic superiority needs, not ingroup love, motivates outgroup derogation.

### **Dark side of ingroup love**

To be fair, from very early on, psychological researchers argued against the necessary binding of positive evaluation of the ingroup with outgroup

derogation (Allport, 1954; Levine & Campbell, 1972). In 1999, in her comprehensive review of psychological research on this topic, Marylin Brewer concluded that ingroup favoritism alone is more frequent than the ingroup favoritism accompanied by outgroup derogation. She identified conditions under which the latter – the association between the ingroup love and outgroup hate – is more likely: intergroup threat, competition, conflict, and distrust. Psychological literature has also differentiated specific forms or modes of ingroup love that are more vs. less likely to predict outgroup hate. The concept of collective narcissism is a part of this literature.

It parallels the differentiation between personal self-esteem and individual narcissism as separate aspects of positive self-evaluation as well as the literature differentiating separate, qualitatively different, adaptive, and maladaptive forms of self-esteem. The first body of literature points to personal self-esteem and individual narcissism having distinct nomological networks (separate correlates among psychological variables, Hyatt et al., 2018), distinct phenotypes, consequences, developmental trajectories, and origins (Brummelman et al., 2016). Personal self-esteem is a belief that one is of a high value and the pride one takes in their own strengths (Brummelman et al., 2016; Kernis, 2003), while individual narcissism is an inflated view of oneself that requires continual external validation (Emmons, 1987; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001 cf Sedikides, 2021, see Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion). In contrast to self-esteem, narcissism is defined by vanity, grandiosity, and self-entitlement, including entitlement to admiration and recognition from others.

The second body of literature differentiates forms of self-esteem that are optimal for psychological functioning from those that are problematic and associated with negative outcomes and negative emotionality: stable vs. unstable (Kernis, 2003), true vs. fragile (Deci & Ryan, 1995), non-contingent vs. contingent (Crocker & Park, 2004), or defensive vs. secure (Jordan et al., 2003) self-esteem, respectively. Analogously, the intergroup literature differentiates “*constructive*” and “*destructive*” forms of ingroup favoritism. Part of this literature is discussed in Chapter 3 and pertains to differentiation between patriotism and nationalism. Here, I discuss concepts that refer to positive ingroup evaluation but do not focus solely on the nation.

### **Collective self-esteem contingent competition**

The concept of collective narcissism extends the concept of narcissistic self-evaluation onto the social aspect of the self in a similar way that the concept of collective self-esteem extends the concept of personal self-esteem onto the social level of the self, the “we” aspect of identity (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). Collective self-esteem is a multifaceted phenomenon. It comprises the importance of the group to the self as well as the evaluation of oneself as a

group member, own evaluation of the ingroup, and the perception of how others evaluate the ingroup (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). A version of the "*self-esteem hypothesis*" proposed that collective (rather than personal) self-esteem should predict outgroup derogation (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). However, research has again brought mixed findings, variably indicating positive, negative, or non-significant relationships between collective self-esteem and outgroup derogation (Hunter et al., 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998).

The concept of collective self-esteem contingency on competition, the positive ingroup evaluation dependent on the ingroup winning competition with other groups (Amiot & Hornsey, 2010), capitalizes on the observation that the adaptive and optimal form of personal self-esteem is non-contingent on individual performance, whereas the more problematic, volatile forms are contingent on performance in a given domain (Crocker & Park, 2004). The authors specify that people with a tendency to base their self-worth on their ingroup's performance in competition with outgroups show higher ingroup bias, especially when the ingroup is criticized by the outgroup (Amiot & Hornsey, 2010).

Collective narcissism shares with the concept of collective self-esteem contingent on competition the realization that positive self-evaluation may be linked to the contingent positive image of the ingroup. In case of collective narcissism, the contingency is on having the ingroup admired and recognized as better, unique, and special. To put otherwise, to satisfy narcissistic superiority needs, the grandiose image of the ingroup needs to be validated by recognition and admiration of others. As our research indicates, the narcissistic need for external recognition is difficult to satiate (see Chapter 4).

### ***Insecure social identity***

The proposition that insecure ingroup identification (or insecure social identity) should be a reliable predictor of ingroup bias and intergroup hostility is based on a framework devised to organize existing conceptualizations and measurements of ingroup identification (Jackson & Smith, 1999). In line with the later models (Ashmore et al., 2004; Leach et al., 2008), four dimensions were taken into account as crucial to people's beliefs about groups they belonged to (1) attraction or positive affect toward the ingroup; (2) perceived competitive vs. cooperative relations of the ingroup with outgroups; (3) beliefs about interdependency or common fate of ingroup members; and (4) depersonalization, or a tendency to think about the self primarily in terms of group membership. In line with the argument developed by Brewer (1999), the authors proposed that the link between positive ingroup regard and outgroup derogation depends on what dimensions of social identity are activated in a particular situation. The authors also argued

that different assessments of ingroup identification tap into its different dimensions leading to inconsistent findings.

Insecure identification with the ingroup characterizes members who are attracted to the ingroup, think about themselves primarily as group members tied to other members in the common fate, who perceive that the valued ingroup is threatened by a possible loss in competitive relations with other groups. Thus, insecure ingroup identification is tapped by measurements that focus on centrality of ingroup identification, attachment and solidarity, and positive evaluation of the ingroup contingent on intergroup competition. In contrast, secure ingroup identification characterizes people who are attracted to the ingroup but do not perceive themselves primarily as group members bound with others by the common fate in intergroup conflict. Secure ingroup identification is tapped by measurements that focus primarily on the positive ingroup evaluation.

Existing empirical evidence only partially aligns with this framework. What the authors alluded to under the label “*secure ingroup identification*” is the most likely illustrated by research suggesting that positive ingroup identification is a psychological resource related to psychological well-being and good mental and physical health (Jetten et al., 2014). However, this form of positive ingroup identification assumes not only positive ingroup evaluation and attraction to the ingroup but also feeling solidarity, loyalty, and responsibility toward other members of the ingroup.

Similarly, results of the research on collective narcissism depart from the framework proposed by Jackson and Smith (1999). Collective narcissism does not entirely fit the characteristics of the insecure ingroup identification. The definition of collective narcissism focuses on how group members evaluate the ingroup and expect others should evaluate the ingroup. Collective narcissism does not comprise assumptions about depersonalization or common fate. In fact, collective narcissism is linked to preoccupation with the ingroup image, but lack of solidarity with ingroup members, low loyalty to the ingroup, and even preference for actions and policies that ultimately lead to harm to the ingroup. Moreover, while collective narcissism is related to perceived intergroup threat (Bagci et al., 2021; Guerra et al., 2023), it is predominantly and specifically related to hypersensitivity to the ingroup image threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016; 2023; Guerra et al., 2022, Chapter 4).

### ***Ingroup glorification***

Unlike collective narcissism, the concept of ingroup glorification has been proposed to describe specifically a mode of national identification. It is reviewed here because sometimes this concept is used interchangeably with collective narcissism (Kende et al., 2019; Kende, 2022), despite the considerable differences between the two conceptualizations. National ingroup glorification is defined as the belief in national ingroup’s superiority,

importance of the ingroup's cohesion, and reverence toward national symbols and authorities (Roccas et al., 2006). People who glorify their nation agree that: "*Other nations can learn a lot from us*"; "*In today's world, the only way to know what to do is to rely on the leaders of our nation*"; "*One of the important things that we have to teach children is to respect the leaders of our nation.*"; "*Relative to other nations, we are a very moral nation.*"; "*It is disloyal for our co-nationals to criticize the our nation*" or "*Our nation is better than other nations in all respects.*". Thus, the concept of national ingroup glorification comprises superiority and deference dimensions of social identity (Roccas et al., 2008). National ingroup glorification is differentiated from the national ingroup attachment, which comprises the aspects of ingroup investment pertaining to ingroup's importance or centrality (the importance of group membership and the group as a category for self-definition) and feelings of emotional attachment and commitment to the national ingroup (Roccas et al., 2006; 2008).

Collective narcissism and ingroup glorification overlap mostly in exaggeration of the ingroup image. Importantly, collective narcissism is a belief people can hold about any ingroup, rather than a mode of national identification. Collective narcissism is an aspect of positive evaluation of the ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2019). Thus, collective narcissism is a more precise and focused and at the same a broader concept than ingroup glorification. Unlike ingroup glorification, collective narcissism pertains only to the exaggerated and contingent evaluation of the ingroup. It does not comprise the need for ingroup coherence or reverence toward the ingroup's symbols. Collective narcissism, but not ingroup glorification, is associated with hypersensitivity to and retaliatory hostility in response to ingroup image threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016). The preoccupation with the recognition of the ingroup is specific to collective narcissism, rather than ingroup glorification (Guerra et al., 2023, Chapter 4).

Collective narcissism is differentiated from ingroup satisfaction, positive evaluation, and satisfaction with the valuable ingroup, also a narrower concept than the ingroup attachment that was contrasted with ingroup glorification. Such precise differentiation of collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction allows us to isolate exactly the aspects of ingroup identification that are related to ingroup bias, intergroup hostility, and group members' distress and differentiate them from those that may be related to intergroup tolerance, diversity, and group members' well-being. Indeed, while the predictions of ingroup glorification and national collective narcissism with reference to intergroup hostility are often similar, the predictions of national attachment (net of national ingroup glorification) and national ingroup satisfaction (net of national collective narcissism) are not (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; Guerra et al., 2022; Kende et al., 2019; Leidner et al., 2010).

### Collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction

Collective narcissism is an aspect of positive ingroup evaluation, a dimension of ingroup investment. It is positively associated with ingroup centrality and ingroup satisfaction, but its associations with other aspects of ingroup identification are less clear. Ties with other members of the ingroup and the concern with the common fate do not seem important to collective narcissists (Federico et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2020). However, emotional investment in the positive evaluation of the ingroup seems to be central to collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction. Thus, collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction overlap, but they also differ. Better understanding of the nature of this difference brings us closer to understanding the psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between ingroup love and outgroup hate.

While collective narcissism emphasizes positive uniqueness and entitlement of the ingroup, ingroup satisfaction emphasizes that the ingroup is of a high value and a reason for one to be proud of. Collective narcissism is preoccupied with the lack of recognition of the ingroup’s unique greatness, while ingroup satisfaction pertains to feeling happy to be the ingroup’s member. While collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction are always positively associated and sometimes yield similar zero-order correlations, their unique (net of the common variance) associations are often opposite. For example, collective narcissism is associated with individual narcissism, but the association between ingroup satisfaction and individual narcissism varies across studies. Only after the common variance of collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction is partialled out, a replicable pattern of opposite associations with individual narcissism emerges, positive for collective narcissism and negative for ingroup satisfaction (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023). Similarly, zero-order correlations between ingroup satisfaction and self-esteem are always positive but inconsistent for collective narcissism. Net of each other, the variables have opposite associations with self-esteem, ingroup satisfaction positive and collective narcissism negative (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). Finally, net of each other, the variables have opposite associations with intergroup hostility and prejudice, while zero-order correlations are always positive for collective narcissism but inconsistent for ingroup satisfaction (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2020; 2023). Table 2.2 summarizes findings pointing to opposite predictions of collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction net of each other with reference to multiple outcomes. Given the consistency of this pattern, it is important to clarify what collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction mean in their residual forms, when their positive overlap is statistically removed.

**TABLE 2.2** Collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction and their opposite unique associations with other variables

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>CN</i>	<i>IS</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Outgroup derogation, prejudice, and intergroup hostility	+	-/0	Golec de Zavala et al, 2009*; 2013; 2020; 2022; 2023 Guerra et al., 2023 Cichocka et al., 2018 Verkuyten et al., 2022 Bagci et al., 2021
Denial of historical transgressions (e.g., holocaust, slavery, racism)	+	-/0	Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019 Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022 Federico et al., 2023 Vu & Rivera, 2023
Zero-sum beliefs about intergroup relations	+	-	Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023
Ultimate attribution error and hostile attribution bias	+	-	Dyduch-Hazar et al. 2019 Bocian et al., 2021 West et al., 2022 Cichocka et al., 2022
Intergroup threat	+	+/-	Guerra et al., 2023 Bagci et al., 2021 Golec de Zavala et al., 2016
Conspiracy theories	+	0/-	Golec de Zavala et al., 2022 (meta-analysis) Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012 Cichocka et al., 2016a,b Sternisko et al., 2023 Bertin et al., 2021 Biddlestone et al., 2022
Anti-science beliefs	+	-	Chapter 7 Bertin et al., 2021
Self-esteem	-	+	Golec de Zavala et al, 2020
Individual narcissism	+	-	Golec de Zavala et al., 2023
Personal control	-	+	Cichocka et al., 2018
Positive emotionality	-	+	Golec de Zavala, 2019
Negative emotionality	+	-	Golec de Zavala, 2019
Well-being	-/0	+	Bagci et al., 2021 Golec de Zavala, 2019
Anxious adult attachment	+	-	Marchlewska et al., 2022
Extrinsic motivation to identify (e.g., for ingroup’s prestige, to support self-worth)	+	0	Eker et al., 2022 (did not control for the overlap)
Intrinsic motivation to identify (because it is satisfying)	0	+	Eker et al., 2022 (did not control for the overlap)
Nationalism	+	-	Federico et al., 2022
	-	+	

(Continued)

**TABLE 2.2** (Continued)

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>CN</i>	<i>IS</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Solidarity/loyalty toward ingroup members			Federico et al., 2021 Marchlewska et al., 2020
Willingness to harm ingroup members	+	-	Gronfeldt et al., 2022 Mashuri et al., 2022 Cichocka et al., 2022
Tolerance	-	+	Verkuyten et al., 2022
Populism	+	-/0	Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021
Anti-establishment	+	-	Chapter 8
Ethnocentric projection	+	0	Chapter 9 Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023

*Note:* CN – collective narcissism, IS – ingroup satisfaction or similar measurement.

Perhaps it is best to think about the difference between collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction (on the social level of the self) analogously to the difference between self-esteem and individual narcissism (on the personal level of the self). Residual forms of collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction can be then interpreted similarly to residual forms of self-esteem and individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2020).

When their common variance is accounted for, self-esteem predicts less, whereas individual narcissism predicts more, self-reported interpersonal anger, aggressiveness, and anti-social behaviors (Barry et al., 2007; Donnellan et al., 2005; Locke, 2009; Paulhus et al., 2004). Self-esteem and individual narcissism (especially in its grandiose form) overlap in positive self-evaluation. Self-esteem with individual narcissism partialled out is interpreted as positive assertion of self-worth, independent of external recognition. Individual narcissism with self-esteem partialled out is interpreted as preoccupation with external validation of self-worth and resentment for the lack of recognition.

Analogously, collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction have in common the belief that the ingroup is of high value. It is what they do not have in common, however, that appears to drive their opposite relationships with a number of outcomes. Collective narcissism with ingroup satisfaction partialled out is group-based, aggrieved entitlement contingent on external recognition without the comfort of the sense of belonging to a valuable ingroup. What remains in collective narcissism when ingroup satisfaction is partialled out is the demand of privileged treatment and the concern about external recognition of the ingroup. Ingroup satisfaction with collective narcissism partialled out is a positive evaluation of the ingroup, independent of concerns about external recognition and resilient to threats and criticism. Collective narcissists

use the exaggerated ingroup image instrumentally to satisfy the individual need for superiority.

In the absence of a clear conceptual differentiation between collective narcissism and non-narcissistic positive evaluation of the ingroup, collective narcissism may become misrepresented as ingroup love. This may lead not only to unclear and inconsistent research findings and lack of theoretical precision. Politically, muddling up the distinction between non-narcissistic ingroup love and collective narcissism may also lead to false assumptions about the latter and its demagogical misuse to justify atrocities committed in the name of the ingroup. This happens when members of ingroups are mobilized to fight aggressive wars for elusive goals such as national greatness or honor because it is “*patriotic*,” regardless of the fact that escalation of intergroup hostility brings about destruction and suffering to the ingroup’s members.

## Conclusion

In sum, differentiating collective narcissism as an aspect of positive ingroup evaluation different from ingroup satisfaction fits into a rich psychological literature seeking to differentiate the “*destructive*” from “*constructive*” or “*genuine*” ingroup love (for a review see Golec de Zavala & Schatz, 2013). The concept of collective narcissism helps explain the inconsistent findings regarding the link between self-esteem, ingroup identification, perceived ingroup threat, and intergroup hostility (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). Studies that use assessments of ingroup identification that tap collective narcissism without conceptually and empirically differentiating it may erroneously link ingroup identification to negative intergroup outcomes. Studies that assess ingroup identification using measures that tap predominantly ingroup satisfaction may exaggerate positive outcomes of ingroup identification for group members’ psychological well-being. Differentiating collective narcissism from ingroup satisfaction allows for observing their unique predictions and enhances our understanding of unique psychological mechanisms underlying those predictions. Residual forms of collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction remain interpretable after their common variance is partialled out. Moreover, studies show that about 30% of the variance in ingroup satisfaction overlaps with collective narcissism (Federico et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). This indicates that non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction and dissatisfied collective narcissism exist independently predicting different intergroup and intragroup outcomes.

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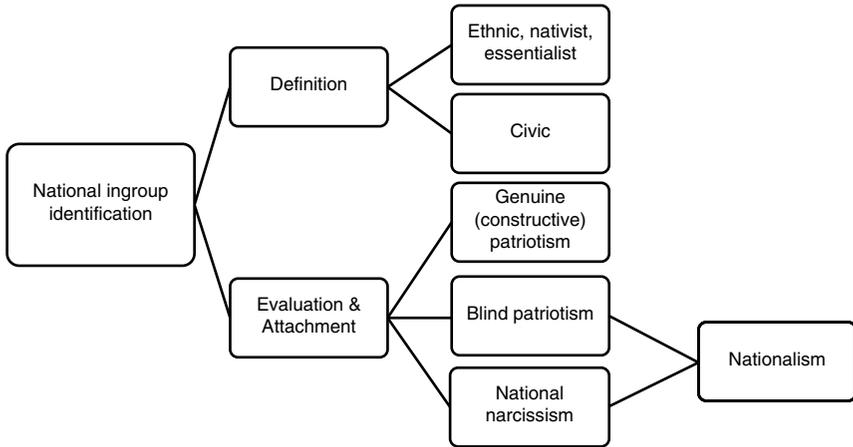
# 3

## NATIONAL NARCISSISM, NATIONALISM, AND PATRIOTISM

Given that the populist appeals to restore national greatness have been linked to increased opposition to immigration, isolationism, the emergence of right-wing extremism, and domestic terrorism (Nacos et al., 2020; Rees et al., 2019; Selvanathan & Leidner, 2021), the question of what makes people sympathetic to those appeals has reemerged in psychological literature in the second decade of the 21st century. It has been argued that the current wave of ultraconservative populism focuses more on narcissistic resentment for insufficient recognition of the nation than on a nationalistic drive toward expansion and international dominance (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2021). In political psychology (and in this chapter), nationalism is defined as “*an orientation toward national dominance*,” combining national superiority and outgroup derogation. Nationalism is differentiated from patriotism, “*a feeling of national attachment*” that pertains to national favoritism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 271). This chapter compares and contrasts the concepts of patriotism and nationalism with the concept of national collective narcissism. It argues that the differentiation of national narcissism improves our understanding of how patriotism and nationalism are related (Federico et al., 2022; cf /Cichocka & Cislak, 2020).

### Nationalism

The concept of nationalism has various definitions in social sciences. Historically, it denotes a social movement that began in the 18th century and advocated the idea of nation-states, sovereign political organizations determined not by common ruler or territory but by shared ethnographic



**FIGURE 3.1** Aspects of national identification.

characteristics. Underlying this movement, nationalism as an ideology proposed love and loyalty to the nation as guiding principles for action surpassing individual and subgroup interests. In political sciences and philosophy, liberal nationalism advances the premise that cultivating shared national identity enables national cohesion despite internal diversity (Miller & Ali, 2014). Indeed, recognizing that one shares national identity with others has been linked to positive outcomes such as solidarity with conationals in face of crises (Johnston, et al., 2010; Theiss-Morse, 2009), including the COVID-19 pandemic (Van Bavel et al., 2022). However, loyalty to the nation has also been linked to hostility toward national outsiders and attempts to ascertain national supremacy by coercive, military means (Federico et al., 2005; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Similarly to the literature on ingroup identification discussed in Chapter 2, the nationalism literature has dealt with the contradictory outcomes of national loyalty by differentiating between modes or definitions of national identity (Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1).

### Definition of national identity

When loyalty to conationals is a guiding principle of our actions, one question we need to answer is what exactly makes others our conationals? To whom our loyalty is due? What are the criteria for one to belong to the nation or a country? For example, the populist rhetoric that contrasts “the people” and “the elites” suggests that “the people” are somehow “better” and more representative of the nation than “the elites,” usually globalized, internationalized, and somehow “contaminated” by “otherness.” Nativist nationalism, resurrected by the populist narrations, advances the idea that

**TABLE 3.1** Collective narcissism and related concepts: nation

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Collective narcissism	<i>“Collective narcissism is a belief that one’s own group (the ingroup) is exceptional and entitled to special recognition and privileged treatment but it is not sufficiently recognized by others.”</i>	Entitlement to and resentment for the lack of recognition
Nationalism	<i>“The view that America is superior and should be dominant.”</i> (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 261)	Asserting international dominance
National chauvinism	<i>“national superiority and dominance”</i> (de Figueiredo and Elkins, 2003, p. 175)	Asserting international dominance
Nativist nationalism	<i>“alludes to the notion that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”)</i> ” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 34)	Exclusion based on shared ethnicity
White nationalism	<i>“The belief ( ... ) that White people are inherently superior to people from other racial and ethnic groups ( ... )”</i> (Reyna et al., 2022, p. 80) <i>“( ... ) a sense of racial and national greatness and entitlement that idealizes ( ... ) a former America dominated by Whites ( ... ) condemning modern America’s ( ... ) decline and devaluation of Whiteness”</i> (Reyna et al., 2022, p. 81)	Exclusion based on shared White ethnicity
Pseudo-patriotism	<i>“blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and rejection of other nations as outgroups”</i> (Adorno et al., 1950, p. 107)	Uncritical conformity and rejection of outgroups
Patriotism	<i>“Feelings of attachment to America”</i> (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 261)	Attachment expressed as love, devotion, and pride

(Continued)

TABLE 3.1 (Continued)

	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Blind patriotism	“A rigid and inflexible attachment to country, characterized by unquestioning positive evaluation, staunch allegiance, and intolerance of criticism” (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153)	Unquestioning positive evaluation
Constructive patriotism	“An attachment to country characterized by ‘critical loyalty,’ questioning and criticism of current group practices that are driven by a desire for positive change” (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153)	Attachment, care, and loyalty
Ethnic national identity	“( ... ) genealogy and presumed descent ties, ( ... ) vernacular languages, customs and traditions” (Smith, 1991, p. 12)	Exclusion based on shared ethnicity
Civic national identity	“(h)istoric territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology” (Smith, 1991, p. 12)	Inclusion based on shared community

membership to the nation is determined by ancestry and blood ties and “non-native (‘alien’) elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 34). Nativist nationalism relies on what Anthony Smith (1991, p. 12) called “ethnic national identity,” based on “( ... ) genealogy and presumed descent ties, ( ... ) vernacular languages, customs and traditions.” Smith contrasts ethnic with civic criteria of national belonging. “Civic national identity” is based on “(h)istoric territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology” (Smith, 1991, p. 12). Ethnic and civic ways of defining national identity are related to distinct attitudes toward the nation, national minorities, and immigrants, and to distinct international stances. Patriotism is related to civic definition of national identity, whereas nationalism is related to ethnic definition of national identity (Schatz, 2020).

According to the civic criteria, the nation is an inclusive community bound together by personal choice and common ideology. The community serves the needs of individuals. In contrast, the ethnic definition essentializes the nation. It assumes that a nation is constituted by the heritable common core

(essence) that makes all members of the nation who partake in it, unique and interchangeable at the same time. Sharing the national core all members of the nation are in their essence, the same and essentially different from those who do not share the same core. Those who are not of the same ancestry and do not share the nation's "blood," essence, and nature, are rejected and treated as threat. Ethnic definition of nationality is related to prejudice toward immigrants and ethnic and national minorities (e.g., Pehrson et al., 2009; Schatz, 2020).

Nativist nationalism justifies isolationist national politics, opposition to globalization, rejection of superordinate organizations such as the European Union, and prejudice toward ethnic minorities and immigrants (Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; McDonnell & Werner, 2020; Mudde, 2019; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Ethnic definition of national identity is also related to emotional attachment to and appropriation of national symbols by the ethnic majority within the nation. Studies found, for example, that subliminal exposure to national symbols resulted in rejection of minorities: Black people in the United States and Palestinian Israelis in Israel (Hassin et al., 2009), whereas American national symbols were associated with White faces more quickly than with Black faces (Devos & Banaji, 2005). White nationalism is a variation of native nationalism that equates nation with one ethnic group only. It is defined as aggrieved racial entitlement and idealization of national past dominated by White people, "*fundamentally an ambivalent ideology merging narratives of greatness with narratives of victimization and loss*" (Reyna et al., 2022, p. 92). White nationalism is related to racism, perceiving racial equality as White victimhood, prejudice toward liberals or feminists as threats to the White hegemony, and acceptance of political violence in pursuit of restoration of White people's greatness and privilege (Reyna et al., 2022).

There are reasons to think that exclusive, ethnic definition of national identity underlies national collective narcissism. For example, research in over 60 countries showed that national collective narcissism is negatively related to the country's level of globalization (Cichocka et al., 2022). Thus, national collective narcissism is higher among nationals of post-colonial countries liberated by mobilizing ethnic national identification. National collective narcissism is lower among nationals of former empires that build their wealth on commercial links with each other, collaborations going beyond the ethnic national divisions.

Similarly, national collective narcissism has also been linked to rejection of the European Union in Poland (Cislak et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2018) and the United Kingdom (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). It has also been linked to perceiving nonheterosexuals and progressive women as threat to ethnic national continuity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021), advocating infringement of women's reproductive rights (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023), rejection of

nontraditional sexuality as “*foreign ideological import*” that threatens the very survival and physical continuity of the nation (Mole et al., 2021). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 9, White and national collective narcissism in the United States overlap stronger than national and Black or Latinx collective narcissism aligning with the concepts of ethnic and national collective narcissism with the White nationalism literature.

### Nationalism and patriotism

The efforts to understand the contradictory consequences of loyalty to the nation have also been informed by the social identity perspective (Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Sidanius et al., 1997). Authors agree that identification as a member of a nation is the pre-requisite to both patriotism and nationalism (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Huddy & Khatib, 2007), or national chauvinism “*national superiority and dominance*”, which combine national superiority with animosity toward outsiders (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003, p. 175). Patriotism and nationalism are seen as feelings or attitudes toward the nation that flow from national identification but are not the same as national identification (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Roccas et al., 2006; 2008). They are also associated with different definitions of national identity, but they go beyond cognitive aspect of national identification and comprise its evaluative and motivational aspects.

### Genuine patriotism

Positive attitude toward the nation is captured by the concept of patriotism. Patriotism combines positive attachment to and positive evaluation of the nation. It is most commonly defined as love for the nation and the belief that the nation and membership in it are valuable and worth being proud of (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Viroli, 1995). Such “genuine” (Adorno et al., 1950) or “constructive” patriotism (Schatz et al., 1999) has been contrasted with “*pseudo-patriotism*”: “*blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and rejection of other nations as outgroups*” (Adorno et al., 1950; p. 107). The concept of national ingroup glorification discussed in Chapter 2 is the closest to pseudo-patriotism as it comprises the uncritical approach to national authorities and symbols as well as the assumption of national superiority (Roccas et al., 2006). Other authors have broken pseudo-patriotism into two separate concepts based on theoretical considerations and empirical evidence: blind patriotism, the uncritical idealization of the nation, and national chauvinism or nationalism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Schatz et al., 1999).

### **Blind patriotism**

Blind patriotism takes a “*my country right or wrong*” stance and focuses on the protection of the idealized national ingroup’s image. In contrast to blind patriotism, “*constructive patriotism*”, is a “*critical loyalty*” to the nation (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153) that combines love for the nation with willingness to accept that it can be criticized to be improved when needed (Schatz et al., 1999). Constructive and blind patriotism both represent positive affect and commitment to the nation. They are associated with national identification. However, they are not associated with each other (or associated negatively) and predict different attitudes toward the national ingroups and outgroups. Blind patriotism is related to unconditional loyalty to the ingroup, the fusion of personal and national identity, emotional investment in national symbols, militaristic attitudes in international politics, opposition to immigration, and exaggeration of intergroup threat. In contrast, constructive patriotism is associated with instrumental approach to the national group, the assumption that the national community, its organizations, and institutions should enable individuals in achieving their goals (Schatz, 2020).

Constructive and blind patriotism have opposite associations with national collective narcissism. The association between national collective narcissism and blind patriotism is positive, whereas the unique association between national collective narcissism and constructive patriotism is negative (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2016). National collective narcissism overlaps with blind patriotism in uncritical idealization of the nation and unrealistic exaggeration of its greatness and importance. But how do those variables differ?

Unlike patriots who uncritically idealize their nation, national collective narcissists see the nation’s greatness constantly undermined by its insufficient recognition by others. While blind patriotism is related to insensitivity to and avoidance of ingroup criticism, collective narcissism is related to hypersensitivity to ingroup criticism. Collective narcissists believe others do not admire their exceptional nation as much as it deserves (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2016). Blind patriotism and national collective narcissism often make similar predictions of intergroup hostility, especially in the context of intergroup threat. Importantly, those predictions are independent suggesting that each concept pertains to a different route linking the beliefs about the nation to intergroup hostility.

### **Nationalism and national narcissism**

Authors often assume that nationalism and national chauvinism combine national attachment with national superiority (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Sidanius et al., 1997). According to those accounts, nationalism is “national love plus”; patriotism with add-ons; “*too much of a good thing.*” However, such conceptualization is

misleading. Unlike patriotism, nationalism is associated with hostility toward other nations, hostility toward minorities within one's nation, and group-based anti-egalitarianism (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Carter & Perez, 2015; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Federico et al., 2005; 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Mummendey et al., 2001; Pehrson et al., 2009; Sidanius et al., 1997).

There are reasons to believe that nationalism is incompatible with genuine patriotism, love, pride, and satisfaction with the nation. Instead, nationalism is related to national collective narcissism. They both express the belief in national superiority. However, in contrast to nationalism that involves an intrinsic desire for national dominance (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Mummendey et al., 2001; Pehrson et al., 2009), national collective narcissism is a desire for the nation to be recognized as better than others for whatever reason (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2019). While nationalism is dominant, agentic, and offensive, national collective narcissism is compensatory and subjectively defensive (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016). In other words, "*nationalism tends to be about what one country should be able to do to other countries, whereas collective narcissism is about what other countries owe us in terms of respect*" (Federico et al., 2022, pp. 180–181). The former may sometimes be a function of the latter, but not exclusively. Nationalistic superiority may be driven by compensatory motives, but it is not entirely driven by them. Though some individuals may be directly attracted to nationalism because of its agentic enthusiasm for national dominance, others may find nationalism attractive because of narcissistic concern about others' perceived failure to acknowledge the exaggerated greatness of the national ingroup.

In contrast to nationalists, national collective narcissists emphasize the need to assert appropriate recognition for the ingroup's exceptionality rather than the ingroup's dominance (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; 2019). Consequently, collective narcissism and nationalism may predict intergroup hostility for different reasons and in different ways. While nationalistic hostility is actively aggressive and openly dominant, collective narcissistic hostility is subjectively defensive, as it is motivated by the desire to *protect* the ingroup's image and assert the recognition that is *due* to the ingroup. To be sure, the subjective defensiveness is biased and does not make collective narcissistic hostility more justified. The same atrocities are often motivated by nationalistic dominance and the collective narcissist's belief that the ingroup deserves appropriate recognition and appreciation.

### **Patriotism as a remedy for nationalism**

While national collective narcissism has more in common with nationalism than patriotism has with nationalism, the three concepts are not reducible to each other. Indeed, their differentiation allows for a better understanding of

each of them and the relationships between them. A recent longitudinal study empirically distinguished patriotism, national collective narcissism, and nationalism and examined the relationships between them. The results of analyses performed on data collected from a nationally representative sample of Polish adults indicate that the model in which patriotism, national collective narcissism, and nationalism are distinguished as three separate factors fit the data better than a one factor model comprising all variables in one-dimensional national identification or a two factor model contrasting patriotism to national collective narcissism and nationalism comprised together (cf Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). This means that the conceptualization of the three variables as separate, distinct aspects of national identification reflects how they are experienced and represented. Importantly, while nationalism and national collective narcissism are positively associated, patriotism net of national collective narcissism is negatively (although weakly) associated with nationalism (Federico et al., 2022).

These findings align with a vast body of research that shows that national ingroup satisfaction is negatively associated with variables reflecting intergroup hostility once its narcissistic component. Of group pride is removed by controlling for collective narcissism. By the same token, the relationship between national collective narcissism and those variables becomes stronger when national ingroup satisfaction is removed from national collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2011, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019, 2020; 2023; see Chapter 2). This pattern has been demonstrated with respect to hostility toward national outgroups, minorities, and marginalized groups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020, cf Golec de Zavala & Bierwaczzonek, 2021 for sexism and Golec de Zavala et al., 2023 for racism). Together with a long line of previous work (Brewer, 1999; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), the finding of the negative relationship between patriotism and nationalism suggests that a positive orientation toward the national group needs not spill into national arrogance or aspirations to dominance over time. Rather, net of national narcissism, patriotism may reduce one's attraction to nationalism (Federico et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

## Conclusion

In sum, according to evidence, national collective narcissism, patriotism, and nationalism are distinct constructs, consistent with the argument that the multidimensionality of national attitudes may go beyond the distinction between patriotism and nationalism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). This conclusion aligns with the literature suggesting that positive evaluation of the national ingroup is not unitary (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) but falls into multiple dimensions, including love and pride of

the nation but also its blind idealization (Roccas et al., 2006; Schatz, 2020), entitlement (Endevelt et al., 2021), and narcissistic deservingness and contingency on external recognition (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2019).

National collective narcissism, nationalism, and patriotism are not only distinct. National collective narcissism and patriotism are also related to nationalism in opposite ways when their common variance is accounted for. Perhaps the most important contribution of research on national collective narcissism is the finding that non-narcissistic national ingroup satisfaction has a negative, not positive as it has been assumed (e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) association with nationalism. Put otherwise, differentiating national collective narcissism allows us to uncover the possibility of national ingroup love that is not only unrelated to nationalism but actually constrains it. Love of a nation not only does not have to come at expense of nationalism, outgroup hostility, and intolerance but it may actually be a remedy for nationalism, outgroup hostility, and intolerance.

When does non-narcissistic national love prevail? Usually competing visions and desired sentiments toward the nation coexist in democratic societies and are topics of constant debates and negotiations. Political leaders propose alternative narrations about the content of national identity. The degree of the overlap between national collective narcissism and non-narcissistic national ingroup satisfaction is shaped by those discussions. Non-narcissistic patriotism becomes a normative sentiment toward the nation when the dominant narration about the national identity stresses communality, commitment, and responsibility, the value of being connected to local communities transcending the self over the importance of the national image and its external recognition or dominance. When such a discourse has a stronger presence in the public sphere, the link between national collective narcissism, nationalism, and outgroup derogation is mitigated. Due to its positive overlap with patriotism, national collective narcissism is linked to psychological benefits of positive social identity: solidarity, sense of belonging, and meaningful existence. Conversely, when national collective narcissism becomes a dominant narration about the national identity and the role of non-narcissistic patriotism is marginalized (e.g., via centralization of power, social polarization, undermined solidarity, and detachment from local communities), individuals feeling uncertain about their self-importance are more likely to uphold collective narcissism and turn against other groups like minorities, refugees, or women because they are motivated to protect the group in whose grandiosity their sense of self-importance is invested.

National collective narcissism is endorsed by people who try to fulfill the need to be recognized as better by partaking in grandiosity of their nation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2022, see Chapter 7). Through populist leaders those individuals gain a collective voice. But national collective

narcissism is not the only way to conceptualize the nation. People who are likely to endorse national collective narcissism are also likely to endorse other visions of the nation. It is because their national identification is an important part of their broader sense of identity. Psychological research consistently shows that collective narcissism is related to ingroup centrality, ingroup attachment, and ingroup satisfaction (for a review see Golec de Zavala et al. 2019, see Chapter 2). In the context of national ingroup, national collective narcissism is associated with national identification, patriotism, and nationalism (Federico et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, see Chapter 3).

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# 4

## COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM, INTERGROUP THREAT, AND INTERGROUP HATE

Collective narcissism has inspired atrocities committed against outgroups. Germans under the Nazi regime agreed to believe that their nation's rights to a better living space and "pure blood" were not sufficiently recognized by others. In response, they considered themselves justified in fighting for those rights with the world and exterminating whole groups of people in the process (Adorno, 1951; Baumeister, 2002). Psychological research testifies that collective narcissism is a robust predictor of intergroup hostility, independent of its other well-studied individual difference correlates such as right-wing authoritarianism (reverence for social norms and authorities and rejection of novelty and difference) and social dominance orientation (preference for hierarchical organization of societies for reviews Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). This means that the mechanism underlying the link between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility is unique.

Collective narcissists see hostility and aggression as desirable responses to what they perceive as threats to the image of the ingroup, in which their self-esteem is invested. They experience threats to the ingroup's image as personal offenses (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). While themselves aggressive and hostile, collective narcissists project hostile intentions onto other groups and see the ingroup as besieged by animosity of others. Collective narcissists see aggression of their ingroup as justified, provoked, retaliatory, and defensive. They push their ingroup toward violence even if it is obviously harmful and costly to the ingroup members (Gronfeldt et al., 2022). Thus, collective narcissism is the specific aspect of ingroup identification that robustly contributes to escalation of intergroup hate and conflicts (Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2012; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). This chapter centers specifically on the links between collective

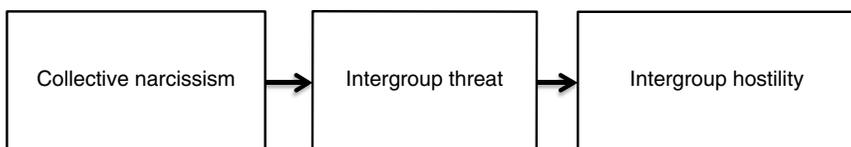
narcissism, hostile behavior and behavioral intentions, and intergroup threat. Chapter 5 focuses on the association between collective narcissism and prejudice.

## Aggression

### **Military aggression**

Collective narcissists support their nations' military aggression. For example, American collective narcissism predicted support for military intervention in Iraq in 2003 during the George W. Bush presidency. This war was a misaimed retaliation after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 that destroyed the Twin Towers and killed almost 3,000 people. While support for intervention in Iraq was also predicted by right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and blind patriotism, only the relationships between blind patriotism and American collective narcissism were mediated by the perception that America was threatened by the hostility of others. Early studies have also shown that the relationship between Polish collective narcissism and hostile anti-Semitism was mediated by the perception of people of Jewish origin as a threat to Poles and Poland. Together those studies indicated that collective narcissism predicts heightened perception of intergroup threat associated with preference for hostile responses toward the threatening outgroups as outlined in Figure 4.1.

As discussed in Chapter 3, national narcissism is related to nationalism, a dominant stance in international relations associated with support for demonstrations of military might (Federico et al., 2022). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 8, collective narcissism is associated with preference for ruthless political leaders prone to confrontations with other countries, leaders who mobilize supporters by insinuating external threats, resentment, and revenge-mongering. Collective narcissists prefer ruthless leaders regardless of whether they are the ingroup leaders or not. For example, Polish collective narcissists justified Putin's Russia invading Ukraine on February 24, 2022. They believed that by conspiring with NATO, Ukraine provoked Russian aggression and should now yield to Russian power to stop the war. Similarly, in France and the United States, national collective narcissism predicted justification for Russian aggression in Ukraine. Moreover, collective narcissists said they would find this aggression justified even if it had targeted their respective countries (Brown & Marinthe, 2022).



**FIGURE 4.1** Intergroup threat mediates the link between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility.

### **Terrorism**

Findings suggesting collective narcissists gravitate towards ruthlessness and violence align with results suggesting that collective narcissists prefer intergroup violence even if it is likely to harm the ingroup members (Gronfeldt et al., 2022), including the self. In this vein, studies have linked collective narcissism to support for terrorist violence, including suicide terrorism, a violent attack, in which the attacker willingly dies as a result of the method of the attack they use (Jaško et al., 2020). Three studies were conducted among extremists in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Morocco. They show that collective narcissists embrace extremist ideologies and terrorist violence.

The studies assessed collective narcissism with reference to an ethnic (Tamil in Sri Lanka), religious (Muslim in Morocco), and ideological groups (in Indonesia). They examined how collective narcissism in each of those groups predicted support for ideological extremism and support for terrorist violence in more vs. less radicalized social networks. The radical contexts were operationalized as the past involvement in political violence (former membership in the LTTE in Sri Lanka), a geographical area known for the greater presence of Islamist and Jihadist organization (radicalized Tetouan vs. metropolitan, diverse, and tolerant Casablanca in Morocco), or belonging to organizations with explicit ideological agendas (Islamists and Jihadists vs. Moderates in Indonesia).

In Sri Lanka, collective narcissism with reference to ethnic group was assessed among former members of LTTE Tamils (detained during the time of the study) and participants who never belonged to this organization. Collective narcissists among LTTE Tamils agreed with statements like: “*A separate Tamil State can only be achieved through violence and insurgency,*” “*Today, armed fighting is a personal duty of all Tamil people,*” and “*Suicide bombers will be rewarded for their actions in their next life*” (Jaško et al., 2020, p. 6).

In Morocco, Muslim collective narcissism predicted support for political violence assessed as agreement with such statements as “*Armed Jihad is a personal obligation of all Muslims today.*” It also predicted support for extreme ideology assessed by statements like “*Political leaders in our country should be selected solely by Islamic clerics*” or “*Islam should be practiced in the strictest way, regardless of situations or circumstance*” (Jaško et al., 2020, p. 7). Those predictions were stronger in the more radicalized region of Tetouan in comparison to less radicalized Casablanca.

Finally, in Indonesia, participants from Muslim organizations varying in the extremity of their beliefs were compared: moderate Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama organizations vs. more extreme but not violent (e.g., Hizbut Tahrir, Indonesia Salafi Group, Persatuan Islam, or Partai Keadilan Sosial). In each organization participants were asked to respond to the Collective Narcissism Scale with reference to the organization they represented. In radical organizations, collective narcissism was related to support

for political violence. In all organizations, it was associated with ideological extremism.

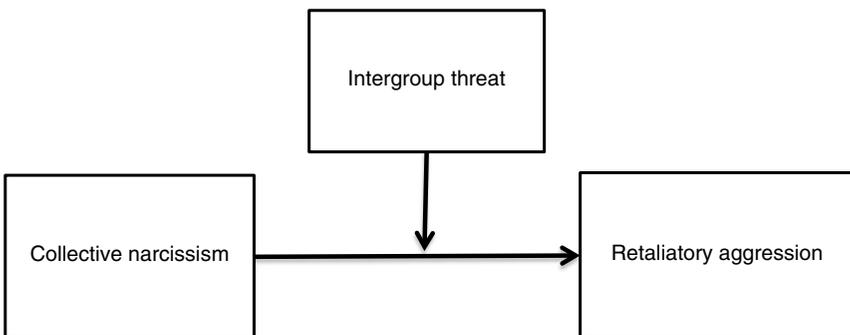
In another study in Indonesia, collective narcissism was assessed with reference to the ideological ingroup among Sunni Islamic organizations: conservative and fundamentalist Prosperous and Justice Party vs. moderate and tolerant Nadhatul Ulama. In both organizations, collective narcissism predicted endorsement of extreme behaviors such as fighting and dying for the ingroup. Its predictions were independent of Muslim religious fundamentalism. In both organizations, the link between collective narcissism and endorsement of political violence was stronger when participants perceived their ingroups as valuing tight adherence to group norms and intolerance of group norms' deviants (Yustisia et al., 2020).

Together, these results suggest that collective narcissism predicts support for political violence, especially in social contexts, in which violence is accepted, seen as desirable or normative. To put otherwise, when the ingroup or a society accepts intergroup violence as means of pursuing political goals, collective narcissists are the first willing to support specific acts of organized violence against outgroups. Nevertheless, even in less radical and peaceful contexts, collective narcissists are likely to endorse extremist ideologies and antagonistic beliefs and follow ruthless leaders.

Extremist leaders offer clear prescriptions for violence. Extremist ideologies justify it (Webber et al., 2020). They may eventually instigate acts of political violence as groups radicalize, societies embrace collective narcissism and become more polarized.

### ***Retaliatory hostility***

As illustrated by Figure 4.2, psychological experiments found that the association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility is stronger when the ingroup's image is threatened, when outgroup members criticize or undermine the ingroup.



**FIGURE 4.2** Intergroup threat moderates the link between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility.

Aligning with studies demonstrating the importance of radicalized social context, those studies demonstrated that collective narcissism predicts retaliatory intergroup hostility centered specifically on the outgroup that threatened the ingroup's image, not displaced on other groups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). For example, in one experimental study, American students read a fictional interview with a foreign exchange student. After reading critical comments about American national character, American collective narcissists expressed hostile behavioral intentions toward the national outgroup represented by the criticizing student. In another experiment, collective narcissists reported that suggestions that their university was not the most prestigious in Poland hurt them personally. Those suggestions were made by students of another university. In retribution, collective narcissists made resource distribution decisions that harmed all students of this university.

Polish collective narcissists also advocated hostile confrontation with a fictitious team of British scientists with whom Polish scientists allegedly collaborated to discover a new chemical element. The British scientist ostensibly disagreed to name the new element to honor Poland. Polish collective narcissists preferred hostile confrontation with their British scientists, especially after they previously read an article containing critical comments about Poland issued by the British press on an unrelated issue (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). These results suggest that collective narcissists retaliate towards those groups they perceive as hostile and threatening.

Such findings extend the threatened egotism theory, which posits that ego-threatening feedback strengthens the association between individual narcissism and retaliatory aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). On the social level of the self it is collective narcissism – rather than individual narcissism – that predicts hostile retribution to the ingroup image threat.

### **Schadenfreude**

Research has also established that collective narcissists engage in opportunistic, passive form of intergroup hostility: intergroup *schadenfreude*, rejoicing in suffering of members of the outgroup deemed as threatening. Those studies also showed that it takes very little to convince collective narcissists their ingroup is threatened. Collective narcissists interpret as insulting situations that require a stretch of imagination to be interpreted as an insult. For example, in Turkey, collective narcissists rejoiced in the 2008 economic crisis in the European Union because they perceived Turkey's prolonged wait on the application to join the European Union as an insult to Turkey. In Portugal, collective narcissists rejoiced in the economic crisis in

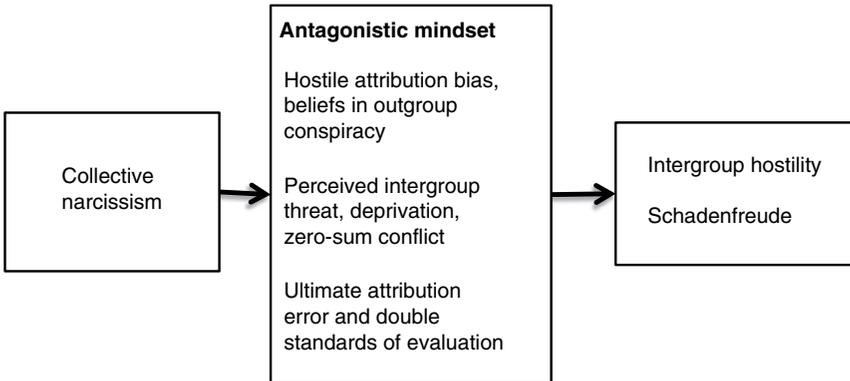
Germany and reported hostile behavioral intentions toward Germans because they felt offended by Germany's higher status. In Poland, collective narcissists wanted to punish the producers of a movie (*Aftermath*), which alluded to Polish anti-Semitism during the Second World War. Another study showed that Polish collective narcissists threatened physical punishment to the Polish actor that made jokes about the country's populist government. They trolled the actor with offensive and hurtful remarks publicly rejoicing in the actor's father's life-threatening illness (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Chapter 6 discusses in more detail analogous findings indicating that collective narcissists do not feel distressed by suffering of the outgroup in the context of intergroup exclusion.

In sum, collective narcissists prefer confrontation in intergroup conflicts and hostile retaliation to what they perceive as threat to their ingroup. They are disproportionately punitive and unforgiving (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Hamer et al., 2018). They believe that hostile revenge is the correct response to threat (Dyduch-Hazar & Mrozinski, 2021). It is unclear whether collective narcissists would accept an apology for the real or imagined wrongs to the ingroup even if it was offered. Studies show, though, that they do not feel their ingroup should offer an apology when it is accused of offending members of an outgroup (Putra et al., 2022).

Findings reviewed in this section elucidate the association of collective narcissism and intergroup hostility that is mediated by and becomes amplified under the threat to the ingroup image. Those findings suggest that the relationship between collective narcissism and intergroup threat is complex and deserves further examination. Collective narcissism predicts exaggerated perception of intergroup threat. This suggests that collective narcissists are likely to be chronically hostile because they are hypersensitive to the ingroup image threat and susceptible to feel offended by insults to the ingroup's image, even when the insults are debatable, not perceived by others, nor intended by another group. They interpret the lack of sufficient reverence for the ingroup as offensive. They rarely see the acknowledgment of the ingroup by others as satisfactory. They quickly develop "tolerance" to external validation and are constantly on the lookout for new signs that others disrespect them.

### Antagonistic mindset

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, exaggeration of intergroup threat is an aspect of antagonistic mindset associated with collective narcissism. Studies identified several aspects of this mindset: hostile attribution bias, zero-sum perception of intergroup situations, perception of relative deprivation of the ingroup, proneness to ultimate attribution error, and double-moral standards in



**FIGURE 4.3** Collective narcissism predicts intergroup hostility via antagonistic mindset including exaggerated perception of intergroup threat.

evaluation of actions of the ingroup and the outgroup. Those studies suggest that collective narcissistic hostility has specific features that do not extend to other predictors of intergroup hostility. The overall feature of this mindset is the biased perception of the ingroup hostility as a necessary defense. There are reasons to think that what is especially in the need of defense is the ingroup's exaggerated image.

### ***Hostile attribution bias***

One study compared the predictions of collective narcissism, social dominance orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism in the context of perceived threat to the ingroup's image. In this study Mexican collective narcissists reported engaging in boycotting American businesses in Mexico in retaliation to the United States constructing a wall along the Mexican border in 2006 under the George W. Bush administration. While America ostensibly built the wall to prevent terrorism, it was built to stop immigration from Mexico, and Mexicans perceived it as an insult to Mexico and Mexicans. In the same context, social dominance orientation predicted lower engagement in actions to hurt American businesses in Mexico because those businesses and positive relations with the United States were seen as a leverage that Mexico can use to assert its better international status. In turn, right-wing authoritarianism was negatively associated with boycotting American companies in Mexico because authoritarians did not perceive the wall as an insult (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Thus, collective narcissism specifically predicted perceiving the wall as threat to the ingroup image.

Together with findings discussed in the previous section, the results discussed here suggest that collective narcissists believe their ingroup is constantly threatened by others because they project own hostile intentions on other groups. Moreover, collective narcissists exaggerate external threat to justify the ingroup's hostility. Multiple studies converge to indicate collective narcissism is associated with hostile attribution bias, exaggerated, and unwarranted attribution of hostile intentions toward the ingroup to outgroups (Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2012).

For example, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 10, studies pointed to the now well-explored association between collective narcissism and a tendency to believe that other groups conspire against the ingroup (for a review see also Golec de Zavala et al., 2022). Conspiracy theories assume secretive, malevolent plots involving multiple actors: a mysterious "them" who "run" things and work against "us." They serve as an explanation for why the ingroup does not receive the recognition it deserves: It is because others envy its greatness and plot to undermine it. Conspiracy theories attribute secretive hostile intentions to outgroups and instigate the sense of intergroup threat.

Collective narcissism has also been linked to *siege mentality* (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Siege mentality is "[a] belief held by group members stating that the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions toward them" (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992, p. 49). Such a belief explains and justifies hardships suffered in the name of the ingroup in intergroup conflicts and legitimizes the hostility and violence perpetrated by the ingroup and the constant monitoring of the signs of the ingroup's mistreatment. Both siege beliefs and conspiracy theories are likely to satisfy the narcissistic need to perceive the ingroup as unique, of special status, and morally superior to the threatening outgroups. They portray the ingroup as brave, misunderstood, and righteous, standing alone against the hostile and dissolute world. Most importantly, they appeal to collective narcissists because they confirm what the narcissists continuously to claim: That other groups are wrong not properly acknowledging their greatness.

In a similar vein, evidence indicates that collective narcissism is associated with *meta-hatred*, a belief that outgroup members hate the ingroup. This belief predicts outgroup hate. Specifically, Muslim collective narcissism in Indonesia predicted believing that non-Muslim Chinese and Christian Indonesians held prejudice and hatred toward Muslim Indonesians. Muslim collective narcissists agreed that members of those religious outgroups see the ingroup "(...) as enemy" and this is "*the reason why they don't want to blend with us*" (Putra et al., 2022).

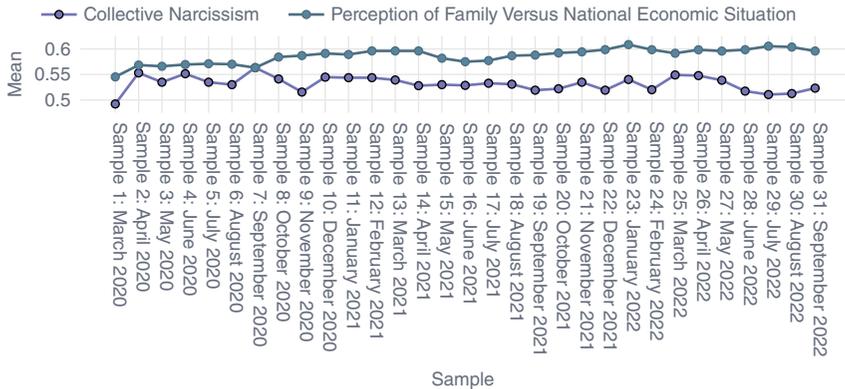
Finally, collective narcissism has been linked to an exaggerated tendency to perceive outgroups as hostile toward the ingroup (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019). In two studies on nationally representative sample of adult Poles,

Polish collective narcissists rejected Syrian refugees because they perceived them as “*aggressive*,” “*dangerous*,” and “*hostile towards Poles*.” Such a perception mediated the link between collective narcissism and social distance and cold feelings toward the refugees as well as behavioral intentions of harming, injuring, offending, and humiliating refugees from Africa and the Middle East. The same pattern of results was also obtained in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, with respect to Muslims. American collective narcissists believed that Muslims were angry and hostile toward non-Muslim Americans. This perception mediated the link between American collective narcissism and feeling displeased, furious, irritated, and angry when thinking of Muslim people. In the United Kingdom and Portugal, the link between collective narcissism and hostile behavioral intentions toward Muslims was mediated by attributing Muslims with hostility and anger (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019).

### ***Zero-sum beliefs and perceived deprivation***

Attributing hostility to outgroups suggests that collective narcissists perceive intergroup relations as inherently antagonistic. Indeed, studies show that collective narcissism is associated with a tendency to perceive intergroup relations as zero-sum conflicts in which only one group can win and others have to lose, and increasing the status of one group necessarily infringes on the status and importance of another. For example, gender collective narcissism among men and women in Poland predicts mirror image, zero-sum perceptions of the relationships between men and women. Similarly, ethnic collective narcissism among American White people and Black people (or Latinos) predicts the zero-sum perception of racial relationships (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). Moreover, results in both intergroup contexts show that collective narcissists believe that their ingroup is deprived and disadvantaged in comparison to the outgroup.

The sense of relative deprivation characterizes collective narcissistic perception of intergroup reality in which only the ingroup unjustly suffers (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2018). More generally, feeling that one’s own position may be somehow worse than that of others is associated with collective narcissism. Figure 4.4 illustrates how Polish collective narcissism and the perception of one’s own economic situation in comparison to the economic situation of other Polish citizens fluctuated in Poland over two years. It suggests that collective narcissism increased as people saw their own economic situation as worse than that of the whole country and decreased when they perceived their own economic situation as better than that of the others. These results are based on the monthly assessments of both variables between March 2020 and September 2022 in nationally representative samples of Polish adults as a part of monthly public opinion polls by Ariadna Research Panel.



**FIGURE 4.4** The perception of own economic situation as better than the average and Polish collective narcissism from March 2020 to September 2022.

This suggests that collective narcissists tend to believe they and their ingroup are deprived, disadvantaged, and victimized regardless of their objective situation. Indeed, collective narcissism is associated with beliefs about the ingroup’s exclusive victimhood and exaggeration of the ingroup’s suffering (Bertin et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Lantos & Forgas, 2021). In line with such findings, Chapter 7 discusses in more detail the findings that collective narcissism is associated with “*status anxiety*” in advantaged social groups and linked to discrimination of disadvantaged groups whose emancipation is perceived as threat to the privileged ingroup’s status. The belief that the ingroup is oppressed by emancipation of others is rather delusional when held by members of advantaged group enjoying higher status and access to resources, but this fact escapes collective narcissists.

### **Ultimate attribution error**

Collective narcissism also predicts ultimate attribution error and moral double standards in understanding and evaluating intergroup situations. Ultimate attribution error is a biased attribution of benevolent and moral actions of the ingroup to its members’ stable dispositional characteristics but the same actions performed by the outgroup are seen as serendipitous or elicited by situational pressures. Analogously, malevolent and immoral actions of the ingroup are attributed to situational pressures or blamed on unfortunate circumstances when performed by the ingroup. However, when

performed by the outgroup they are attributed to stable dispositional characteristics of its members. Such biased perceptions develop in contentious intergroup relations and escalating intergroup conflicts (Pettigrew, 2001). People in intergroup conflicts attribute what they regard as negative acts performed by outgroup members dispositionally, often to their genetically determined features, or “their nature.” However, when the same act is performed by the ingroup member, it is attributed to external circumstances and seen as a one-off, unfortunate mistake.

Ultimate attribution error is also illustrated by the double standards applied in interpretation of the same actions as moral or immoral depending on whether they were performed by the ingroup or outgroup members. Collective narcissists justify immoral actions of the ingroup actions and deny moral justification of the same actions when they are performed by outgroups. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, collective narcissists justify and reinterpret hateful and discriminatory actions of the ingroup but see the same actions as morally condemnable and discriminatory when they are perpetrated by the outgroup members (Putra et al., 2022; West et al., 2022). Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 6, collective narcissists feel distressed only when their ingroup is excluded in intergroup contexts, but not when their ingroup excludes other groups (Golec de Zavala, 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2023; Hase et al., 2021).

Collective narcissism is also associated with a tendency to see acts as moral or justified when they serve ingroup interests in comparison to the same actions that do not serve ingroup interests or serve the interests of outgroups. For example, partisan collective narcissism in the United States predicted opposite evaluation of the decision to confirm the Republican nominee Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court by the U.S. Senate among Republicans vs. Democrats. Judge Kavanaugh had been accused of sexual misconduct, and opinions regarding his political nomination to the Supreme Court strongly divided the American society. While collective narcissists among Democrats judged his confirmation as immoral, collective narcissists among Republicans did not see anything immoral in it and judged it as “*fair*,” “*moral*,” “*ethical*,” and “*just*.” In another study, American collective narcissism predicted opinions regarding President Trump’s decision to remain loyal to Saudi Arabia in the wake of accusations of the Crown Prince being involved in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. American collective narcissists regarded this decision as moral, ethical, and just especially when it was linked to American economic interests invested in friendly relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia (Bocian et al., 2021). In a similar vein, results discussed in Chapter 10 show that Polish collective narcissism predicted defensive reactions to the evidence that Karol Wojtyla covered sexual abuse and pedophilia in the Catholic Church and protected priests who perpetrated them. The latest

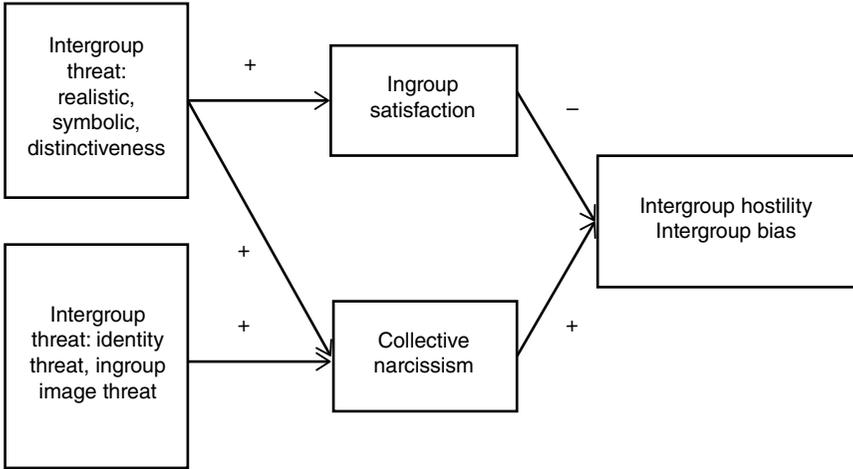
evidence was presented in a book “Maxima Culpa. John Paul II Knew” published in Poland in early 2023. Polish collective narcissists refused to accept this evidence and condemned the book as an insult and threat to Polish pope and Poland.

In sum, together the results reviewed in this section suggest that collective narcissistic antagonistic mindset serves to justify the ingroup’s hostility as defensive. Collective narcissists specifically – in comparison to people who strongly identify with their groups or are satisfied to be ingroup members or people high in right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation – see their ingroup’s aggression as provoked and defensive retaliation. Collective narcissists share a predilection to over-detect, monitor, and exaggerate intergroup threat, especially threat to the ingroup’s image. They feel compelled to retaliate aggressively to such a threat.

### Intergroup threat as a source of collective narcissism

While studies suggest that collective narcissism predicts exaggeration of intergroup threat that leads to hostile retaliation and intergroup threat strengthens the association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility, there are also reasons to think that intergroup threat, and especially threat to the ingroup’s image, increases collective narcissism. Theodor Adorno (1951) argued that preponderance of collective narcissism in Germany before the Second World War was caused by how humiliated and dishonored Germans felt by the Treaty of Versailles that ended the First World War. Adorno believed German collective narcissism was born from those emotions as the humiliating surrender was a direct threat to the Germans’ grandiose ingroup image. Collective narcissism was rallied and harnessed by the Nazis to get to power and mobilize support for the aggressive internal and international politics (see also Baumeister, 2002). Indeed, evidence from psychological studies indicates that feeling humiliated - personally and collectively - is among the most frequently reported motives for political radicalization and violence (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

As illustrated by Figure 4.5, in line with Adorno’s argument, a new line of studies shows that intergroup threat predicts collective narcissism, whereas the results are mixed in the case of non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction (Bagci et al., 2021; Bertin et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2023; Guerra et al., 2022; 2023). Whether intergroup threat simultaneously increases collective narcissism and non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction or increases only collective narcissism but not non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction seems to depend on the type of intergroup threat.



**FIGURE 4.5** Intergroup threat predicting collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction that differently mediate its effects on intergroup hostility.

According to the intergroup threat model (Stephan et al., 2002; 2009), intergroup threat may be realistic and concern an outgroup as a threat to the ingroup’s interests, access to power and resources, general welfare, or even existence. It may result from outgroup aggression or discrimination and oppression by the outgroup. Intergroup threat may also be symbolic. In this case the outgroup is perceived as a threat to the ingroup’s worldviews, values, and beliefs by the virtue of holding different worldviews, values, and beliefs. Intergroup threat may be embedded in a negative stereotype of the outgroup that attributes threatening features and intentions to the outgroup and its members.

In their seminal paper Neila Branscombe and collaborators (1999) propose a categorization of threats that can be experienced on the social identity level. Some of those threats are posed by outgroups. Outgroups may pose (1) the categorization threat experienced when someone is categorized as a member of a group against their will. For example, this threat is experienced by non-binary persons prompted or forced to choose a binary gender identity. Another threat posed exclusively by relevant outgroups is (2) the distinctiveness threat, experienced when the ingroup uniqueness is undermined. This threat is experienced when ingroup members perceive too much similarity between the ingroup and another group. Distinctiveness is “*the perceived difference or dissimilarity between one’s own group and another group on a relevant dimension*” (Jetten et al., 2001, p. 621). When the ingroup distinctiveness is threatened, ingroup members are motivated to restore it by strengthening intergroup differentiation. They do this often via

outgroup derogation (Jetten et al., 2001; 2004). Finally, outgroups pose (3) the threat to the ingroup value experienced when they criticize, exclude, or discriminate the ingroup. This way outgroups threaten the ingroup's positive image undermining the ingroup members' pride and leave them feeling humiliated (Branscombe et al., 1999).

Studies conducted in four European countries – Portugal, Greece, Germany, and the United Kingdom – showed that different countries posed realistic (Germans in Portugal, Greece, and the United Kingdom, Sweden to Germany), symbolic (German in Portugal and Greece, Poland in Germany, and Romania in the United Kingdom), and distinctiveness (Spain in Portugal, Italy in Greece, Austria in Germany, and Ireland in the United Kingdom) threat to the national ingroups (Guerra et al., 2022). In all four countries, national collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction were independently, positively related to all types of intergroup threat. However, only national collective narcissism was positively related to hostility toward the threatening outgroups regardless of the type of threat it posed.

Studies also showed that ethnic collective narcissism is associated with the perception that the ethnic outgroup poses an identity threat to the ingroup, regardless of the relative status of the involved ethnic groups. Specifically, in Turkey, collective narcissists among ethnic Turks (ethnic majority, advantaged group) felt threatened by Turkish Kurds (ethnic minority, disadvantaged group). Specifically, collective narcissists among Turks felt that their own ethnic identity was threatened in the presence of Kurds who express their specific ethnic identity and followed their specific customs and traditions. Collective narcissists among Kurds also felt their ethnic identity was threatened by Turks following their specific customs and traditions. Collective narcissism mediated the association between the identity threat and intergroup bias among Kurds and Turks.

These results were replicated among White people and Black people in the United Kingdom. White people perceived Black people as the identity threat, and Black people perceived White people as the identity threat. In both groups, collective narcissism was associated with larger difference in the temperature of feelings for the ethnic ingroup and the outgroup with warmer feelings being reported for the ethnic ingroup. Ingroup satisfaction was not associated with perceived identity threat and, unlike collective narcissism, it was positively associated with group members' psychological well-being (Bagci et al., 2021). Together research by Bagci and colleagues (2021) and Guerra and colleagues (2022) suggests that the perception of intergroup threat is reliably associated with collective narcissism, narcissism but not as reliably with non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction. Moreover, only collective narcissism predicts retaliatory intergroup hostility in the context of intergroup threat.

There are reasons to believe that intergroup threat increases collective narcissism. For example, in one study an experimental manipulation

emphasized the increasing relative power of the European Union over the United Kingdom linking it to the influx of immigrants into the United Kingdom. This manipulation increased British collective narcissism and did not increase ingroup identification comprising ingroup satisfaction, centrality, and perceived ties with other ingroup members (Marchlewska et al., 2018). Although it is unclear whether it was the power imbalance or increased immigration threat that increased collective narcissism, it can be argued that the suggested power imbalance posed the ingroup's image threat while the immigration posed realistic and symbolic intergroup threat. In another study, French participants read results of a fictional opinion poll indicating that French people felt that France's stance on freedom of speech was the most unfairly criticized facet of its politics and the most important domain in which France is not sufficiently recognized by other countries. In the control condition participants read an unrelated text that did not prime ingroup identification. This experimental manipulation, intended by the authors to increase the salience of French collective narcissism, increased both French collective narcissism and French national identification (Bertin et al., 2022).

Centering on intergroup threat, collective narcissism research elucidates the inconsistent findings in two lines of psychological literature : (1) research that investigates how ingroup identification moderates the effect of intergroup threat on intergroup hostility (Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2009) and (2) research that examines the consequences of intergroup threat on group members ingroup identification and well-being.

First, collective narcissism research proposes an explanation why studies have brought inconsistent findings predicting the positive, negative, and null association between ingroup identification and intergroup hostility under intergroup threat (Riek et al., 2006). One plausible reason is that they used measures that did not differentiate collective narcissism. The inconsistent results may reflect the fact that measures of ingroup identification differed (but did not control) in the extent to which they tapped into collective narcissism. The measures that tapped collective narcissism more were more likely to produce significant positive associations between ingroup identification and intergroup hostility under intergroup threat. However, the studies whose measures of ingroup identification tapped into non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction were more likely to produce negative associations with intergroup hostility under intergroup threat. Measures that tapped into both collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction were likely to produce null findings.

Similarly, collective narcissism research may explain inconsistent findings in the rejection identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999) and threat identification model (Schmid & Muldoon, 2015) literatures. Both models propose

that intergroup threat should increase positive ingroup identification which protects ingroup members' psychological well-being in the face of intergroup threat. Indeed, intergroup threat was shown to increase group cohesion (Stephan et al., 2009), positive ingroup identification (Verkuyten, 2009), and solidarity with ingroup members (Giamo et al., 2012). However, studies also showed that discrimination that poses the ingroup image threat increases distress and undermines group members well-being (Meyer et al., 2008). Threat to the ingroup's image has also been linked to greater detachment from the devalued social identity, especially when the intergroup boundaries were and group members can move from one group to another easily permeable (Bobowik et al., 2017).

Collective narcissism research suggests that the predictions of the rejection identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999) and threat identification model (Schmid & Muldoon, 2015) may not apply at high levels of collective narcissism. While intergroup threat is associated with collective narcissism and may even increase collective narcissism, collective narcissism does not protect group members' well-being but increases their feeling of humiliation and leads to retaliatory intergroup hostility. Only ingroup satisfaction is linked to group members well-being but it is unclear whether it increases in response to intergroup threat (Bagci et al., 2021; Guerra et al., 2022). Moreover, collective narcissism is negatively associated with psychological well-being, whereas ingroup satisfaction is positively associated with psychological well-being (Golec de Zavala, 2019). Studies that do not differentiate collective narcissism as an aspect of ingroup identification are likely to produce conflicting findings. Similarly, studies that experimentally increase collective narcissism and other aspects of ingroup identification are likely to produce inconclusive results that cannot be clearly attributed to the increases in either (Bertin et al., 2022, cf Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

### ***Ingroup misrecognition threat***

Studies reviewed above indicate that while certain types of intergroup threat increase ingroup identification including collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction, there are other types of intergroup threat – the identity threat and threat to the ingroup image – that seem to increase collective narcissism specifically (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). It is important to distinguish those types of intergroup threat, especially when examining distinct effects of collective narcissism vs. other aspects of ingroup identification (see Chapter 2). In this vein, experimental studies show that the ingroup misrecognition threat reliably increases collective narcissism without increasing ingroup satisfaction or ingroup glorification (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023; Guerra et al., 2023). Although the effect of this experimental manipulation of intergroup threat on collective narcissism is small, it is not smaller than effects of other attempts to use

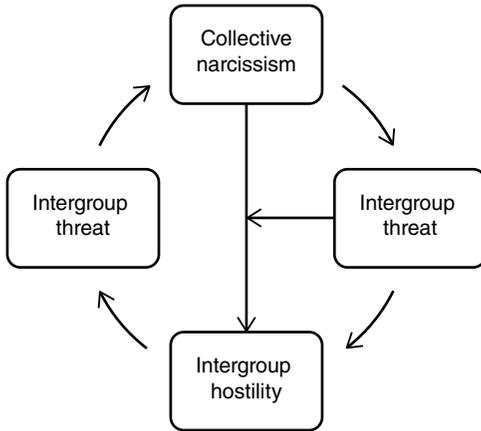
intergroup threat to experimentally increase ingroup identification including collective narcissism (Bertin et al., 2022; Marchlewska et al., 2018) or collective narcissism specifically (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

The ingroup misrecognition happens when group members have their social identity denied, not recognized, or mistaken by others (Amer, 2020; Blackwood et al., 2015; da Silva et al., 2021). Another form of ingroup misrecognition takes place when the ingroup is not recognized as distinct from another group by external observers. Examples of this form of the ingroup misrecognition include a popular pop music singer Justin Bieber on his way to give a concert in Poland announcing he is excited about his upcoming visit to Russia, or Britney Spears welcoming her Portuguese audience in Lisbon shouting “Hello Spain!” of the stage (Guerra et al., 2023). Having the national ingroup mistaken with another (especially when it is objectively similar to it) is an ingroup image threat. Misrecognition is perceived as devaluation and a lack of respect (Honneth, 1996). Five independent studies – three in Poland and two in Portugal – showed that such situations triggered collective narcissism specifically without increasing ingroup satisfaction or ingroup glorification. Those results are consistent with the argument that contingency of the exaggerated ingroup’s image on external recognition is a core feature of collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2011). The increases in collective narcissism in all studies were associated with hostility toward the outgroup that threatened the ingroup’s uniqueness: the outgroup with which foreigners mistook the ingroup.

## Conclusion

Multiple findings provide robust empirical support for the conclusion that collective narcissism is associated with intergroup hostility (see also Chapter 5 specifically focused on prejudice). Collective narcissism is the form of ingroup love that is reliably associated with outgroup hate. This association generalizes over various social identities, national and intergroup contexts as well as group status differences. Findings also suggest that the association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility is amplified under intergroup threat and that subjectively to collective narcissists, hostility of their ingroup is justified, retaliatory and defensive. Regardless of whether the outgroup realistically poses a threat to the ingroup or not, collective narcissists are prone to perceive it as a threat and if necessary fabricate evidence and spread conspiracy theories to justify this perception.

As illustrated by Figure 4.6, findings suggest complex, possibly self-reinforcing relationships among collective narcissism, intergroup threat, and intergroup hostility. Collective narcissism generates biased perceptions of



**FIGURE 4.6** A model of the complex relationships between collective narcissism, intergroup threat, and intergroup hostility.

intergroup situations that result in exaggerated sense of intergroup threat, which in turn is related to increased intergroup hostility. At the same time, studies suggest that intergroup threat increases collective narcissism, which leads to increases in intergroup hostility.

Our work suggests that it is important to design experimental manipulations that increase collective narcissism specifically, as some types of intergroup threat increase collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction that are associated with opposite attitudes toward the threatening outgroups. Experimental manipulations that increase both collective narcissism and non-narcissistic ingroup identification confound their effects. Initial studies indicate that the misrecognition threat – having the ingroup mistaken for an outgroup – seems to increase collective narcissism specifically, without increasing other aspects of ingroup identification.

Collective narcissism research clarifies the inconstant results pertaining to the role of ingroup identification in predicting intergroup hostility under intergroup threat. Research clarifies that collective narcissism is the specific aspect of ingroup identification that is robustly associated with intergroup hostility under intergroup threat. Collective narcissism research also clarifies inconsistent findings regarding the rejection identification model and threat identification model. The predictions of these models – expecting positive ingroup identification to buffer negative effects of social identity threat – do not apply at high levels of collective narcissism.

The way out of the self-reinforcing vicious circle of intergroup threat, collective narcissism, and intergroup hostility seems to be via the positive association between collective narcissism and non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction. As reviewed in Chapter 2 both aspects of positive ingroup

evaluation have often opposite associations with intergroup outcomes. The overlap with non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction reduces the strength of the association between collective narcissism, intergroup hostility and perceived intergroup threat. Capitalizing on those findings interventions that emphasize non-narcissistic pride of being a member of a valuable ingroup may decrease collective narcissistic intergroup hostility and collective narcissistic sensitivity to intergroup threat. Another type of intervention may focus on emphasizing the positive, prosocial emotionality associated with ingroup satisfaction to reduce collective narcissistic hostility. Such interventions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

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# 5

## COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM AND PREJUDICE

### Politics of hate

National collective narcissism has become a normative belief organizing the understanding of national identity in many countries governed by ultra-conservative populists. Its introduction to the political mainstream has been accompanied by growing societal polarization, increasing inequalities, intensified exclusion, and discrimination of disadvantaged groups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021b). In Poland, since the populist government came to power in 2015, women and sexual minorities have suffered increasing infringements of their human rights. Pursuing gender equality and deviating from patriarchal norms governing gender and sexuality has been construed as an “*ideology*,” “*civilizational invasion*” antagonistic to traditional family values rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Supported by the Polish Catholic Church and the Pope’s declaration on education in “*gender ideology*” as dangerous, the Polish government has limited access to sexual education and care and stigmatized sexual minorities along with men and women who refuse to conform to traditional gender roles (Ayoub, 2014; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). In 2019, a Polish archbishop publicly labeled the LGBTIQ+ community a “*rainbow plague*” (Reuters, 2019), several Polish cities declared themselves “*LGBT free zones*” (Noack, 2019), and a Polish newspaper announced its intention to distribute “*LGBT free zone*” stickers nationwide (Giordano, 2019). Across European countries where populist parties and politicians prevail noted decreases in pro-LGBTIQ+ legislation but increases in hate speech against women and sexual minorities (ILGA-Europe, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic many populist governments attempted to consolidate their authoritarian power and intensified attacks on dissenters to traditional sexual norms (Federico et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2021a;

Mole et al., 2021). In Hungary, Viktor Orbán banned gender studies from universities across Hungary (Apperly, 2019), and during the pandemic, he blocked access to legal gender recognition for transgender people (Walker, 2020). In 2020, the ultraconservative government in Poland introduced a highly controversial near-total abortion ban, the most restrictive anti-abortion law in Europe, and used the state power to crash street protests against it. Several southern states in the United States used the COVID-19 pandemic to ban abortion (Hernandez & Barnes, 2020). In 2022, the American Supreme Court overruled the *Roe v. Wade* decision that had guaranteed constitutional protection of women's rights to reproductive health since 1974. Its overruling allowed individual states to introduce laws that limit those rights.

The expansion of populism in the United States has been accompanied by societal polarization and a steep increase in hate crimes (2021 Hate Crime Statistics, 2021). Hate crimes are offenses motivated by prejudice toward disadvantaged groups such as racial or religious minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, or women. In 2020, about 20% of those crimes were aggravated assaults including murders. They are classified as domestic terrorism. Domestic terrorism has recently been identified as a primary threat to national security by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, superseding the threat from other forms of terrorism (2020). Such acts of domestic terrorism were predominantly perpetrated by right-wing extremists motivated by the divisive populist rhetoric (Nacos et al., 2020; Rees et al., 2019; Selvanathan & Leidner, 2022). The manifestos issued by some perpetrators of hate crimes illustrate their inspiration by the nativist approach toward the nation and narcissistic approach toward their advantaged social identity. For example, the 180-page long manifesto of the 2022 Buffalo shooter who targeted and killed Black people in Buffalo, New York, United States revealed his self-proclaimed allegiance to American White supremacy movement and his endorsement of the “*great replacement*” conspiracy theory blaming Jews and the “*elites*” for purposefully procuring the “*White genocide*.” The attack was explicitly intended to terrorize racial minorities to leave the country (Thompson et al., 2022). While majority of hate crimes in the United States are perpetrated against racial minorities, women are also targeted by hate crime. A mass shooting that took place at the University of California in 2014 was explicitly motivated by hatred of women. The University of California shooter openly spoke for “*Incels*” (i.e., self-proclaimed “*involuntary celibates*”), an online community of sexually frustrated men preaching hate and vengeance toward women for not recognizing their entitlement to have sex with the women they choose (Beauchamp, 2019).

The anecdotal evidence that links frustrated narcissistic entitlement elevated to a group level to extreme hatred of outgroups – national or among advantaged groups such as White people or men – is complemented by the results of the systematic psychological research of the association between

collective narcissism and prejudice. Findings indicate that national and advantaged groups' collective narcissism fuels prejudice toward disadvantaged groups used to justify the backlash against their pursuit of social justice and equality (see also Chapter 9).

## Collective narcissism and politics of hate

### ***Racism, anti-Semitism, prejudice towards minorities***

National collective narcissism has been linked to prejudice toward national minorities and immigrants. For example, multiple studies showed that Polish collective narcissism predicts anti-Semitism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013a; 2020; 2023b), including conspiratorial stereotyping of people of Jewish origin (the belief that Jews are secretly plotting against Poland motivated to control the world, Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Kofta et al., 2020), and denial of anti-Semitic hate crimes committed by Poles during the Second World War (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019a). Studies conducted in Germany show that German collective narcissism is associated with denial of crimes perpetrated against Jews by Germans under the Nazi and desire to forget this period in German history (Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022).

National collective narcissism has also been linked to prejudice toward other ethnic minorities in Poland (e.g., Russians, Germans, and Ukrainians; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013a; 2020; 2023b). Polish collective narcissism was associated with prejudice toward Ukrainian immigrants after the first wave of Ukrainian immigration to Poland that followed the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). After the Russian invasion in Ukraine in February 2022, Poland has assimilated almost two million refugees from Ukraine. As discussed in Chapter 8, Polish collective narcissists, in contrast to participants who reported high national ingroup satisfaction, did not appreciate the Polish help to Ukraine and Ukrainian immigrants. American collective narcissism was linked to prejudice (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023b) and aggression toward Mexican immigrants (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020) and prejudice toward Arab immigrants (Lyons et al., 2010), French collective narcissism was linked to prejudice and discrimination of immigrants in France (Bertin et al., 2022). British collective narcissism was linked to xenophobia and rejection of immigrants that linked collective narcissism with satisfaction with the Brexit vote. (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). German and Dutch collective narcissism have been linked to prejudice toward Muslims (Verkuyten et al., 2022). Muslim collective narcissism in Indonesia, where Islam is the dominant religion, was associated with prejudice and hatred toward minority religious outgroups, non-Muslim Chinese and Christian Indonesians (Putra et al., 2022).

Taken together those results indicate that the association between collective narcissism and prejudice is universal. Groups targeted by prejudice differ depending on the national context. They tend to be the groups

normatively stigmatized and “othered” in a given society (Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2012; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

As discussed in Chapter 1, this association is specific to collective narcissism in comparison to individual narcissism. Individual narcissism has a negligible contribution to explaining prejudice. The only exception is the rivalry aspect of grandiose narcissism with its focus on competition and dominance. It predicts sexism and racism independently of collective narcissism. Thus, at least those two forms of prejudice involve not only the desire for the ingroup to be recognized as superior but also the desire for interpersonal dominance (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023b). As discussed in Chapter 2, the association between collective narcissism and prejudice is specific to collective narcissism in comparison to other aspects of ingroup identification. It is also often suppressed by the overlap between collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

Adding insult to injury, collective narcissism is associated with denial, rationalization, and attempts to reinterpret and re-construe prejudice and discrimination. In general, people consider discrimination undesirable. However, they differ in their perception of what acts are discriminatory. Especially, the lay definition of discrimination tends to be narrower than the scientific one (Greenland et al., 2018). For example, while both are clear cases of discrimination according to scientific and legal definitions, British newspapers debated whether the comments of the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, were “racist” when he referred to Black people as “piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles” (Khorsandi, 2020). American newspapers discussed whether Donald Trump’s comments were “racist” when he referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as the “Chinese virus” or “kung flu” (Geanous, 2020). Studies show that biased understanding of racial discrimination is predicted by national collective narcissism as well as collective narcissism of advantaged groups (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; West et al., 2022).

For example, studies conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States show that White collective narcissism predicts double standards in evaluating the same actions as racists depending on who is perpetrating and judging them. Collective narcissists among White men in the United Kingdom and the United States identified the same transgression as racist when they were committed by Black people against White people but as not racist when they were committed by White people against Black people. For example, collective narcissists among White men approved the statement like “*The core of racism is that it is malicious: if a person is not being malicious, then it can’t be racism*” when the person indicated in this statement was White but not when they were Black (West et al., 2022). In a similar vein, two studies conducted in Indonesia linked Muslim collective narcissism to

refusal to acknowledge that the ingroup member engaged in hate speech against ethnic/religious (non-Muslim Chinese), or religious (Christian) minority outgroup and needed to apologize (Putra et al., 2022). Hate speech is an attack, insult, or a mock to a person or group based on their group membership. It is often issued by public figures to rally support and mobilize electorate as illustrated by the example of two populist politicians above (Leader et al., 2009).

National and White collective narcissism have also been linked to denial of racism in several other studies. In the United Kingdom and the United States, collective narcissism predicted framing prejudice (operationalized as endorsement of severe restrictions of the numbers of non-White immigrants allowed to enter the country) as White “*racial self-interest*.” This framing and the argument that White grievances are legitimate and need to be accommodated in state legislations has been presented by British political scientist Eric Kaufmann in his 2018 book “*Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*” published by Allen Lane. The argument pointed to the “*unprecedented White demographic decline*” and the need for “*equal treatment*” of the culture of all ethnic groups while suggesting that White culture is a target of discrimination. National collective narcissists in the United States and the United Kingdom as well as White collective narcissists in the United States endorsed this argument. They agreed that “*A White American who identifies with her group, and its history and supports a proposal to reduce immigration*” is not racist (Cichocka et al., 2022).

Such findings align with results of earlier research showing that racial collective narcissism among British White people has been associated with bias against British Black people (Bagci et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), but also the denial of the existence of anti-Black racism in the United Kingdom (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Extending such findings, research has also shown that national and White collective narcissism in the United States predicts rejection of the Black Lives Matter social movement but support for White supremacists collective action under the “*All lives matter*” slogans (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022, for a review Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). American and White collective narcissism predict support for tightening of the anti-immigration regulations and state oppression against emancipating racial minorities and state oppression against the Black Lives Matter movement. They also predict endorsement of beliefs justifying racial inequalities and rejection of the egalitarian worldview (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023).

The alignment of the negative attitudes toward equality and toward racial minorities among national and White collective narcissists is in line with the concept of White nationalism, the belief that White people are inherently superior to people from other racial and ethnic groups (Reyna et al., 2022, see also Chapter 3). However, the alignment of prejudiced

attitudes predicted by national and the advantaged group's collective narcissism is not specific to the racial context. For example, extensive research indicates the same alignment characterizes the link between national and gender-collective narcissism among men when it comes to sexism and attitudes toward gender equality.

### **Sexism**

Collective narcissism among men predicts double standards in evaluating the same actions as sexism depending on whether they were perpetrated by men against women or by women against men. Studies in the United Kingdom showed that gender-collective narcissism among men responded less favorably to a statement like *"If a men says or does something that seems a bit sexist, even if he does it by accident, then it's sexist"* than to a statement *"If a women says or does something that seems a bit sexist, even if she does it by accident, then it's sexist"* (West et al., 2022). Other studies (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; Szczepanska et al., 2022) leave little doubt that national, Catholic, and male collective narcissism predict sexism, prejudice toward and discriminatory treatment of women as a social group (Glick & Fiske, 2001) that justifies gender inequality (Jost & Kay, 2005; Sibley et al., 2007; 2009).

Gender-collective narcissism among men is associated with hostility toward women. This link is driven by the belief that men and women are defined by their traditional social roles, and masculinity is a precarious social status that can be lost (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021). Moreover, Catholic collective narcissism in Poland (that closely overlaps with national collective narcissism, Mole et al., 2021) is associated with justification of domestic violence (targeting predominantly women) as a *"family issue"* rather than a crime that should be persecuted by the state. Both Catholic collective narcissism and Catholic religious fundamentalism, among men and women alike, predicted greater acceptance of a particular case of wife beating perpetrated by a Polish male MP representing the ruling populist party *Law & Justice*. Polish national collective narcissism is also robustly associated with hostile and benevolent sexism (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2023a, b; Szczepanska et al., 2022).

Hostile sexism comprises derogatory and antagonistic beliefs about women rooted in intergroup-level competition of men with women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Benevolent sexism comprises paternalistic prejudice based on the belief that women are passive and incompetent and should be protected. Although superficially positive, benevolent sexism is associated with hostile sexism, legitimization of gender inequality, and reduced ambitions among women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). The association between national collective narcissism and hostile sexism drives the link between national collective narcissism and acceptance of domestic violence (Golec de Zavala &

Bierwiazzonek, 2021) and support for the restrictive anti-abortion law in Poland (Szczepanska et al., 2022) among men and women.

While national collective narcissism and hostile sexism are positively associated among men and women, this association is notably weaker than the association between national collective narcissism and benevolent sexism. However, the association between national collective narcissism and benevolent sexism is stronger among women than among men (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021). This suggests that women who endorse national collective narcissism internalize sexism in its benevolent form. Women often endorse benevolent sexism for self-protection when they feel threatened by men (Expósito et al., 2010). As women who endorse national collective narcissism are likely to associate with like-minded men, they may continuously experience such a threat. This is because Polish men who endorse national collective narcissism are hostile and patronizing toward women (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021).

Studies also showed that collective narcissists among men do not support women in their collective action for gender equality. They did not feel distressed at exclusion of women in public settings (Golec de Zavala, 2022), they rejected the All Poland's Women Strike actions to protest the infringement of women's rights to reproductive health in Poland (Górska et al., 2020, see Chapter 9 for more detail), and supported the state repressions against this movement (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022).

As in the context of racial relations, in the context of gender relations, studies show a remarkable overlap of attitudes predicted by national and male collective narcissism. Both predicted sexism, endorsement of beliefs legitimizing gender inequality, support for state actions to oppress women, and double standards in assessing gender discrimination (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; West et al., 2022). Collective narcissism inspires White nationalism increasing tensions in racial relationships in the United States (Reyna et al., 2022) as well as male Catholic nationalism increasing oppression of women in Poland (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

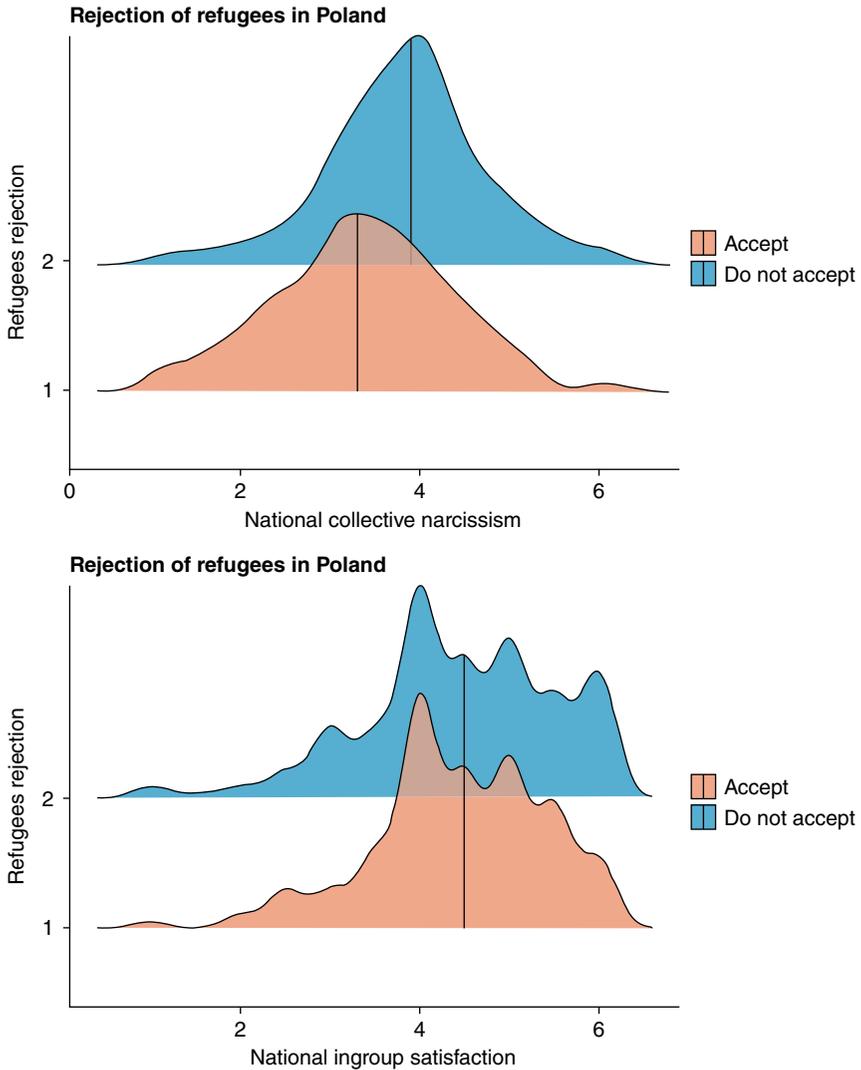
### ***Prejudice toward immigrants and refugees***

National collective narcissism predicts xenophobia, prejudice toward immigrants and refugees, people who were forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. In the last two decades, Europe has witnessed two major displacements due to wars: the 2015 refugee crisis and the displacement of Ukrainians after the 2022 Russian invasion. During the 2015 crisis over a million people were displaced due to wars and persecution outside of Europe, mainly in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eritrea. The plight of people displaced from those regions is ongoing. During the

2022 crisis around eight million Ukrainians were displaced. In contrast to the refugees from Africa and the Middle East, Ukrainian immigrants were accepted and assimilated by the European countries (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, Polish collective narcissism has been linked to the tendency to believe the Russian propaganda about war in Ukraine (that Ukrainians are Neo-Nazis that ally with the West against Russia and that sanctions on Russia will hurt Western countries more than Russia) and prejudice toward Ukrainian refugees (Nowak et al., 2022). This aligns with results discussed in Chapter 8 showing that Polish collective narcissism predicted blaming Ukraine for provoking Russian invasion. Polish collective narcissism was also negatively related to feeling proud of Polish help to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

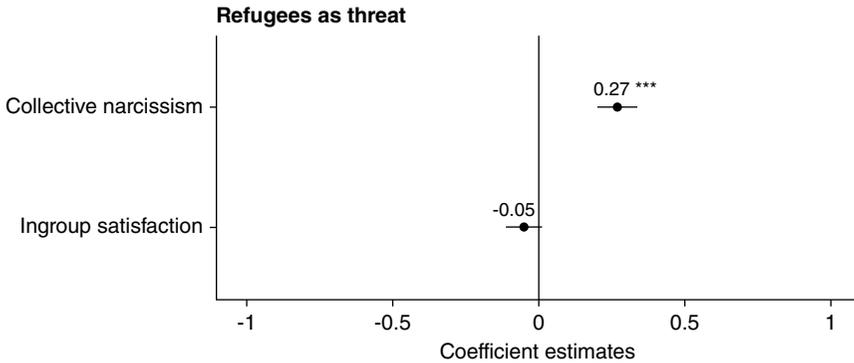
While the majority of European citizens expressed sympathy toward refugees from Africa and the Middle East, only a minority of them felt comfortable with their country providing refugees from Africa and the Middle East with help (Ipsos, 2019, June 17). As the refugee crisis worsened during the pandemic (Reynolds, 2020, September 1), so did the attitudes toward the refugees among the European citizens (Kluth et al., 2021). The burning of the Moria refugee camp in Greece in September 2020 coincided with the highest ambivalence regarding helping refugees among European citizens (Kingsley, 2020, September 9). Studies that link national collective narcissism to prejudice toward refugees from Africa and the Middle East were conducted in Poland. During the times of the 2015 crisis, those refugees were perceived as the most threatening and culturally dissimilar group, and violence toward them was accepted as a way of managing the refugee crisis (Hall & Mikulska-Jolles, 2016; Swiderska et al., 2016). National collective narcissism predicted prejudice (in the form of higher desired social distance) toward refugees from Africa and the Middle East over and above other predictors such as right-wing authoritarianism or individual narcissism, whereas national ingroup satisfaction predicted acceptance of those refugees (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019b; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

Figure 5.1 illustrates the distribution of Polish collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction among participants who favored vs. opposed that Poland accepts refugees from Africa and the Middle East in March 2016. The results are based on a survey of a nationally representative sample collected in Poland as a part of a monthly omnibus survey. A nationally representative sample was approximated using quota sampling based on census data considering age, gender, region, and education. Figure 5.2 illustrates the associations of national collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction with the belief that accepting refugees from the Middle East in Poland would increase threat of Islamist terrorism in Poland. Those results illustrate that in contrast to national ingroup satisfaction, Polish collective



**FIGURE 5.1** National collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction among participants who accepted vs. opposed the idea that Poland accepts refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

*Note:* Analyses are based on nationally representative panel data collected by the Ariadna Research Panel in Poland in March 2016. The vertical lines in each density plot indicate the mean of the indicated variable in that partisan group in Poland in 2016.



**FIGURE 5.2** National collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction as predictors of perceiving refugees from Africa and the Middle East as threat.

Note: Results of multiple regression analyses are based on nationally representative panel data collected by the Ariadna Research Panel in Poland in March 2016.

narcissism predicted greater tendency to perceive refugees as a threat and refuse to shelter them in Poland.

### ***Prejudice towards sexual minorities***

Studies linked national collective narcissism with explicit (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021a; Górska & Mikołajczak, 2015; Mole et al., 2021) and implicit (Lantos et al., 2023) homophobia in Poland. The in-depth investigation into this association clarified that this link is driven by the belief that people whose sexuality is not conventional and who do not compromise to the traditional gender roles threaten the positive image of the Polish nation. Those beliefs are, in turn, rooted in endorsement of traditional beliefs about gender roles (Mole et al., 2021). Polish collective narcissism is associated with a tendency to essentialize the differences between heterosexuals and sexual minorities but also a tendency to see non-normative sexuality as a controversial individual choice (Lantos et al., 2023).

Studies have also linked collective narcissism in the heterosexual majority with prejudice toward sexual minorities. They showed that heterosexual collective narcissism was negatively associated with empathy and solidarity with collective action in support of the Polish LGBTIAQ+ community (Górska et al., 2020). In addition, gender-collective narcissism among heterosexual men predicted prejudice toward gay men and lesbians in Poland (Marchlewska et al., 2022). Those studies show that national collective narcissism and collective

narcissism with reference to the advantaged, heterosexual group are associated with similarly negative attitudes toward sexual minorities.

In sum, national collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups predict prejudice toward disadvantaged groups. Prejudice legitimizes inequality and is used to maintain the advantaged groups in power (e.g., Jost, 2019). Not surprisingly national collective narcissism and advantaged groups' collective narcissism are associated more strongly than national collective narcissism and disadvantaged groups' collective narcissism. Collective narcissists in advantaged groups project their ingroup interests on the whole nation and treat them as national interests (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023, see Chapter 9).

## Reducing hate at high levels of collective narcissism

### ***Ingroup satisfaction***

By revealing that collective narcissism is the aspect of ingroup identification that systematically and robustly predicts prejudice and derogation of outgroups, research on collective narcissism has allowed to explore the opposite unique predictions of non-narcissistic aspects of ingroup identification (Golec de Zavala, 2011; 2012; 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019, for recent empirical findings see Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2023b, see Chapter 2). This research points to a potentially mitigating role of non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction on the link between national collective narcissism and prejudice. This research suggests that the stronger is the association between collective narcissism and non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction, the weaker is the association between collective narcissism and prejudice (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2020; 2023b).

However, it is important to bear in mind that recent research has also pointed to limitations of those findings. For example, Polish ingroup satisfaction does not mitigate the association between Polish collective narcissism and sexism. Polish ingroup satisfaction predicts benevolent sexism among men (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021), and it is not related to rejection of benevolent sexism in analyses that collapse both genders even after its overlap with collective narcissism is accounted for (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023b; Szczepanska et al., 2022). Next, while national ingroup identification mitigates the link between collective narcissism and prejudice, it does not reduce it completely as the link between collective narcissism and prejudice is robust, whether ingroup satisfaction is partialled out or not (Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; 2020; 2023b). Why is the link between national collective narcissism so robust?

***Emotional deficits of collective narcissism***

One answer to this question may be that the link between collective narcissism and prejudice reflects the more general tendency among collective narcissists to experience predominantly negative emotions, anger, and hostility (Golec de Zavala, 2019; Golec de Zavala et al., 2023a). Collective narcissism increases in response to threats to personal control (Cichocka et al., 2018) and self-esteem (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

It is associated with self-criticism, feeling inadequate and unhappy about oneself, and not feeling connected to others (Golec de Zavala, 2019). Collective narcissism is also associated with adult attachment anxiety, negative model of the self, feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy, and fear of abandonment and rejection (Marchlewska et al., 2022). Moreover, collective narcissists report frequently experiencing negative emotions: sadness, fear, guilt, shame, upset, or hostility. Collective narcissism is also related to sensory processing sensitivity, genetically determined elevated responsiveness to environmental stimuli including exaggerated experience of pain (Golec de Zavala, 2019). Moreover, collective narcissism is robustly associated with individual narcissism, including vulnerable narcissism, neurotic, frustrated, and self-negative presentation of individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023b). Finally, multiple studies link collective narcissism to hypersensitivity to intergroup threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; 2023b; Guerra et al., 2022), especially threat to the ingroup's image (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013b; 2023b; Guerra et al., 2023) also on physiological level, which puts collective narcissists under a heightened risk of negative health outcomes (Hase et al., 2021). This pattern of associations clearly points to deficits in the ability to downregulate and soothe negative emotions at high levels of collective narcissism.

The emotional profile associated with collective narcissism is in sharp contrast to the emotional profile associated with ingroup satisfaction. Ingroup satisfaction is associated with high self-esteem (most likely reciprocally, Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). It is not associated with individual narcissism, and when its overlap with collective narcissism is controlled, ingroup satisfaction is uniquely, negatively associated with all aspects of individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023b; see Chapter 1 for meta-analytical summary). It is also associated with positive emotionality and lack of negative emotionality, self-compassion, pro-sociality, and life satisfaction. Thus, because of its overlap with ingroup satisfaction, collective narcissism can be linked to pro-sociality as a source of positive emotions (Golec de Zavala, 2019). This is important because experiencing positive emotions builds enduring physical, cognitive, and social resources that support faster recovery from negative emotions. Positive emotions produce positive emotions and strengthen the ability to

effectively alleviate the effects of negative emotions and maintain life satisfaction, even in face of hardship and adversity (Fredrickson, 2001; 2013).

### ***Mindfulness***

I conducted experimental studies that capitalized on the assumption that the robust association between national collective narcissism and prejudice may be, at least partially, driven by collective narcissists' general predisposition toward negative emotionality. I expected that training the ability to experience positive emotions may suppress this association. Thus, I conducted experiments, which engaged participants in mindful gratitude practice. Dispositional mindfulness is the ability to focus non-judgmental attention on the present moment and positive aspects of the experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness practice is an intervention that improves the ability to experience positive emotions and downregulate negative emotions. Mindfulness-based interventions train the ability to focus on experiencing self-transcendent emotions that link people to the social and physical world beyond them (e.g., compassion, gratitude). Experiencing those emotions boosts emotional resilience (Stellar et al., 2017) with durable positive consequences for physiological and neural activity (Garland & Fredrickson, 2019; Kok et al., 2013).

Dispositional mindfulness is associated with lower discrimination distress in disadvantaged groups (Li et al., 2019) and higher awareness of privilege in advantaged groups (Verhaeghen et al., 2020). Studies also show that mindfulness trainings reduce intergroup hostility and prejudice. One study showed that six weeks of loving-kindness meditation training resulted in decreased implicit (but not self-reported) prejudice toward homeless people and Black people among White participants in the United States (Kang et al., 2014). In another study, participation in a six-week of mindfulness and compassion training reduced prejudice toward Palestinian Israelis among Jewish Israeli teenagers (Berger et al., 2018). Even short mindfulness practices led to temporary reduction in implicit racial prejudice (Lueke & Gibson, 2015), and implicit (Stell & Farsides, 2016) and explicit prejudice toward homeless people (Parks et al., 2014). However, no such intervention to date was shown to work on prejudiced people (Alkoby et al., 2017; Oyler et al., 2021). Given that increased mindfulness skills can lead to improvement in emotional regulation, I predicted that mindfulness may be a particularly good technique to reduce prejudice among collective narcissists.

One experimental study compared two mindfulness-based interventions – one meditative practice focused solely on non-judgmental attention to

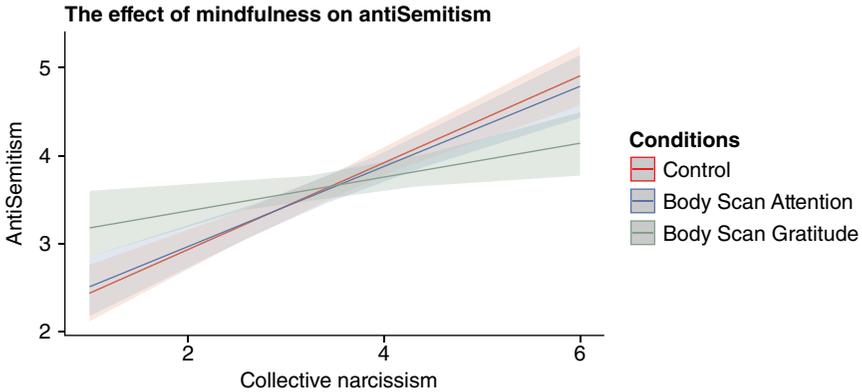
unfolding experience; another one added instructions asking participants to focus on positive aspects of experience, specifically on those aspects of the unfolding experience that for which they could feel grateful. The experiment tested whether a brief 10-minute long mindfulness session weakens the robust link between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism. This experiment tested whether a brief 10-minute long mindfulness session weakens the link between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism.

I assessed anti-Semitism by asking participants to what extent they agreed with statements: “*Jews do not like Poles,*” “*Jewish people have too much influence in the world,*” “*Israel’s foreign politics make me feel apprehensive towards Jewish people,*” “*Jewish people try to use their history to achieve their goals,*” and “*Talking about crimes perpetrated by Poles on Jewish people makes me apprehensive*” (Wójcik et al., 2011).

The association between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism was reduced by half after participants took part in a 10-minute-long audio-guided mindful gratitude practice in comparison to the control condition in which they listened to a neutral recording and a condition in which they participated in mindful attention meditation. This was regardless of how much variance in anti-Semitism or prejudice towards refugees was explained independently by individual narcissism, ingroup satisfaction, or trait mindfulness. None of these individual difference variables interacted with the mindfulness conditions to predict a decrease prejudice (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023a) (Figure 5.3).

Another experimental study tested whether a six-week long mindful gratitude training reduces the association between Polish collective narcissism and several forms of prejudice predicted by Polish collective narcissism: anti-Semitism, sexism, prejudice toward Ukrainian immigrants, and sexual minorities. The training increased participants’ dispositional mindfulness, positive affect, and gratitude and reduced the levels of daily stress. While the levels of collective narcissism stayed the same over time, the training worked to reduce all forms of prejudice. Moreover, the decrease in prejudice was the most pronounced at high levels of Polish collective narcissism. Prejudice decreased as a function of time in the waiting-list group that did not receive the training, except for high levels of collective narcissism on which it increased. In contrast, in the mindful gratitude training group, prejudice decreased on average, especially at high levels of collective narcissism. The analyses were performed on the latent change scores that account for the temporal invariance of the measurements, unequal starting points, and measurement error (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023a).

Those experimental results indicate that mindful gratitude practice, the intervention that improves constructive regulation of negative emotions,



**FIGURE 5.3** The effect of a short mindful-gratitude practice on the association between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism.

reduced the association between collective narcissism and prejudice. This suggests that the mechanism linking collective narcissism to prejudice is related to the inability to downregulate negative emotions.

### Conclusion

Studies consistently indicate that national collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups predict prejudice toward disadvantaged groups. National collective narcissism predicts anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, prejudice toward sexual minorities, and rejection of immigrants and refugees. Polish collective narcissism is associated with sexism, more strongly among women than among men, while American collective narcissism predicts antiegalitarianism, symbolic racism, and legitimization of racial inequality especially among American Black people (see Chapter 9). Thus, national collective narcissism predicts not only prejudice but also internalization of prejudice and oppression among members of disadvantaged groups.

Prejudice toward minorities and disadvantaged groups serves to legitimize inequality. Members of advantaged groups project their ingroup's interests on the national group. They make advancement of their ingroup's privileges a matter of national importance. The attitudes associated with national collective narcissism and collective narcissism of advantaged groups align: national and male collective narcissism predict sexism, American and White collective narcissism predict racism, national, and heterosexual collective narcissism predict prejudice toward sexual minorities. White collective

narcissists refuses to see racism in action of White people but are ready to attribute racism to the same actions of Black people. Collective narcissists among men refuse to see sexism in men's actions toward women but are happy to attribute the same actions when performed by women toward men to sexism.

The robust association between national collective narcissism and prejudice is suppressed by the positive overlap between national collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction. The unique association between national ingroup satisfaction and prejudice is often negative. Due to its overlap with national ingroup satisfaction collective narcissism is connected to benefits of positive emotionality. This is important because the link between collective narcissism and prejudice seems to be related to the deficits in the ability to regulate negative emotions that characterize collective narcissists. An intervention that trains the ability to soothe and downregulate negative emotions – the mindful gratitude training – reduces prejudice and the association between national collective narcissism and prejudice. Mindfulness is an intervention particularly well-suited to address the mechanism underlying the link between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility. It reduces prejudice on high levels of collective narcissism.

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# 6

## COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Minority stress theory posits that expectations of exclusion produce stress and negative health outcomes in disadvantaged groups (Meyer, 2003; Meyer et al., 2008; Williams, 2018). The lack of acceptance from friends and family is linked to distress, depression, and lower psychological well-being among members of the LGBTIQ+ community (Camp et al., 2020). Women experience distress of gender discrimination (Bilodeau et al., 2020) and vicarious ostracism when they witness the exclusion of other women (McCarty et al., 2022; Schmitt et al., 2014). When excluded themselves, they experience distress more strongly when they attribute the reasons for exclusion to their group membership (Schaafsma & Williams, 2012; Schmitt et al., 2014; Wirth & Williams, 2009).

Exclusion – the experience of being separated from others against one’s own will (Riva & Eck, 2016) – is universally distressful (Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Williams, 2009) and painful experience (Eisenberger, 2015; Ratner et al., 2018; Sturgeon & Zautra, 2016). It undermines basic human needs: the need of positive self-evaluation, control, belonging, and meaningful existence (for a review see Hartgerink et al., 2015). Given that pain of exclusion is vicariously shared with others (Wesselmann et al., 2013), why men do not seem to be universally distressed by discrimination and exclusion of women? Why White people do not universally suffer because of discrimination and exclusion of Black people? Why citizens of host countries do not oppose social and physical exclusion of immigrants and refugees?

One explanation is that people tend to empathize (understand and tune in to the emotions of others) more with the distress of members of the ingroup than the outgroup, a phenomenon known as parochial empathy (Bruneau et al., 2017; Cikara et al., 2011). Is vicarious ostracism (feeling distressed by

exclusion of others) similarly parochial? Do people feel distressed only when their ingroup is excluded?

Consider the example of the treatment of refugees at two different Polish borders in 2022: the border with Belarus and that with Ukraine. Since 2021, refugees fleeing the conflicts in Africa and the Middle East have been stranded in forests along the border between Poland and Belarus, trapped between repeated illegal pushbacks. They were lured there by the promise of safe passage through Belarus to the European Union, allegedly a retaliation for the European sanctions against Belarus. To stop the influx of refugees, the Polish government quadrupled the presence of military border guards and supported them with the riot police. A barbed-wired, two-mile-deep militarized zone inaccessible to aid workers and journalists was created and a tall, barbed-wired fence along the border was built. About 2,000 refugees hiding in the forests along the border could not have been more literally excluded. At least 19 people died as a result of the illegal pushbacks, most of them freezing to death (Gettleman & Pronczuk, 2022; Tondo, 2022).

The contrast with the treatment of refugees at the Ukrainian border could not have been sharper. By October 2022, Poland has received about 1.4 million Ukrainian refugees fleeing after the Russian invasion. Polish border guards and soldiers did not stop or persecute them; they did not build razor-wired fences. They welcome Ukrainian refugees distributing food, water, blankets, and hot tea. Many Polish families lend them shelter often allowing the refugees to stay in their homes for free. The Polish government made Ukrainian refugees eligible for the same benefits as Polish citizens, such as health insurance, free public education, and child allowance. Integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland has been supported by generous funds and donations from the European Union, the Polish government, and individual Polish citizens. Unlike the refugees from Africa and the Middle East but like Poles, a majority of Ukrainians are White, speak similar language, and profess Christian religion. It seems Poland and the European Union help Ukrainian refugees because “*they are like us*” (Gettleman & Pronczuk, 2022).

The distinction between those ‘like us’ and ‘not like us’ becomes especially important at high levels of collective narcissism. Collective narcissism research has established that vicarious ostracism becomes parochial at high levels of collective narcissism. The narcissistic concerns with the ingroup’s image impair the ability to experience vicarious distress of excluded outgroups (Golec de Zavala, 2022; Golec de Zavala, 2023; Hase et al., 2021).

### “Angry White men” and exclusion of women

Collective narcissists become distressed when they witness exclusion of their ingroup, regardless of whether they belong to a disadvantaged or advantaged group, the former arguably experiencing daily exclusion more often than the latter. In one of studies conducted in my lab Polish men and women watched

the female MP (Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus) silenced by the male Chairman of the Parliament (Ryszard Terlecki) during the Polish Parliament session on October 22, 2020. The session took place during the nationwide protests after the near-total ban on abortion was introduced in Poland in October 2020. Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus spoke about the situation of women. The reactions to the footage from this Parliamentary session were compared to reactions to footage from another Parliamentary session during which the same MP, Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus spoke on the same issue but was not silenced by the Chairman. Men and women reported higher distress when watching the female MP being silenced in comparison to the control condition. However, at high levels of gender collective narcissism the reactions of men and women were different. Collective narcissists among women reported higher distress when witnessing exclusion of the woman MP than collective narcissists among men (Golec de Zavala, 2022).

While this study was informative, the MP and the Chairman represented not only different genders but also different political parties and different political ideologies; they also differed in social status as the Chairman had formal control over the MP in the context of the Parliament. In order to observe the effects of gender exclusion without those confounds we conducted experimental studies abstracting the intergroup exclusion of its real-life context.

Research on social exclusion has frequently used an experimental paradigm known as the Cyberball. The Cyberball is a ball-tossing game played online. Typically, participants are led to believe that they play the game with two other participants. All participants are represented by more or less personalized avatars. The ball is tossed by clicking on the avatar of the participants to whom we want to pass the ball. In reality, only one participant actually plays the game; the other two players are pre-programmed avatars that either include or exclude the real participant (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). Participants report greater distress and threat to basic human needs when they are excluded in this game. This happens even when they are made aware they play the game with the computer rather than other human participants (Zadro et al., 2004).

We have adapted the Cyberball paradigm to the intergroup context. We led our participants to believe that in our studies they would be chosen to either observe or play an online ball-tossing game in a team of men or women. In reality, all participants only observed pre-programmed games played between avatars representing men and women. Men and women observed either a game, in which an equal number of ball throws was exchanged between the teams, or a game, in which the team of men excluded the team of women, but also a game, in which the team of women excluded the team of men. The exclusion was only temporary, trivial, and did not happen to participants personally.

Nevertheless, gender collective narcissism predicted parochial vicarious distress in face of the gender ingroup exclusion similarly among women and

men. The relationship between gender collective narcissism and distress was positive and significant when women witnessed the exclusion of other women, but not when they witnessed exclusion of men. The association was also positive, significant, and of nearly the same size when men witnessed the exclusion of other men by women, but not when they witnessed exclusion of women by men. All studies showed that the pattern consistent with parochial vicarious ostracism can be observed only at high levels of collective narcissism in comparison to individual narcissism or gender ingroup identification (Golec de Zavala, 2022).

These findings suggest that gender collective narcissism is likely to be an obstacle to allyship between men and women pursuit of gender equality. The allyship of advantaged groups (e.g., men) with disadvantaged groups (e.g., women) is motivated by members of advantaged groups feeling distressed and angered by the discrimination of disadvantaged groups (Lizarazo Pereira et al., 2022; Subašić et al., 2008). Collective narcissists among men may not be interested in pursuing gender equality because, as our results elucidate, they are not distressed by exclusion of women. Instead, they are distressed at the prospect that men as a group may face marginalization by emancipation of women. Those findings are also consistent with research discussed in Chapter 7 indicating that members of advantaged groups feel distressed because they believe emancipation of disadvantaged groups infringes on privileges of their ingroup (Scheepers et al., 2009, see also Jetten, 2019). Men are likely to fail in allyship with women as long as they perceive gender equality as an intergroup threat, and they are more likely to perceive gender equality as a threat when they endorse gender collective narcissism.

Our findings align with what sociologist Michael Kimmel (2013) describes as *aggrieved entitlement*, perceived injustice, feeling of victimization, and moral outrage that people in position of power experience when they fear being deprived of their privileges by emancipation of other groups. In his seminal book “*Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the Edge of the Era*,” Kimmel describes the maladaptive reactions to emancipation of historically disadvantaged groups among American White men, a historically dominant, advantaged, and privileged group. Men who constructed their gender and ethnic identities around the privileges their groups have historically enjoyed feel entitled to those privileges as if they were their inherent rights and they become resentful and angry when those privileges are questioned. Those men often engage with misogynistic communities such as “*manosphere*” and racist White supremacist movements.

Collective narcissism research suggests that in such movements male, White, and national collective narcissisms align. As discussed in Chapter 5, American and White collective narcissism predicts denial of racism in the United States (Cichocka et al., 2022; Vu & Rivera, 2023), support for reactionary, supremacist social movements, and rejection of progressive

social movements for racial equality such as the Black Lives Matter (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022). American collective narcissism predicts opposition to teaching the critical race theory, a cross-disciplinary scholarly endeavor to explain various forms of inequality treating social categories such as race as social constructions that advance the interests of advantaged groups (Vu & Rivera, 2023). This phenomenon is not specifically American. In several publications other, authors and us have pointed to the alignment of male, Catholic, heterosexual, and national collective narcissism in predicting exclusion of non-traditional women and sexual minorities in Poland (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; Górska et al., 2020; Graff & Korolczuk, 2021).

### **Delusion of exclusion: Reactions to exclusion in advantaged groups**

As explained above, collective narcissism research provides insights into a psychological mechanism implicated in advantaged groups' opposition to social equality. It suggests that group members expressing superiority needs through their advantaged group membership become distressed by trivial, temporary and even only imagined exclusion of their privileged ingroup by others. I examined consequences of imagining the ingroup exclusion in the make-believe intergroup setting, deprived of any real-world, geo-political references and devoid of the context of status differences or histories of inequality and oppression. It also looked at vicarious ostracism in response to exclusion in trivial and inconsequential situations such as the Cyberball game. Using those abstract experimental settings, those studies disconfounded the effect of personal, group-level, and societal exclusion.

More specifically, in one study, I asked participants to engage in a role-playing game. They read about an imaginary world inhabited by three nations. Participants were given a bogus personality survey. They were led to believe their responses indicated they were a perfect match with one of the nations of the imaginary world. They were given information about the land it inhabited and given a tour around its capital. Next, they reported identification with this nation and collective narcissism with reference to it. As the game unfolded, participants were led to believe their nation was excluded from (or included in) an economic deal with other two countries: its immediate neighbour and an overseas country. I found that distress of exclusion was the function of participants' bogus nation collective narcissism but not their identification with this country or their individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023).

Another studies found that Polish collective narcissists felt distressed when their national team was excluded in the intergroup version of the Cyberball game played with either Ukrainians or Britons living in Poland.

The two national outgroups differ with respect to relative status typically attributed to them by Poles. Even before the Russian invasion on Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainians were the largest immigrant group in Poland. They enjoyed a relatively lower social status than Britons who typically held better paid highly qualified jobs. It did not matter which outgroup excluded the Polish team in the observed Cyberball game. Witnessing exclusion of the national ingroup caused distress, especially at high levels of Polish collective narcissism but not Polish ingroup satisfaction, Polish national identification, or individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2023). Another study showed that the self-reported distress of the ingroup's exclusion was paralleled by a physiological distress response (HF HRV). Decreased high-frequency heart-rate variability when Polish collective narcissists witnessed the ingroup's exclusion indicated their heightened stress-related emotional arousal (Hase et al., 2021).

Studies also clarified that it was exclusion of the ingroup specifically that distressed collective narcissists. Polish collective narcissists reported higher distress when they watched the Polish team excluded in the ball-tossing game than when they watched a German team excluded in the ball-tossing game. In another study, American collective narcissists reported feeling distressed when they watched the American team excluded by a team of Mexican immigrants. However, they did not feel distressed when they watched a game in which the American team excluded the Mexican team (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023). Those findings parallel the results obtained among men and women who only reported distress at exclusion of their gender ingroup (Golec de Zavala, 2022).

In sum, collective narcissism research has extended our understanding of vicarious ostracism (Wesselmann et al., 2013) and parochial empathy (Cikara et al., 2011). It has indicated that at high level of collective narcissism in intergroup settings, vicarious ostracism tends to be parochial. Studies that examine the consequences of intergroup exclusion without taking collective narcissism into account may produce inconsistent findings. Similarly, attributing exclusion to group membership may produce different results on high and low levels of collective narcissism. This may explain why some studies demonstrated that distress of exclusion was aggravated among women who attributed their exclusion in the Cyberball to their group membership (Schaafsma & Williams, 2012), whereas other studies showed that members of an ethnic minority who were excluded in the Cyberball game and attributed their exclusion to their ethnic group membership felt less distressed by exclusion (Masten et al., 2011).

In a similar vein, research has also shown that ingroup identification may ameliorate (Bolling et al., 2012) or aggravate (McCoy & Major, 2003) gender discrimination distress depending on the assessed aspect of gender identification that is measured or activated (Schmitt et al., 2014). Women's

gender identification was linked to greater physiological and psychological distress after exposure to gender discrimination (Eliezer et al., 2010; Fischer & Holz, 2007; McCoy & Major, 2003). However, women's private collective self-esteem (positive evaluation of their gender ingroup) buffered the negative effects of gender discrimination (Corning, 2002), and affirmation of gender ingroup values protected women's self-esteem in the face of blatant sexism (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2016). Studies could clarify such inconsistencies by taking the role of collective narcissism into account.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the findings of collective narcissism research are at odds with the rejection identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999), which suggests that ingroup identification should play a palliative role in the face of aversive experiences such as the ingroup's exclusion. While positive ingroup identification provides psychological resources (e.g., clear self-definition, high self-esteem, a sense of meaning and direction, a sense of belonging, and social connectedness) that support individual well-being (Cruwys et al., 2014), the positive and protective role of sharing a social identity depends on its normative content and the ingroup's status and circumstances. For example, group norms may require group members to engage in actions that undermine their well-being (e.g., violence in gangs or suicidal terrorism in extremist organizations). Collective narcissism emphasizes under-appreciation of the ingroup by others and requires group members to engage in aggressive retaliation. When collective narcissism becomes a prevalent, normative way of defining the ingroup's identity, it is likely to undermine group members' well-being. Indeed, collective narcissism is associated with chronically low life satisfaction and negative emotionality (Golec de Zavala, 2019; Golec de Zavala et al., 2023), and, unlike non-narcissistic ingroup satisfaction, it does not predict well-being in advantaged or disadvantaged groups (Bagci et al., 2021). Thus, to understand the role of ingroup identification in the context of intergroup exclusion, it is important to examine not only whether group members identify with the excluded ingroup, but also how they identify with it, as ingroup identification is a multifaceted phenomenon (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion).

It is important to study how group members react to signs of the ingroup's exclusion because some group members, like those with high levels of collective narcissism, are likely to perceive it as the ingroup's humiliation (Veldhuis et al., 2014), which may push them to radicalize toward political violence (Kruglanski et al., 2013; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Schaafsma & Williams, 2012). Indeed, collective narcissism was associated with support for terrorist violence in radicalized extremist organizations among ethnic minorities (Jaško et al., 2020) and support for extremist organizations in ethnic majorities (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022). Importantly, it is the ingroup exclusion rather than personal exclusion that has the radicalizing effect. Indeed, leaders of

extremist organizations often come from privileged backgrounds and enjoy privileged position within the organization (Pape, 2006). Nevertheless, they are mobilized by the ingroup's exclusion and committed to the ingroup's cause more than their followers. They also use the vicarious pain of the ingroup's exclusion to mobilize their followers (Jaško & LaFree, 2019).

Interestingly, in all studies on collective narcissism and intergroup exclusion almost none indicated that witnessing the ingroup exclusion strengthens the link between collective narcissism and retaliatory intergroup hostility. This link was positive regardless of research conditions. The only exception was the study in which we assessed behavioral aggression rather than self-reported hostility or aggressiveness. We assessed aggression using the Taylor Aggression Paradigm (e.g., Giancola & Parrott, 2008). In this paradigm, participants engage in an alleged competitive reaction time task. As per the standardized procedure, during each trial participants watch three consecutive rectangle signs: green indicating that their opponent is ready, yellow indicating that the game is about to start and players should focus, and red indicating that the player should react as fast as possible by clicking on the rectangle. Instructions indicate that the participant who clicked the red rectangle faster would win the trial. The winning participant administers an unpleasant blast of the white noise of chosen intensity to the losing participant. In reality, participants interact with a computer program, not actual players.

In one study, we used this paradigm to assess aggression after the ingroup's exclusion. Participants were informed that they were competing against one of the outgroup players from the Cyberball game observed previously (i.e., the team that had just excluded the participant's ingroup). Participants who scored high on collective narcissism administered the stronger average volume of white noise blasts to the alleged excluders after group members witnessed their ingroup's exclusion, especially when they were instructed to focus on their experiences and feelings while witnessing the ingroup's exclusion (Hase et al., 2021). Thus, in this study exclusion strengthens the link between collective narcissism and aggressive behavior. Nevertheless, this was the only study in which we obtained this effect. This means that while observing the ingroup's exclusion does not intensify collective narcissistic hostility, watching a fair-play exchange between the ingroup and the outgroup or the ingroup's inclusion is not enough to reduce collective narcissists' intergroup hostility.

## Conclusion

Group members experience distress in response to witnessing or even only imagining that their ingroup is excluded by another group. However, this happens consistently only at high levels of collective narcissism (in comparison to low levels of collective narcissism and high levels of ingroup

identification or individual narcissism). This happens without collective narcissists experiencing any personal exclusion and when they belong to groups not routinely marginalized by others but instead holding privileged positions in the group-based hierarchies. Collective narcissism renders vicarious ostracism – distress experiences when watching exclusion of others – parochial.

Witnessing or even only fearing exclusion of the ingroup may drive group members toward extreme ideologies and divisive leaders. Framing social equality as marginalization of privileged groups is a technique used by populist leaders to mobilize followers among members of those groups (Jetten, 2019). Collective narcissism enhances vicarious distress of exclusion of the ingroup leaving those who endorse it an easy prey for leaders who make elusive promise to restore the ingroup's undermined greatness. This explains why collective narcissism may motivate extremists from marginalized groups in their support for terrorist violence (Jaško et al., 2020) and extremists from advantaged groups to express their support for populist leaders willing to violating the rule of law and use the state power to repress social movements for social equality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021; 2023).

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# 7

## COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM OF POPULISM

In the second decade of the 21st century, ultraconservative populism has reorganized the political map of the world. Populist politicians and parties have become significant political players in Western democracies (Brubaker, 2017). Since in 2016 American citizens elected Donald Trump as a president and British citizens made Brexit a reality, social scientists have proposed varied explanations of what has made ultraconservative populism so appealing to voters. Populism is most commonly defined as “*thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people*” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 6). Various ideological contents may be used to “thicken” the empty core of populism. Collective narcissism is one of them.

I argue that the appeal of ultraconservative populism lies in the fact that its ideological narrations advance a coherent and appealing vision of national identity. This vision is defined by national narcissism – the belief that the nation deserves but is denied special treatment and recognition – which populism has legitimized as a valid belief about the nation. This vision provides a persuasive, although biased, response to conditions that challenge people’s established expectations regarding self-deservingness and self-importance. Those conditions comprise (1) socio-cultural shifts away from traditional hierarchies and (2) the economic prosperity of the second half of the 20th century followed by increasing economic inequalities and pauperization in the end of the 20th century (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021).

Historically, the term *Kollektiver Narzissismus* was coined to denote a dominant narration about German national identity that preceded the

Second World War and the atrocities committed by the Nazi-led Germany. The success of this narration had been preceded by similar socio-cultural and economic conditions: the economic crisis of the Great Depression and a major redefinition of traditional values and hierarchies brought about by the First World War and communist revolution in Russia (Adorno, 1997; Fromm, 1973; Baumeister, 2002).

In a paper written just after the 2016 American election, Chris Federico and I argued that presidential success of Donald Trump signals the elevation of American collective narcissism to the status of a dominant and normative belief about American identity. We predicted that this presidency would be associated with American collective narcissism being used to justify exclusive and narrow understanding of what it means to be “American.” This, in turn, would bring about increasing internal polarization, social exclusion and discrimination. We also expected that the public embracing one delusional belief such as collective narcissism would most likely lead to its embracing of other delusional beliefs. We expected that Trump’s presidency would be characterized by increased presence of conspiracy theories in the public domain (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018).

As expected, Donald Trump’s presidency was marked by divisive rhetoric of national grandiosity and deservingness and scapegoating of disadvantaged groups. During Trump’s presidency the number of hate crimes (crimes motivated by prejudice) has increased and domestic terrorism became a threat to national security larger than external aggression (see Chapter 4). Studies showed that there were more hate crimes committed in the counties that held Trump’s rallies in comparison to the counties that did not (Edwards & Rushin, 2018; Feinberg et al., 2022). Moreover, Trump’s presidency was characterized by increased presence of conspiracist ideation in the public life (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2022; cf Uscinski et al., 2022). Thus, the current wave of ultraconservative populism has given urgency to the need to understand the role of collective narcissism in citizens’ political choices. First, I will discuss the results that demonstrated that national collective narcissism stood behind support for right-wing populism. Next, I will present the findings that linked national narcissism to support for populist policies, climate change denial and medical populism. Finally, I will discuss why populism may be attractive at high levels of national collective narcissism.

### Collective narcissism and populist voting

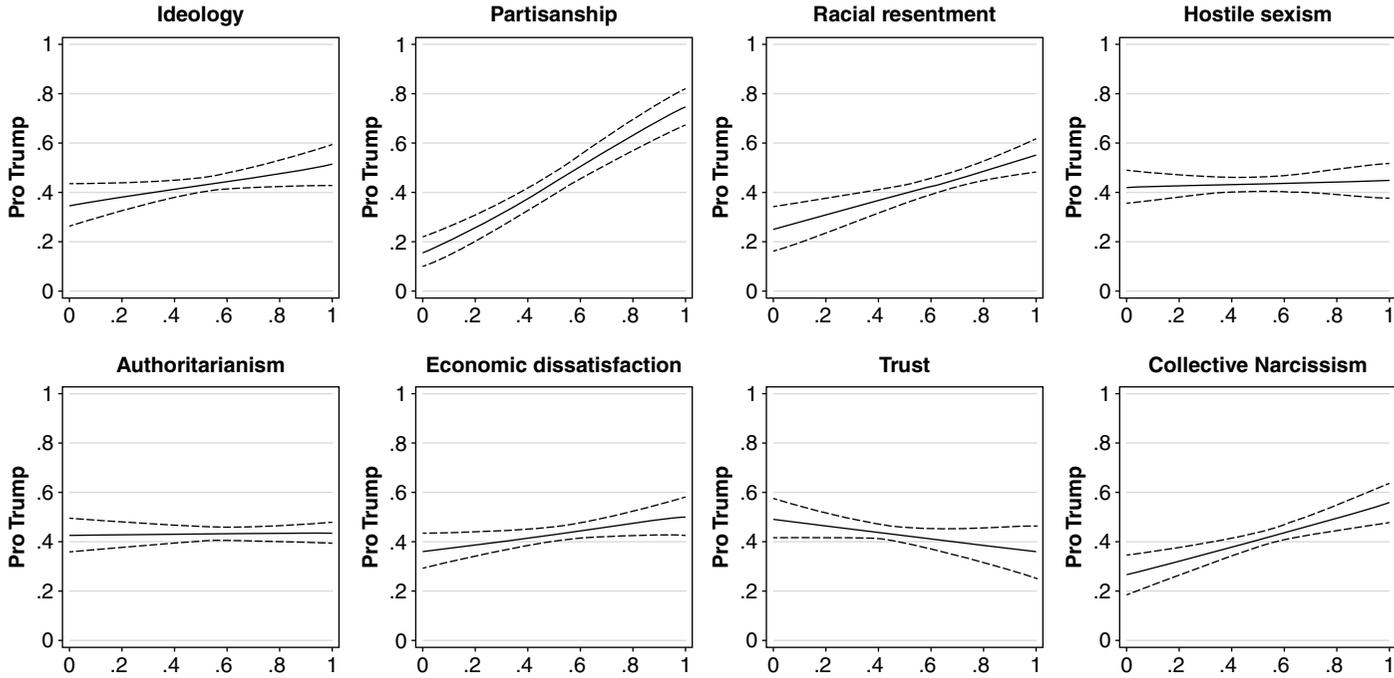
Multiple studies have linked national narcissism to voting for populist parties, politicians, and policies. National collective narcissism was associated with the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom in 2016 (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017; Marchlewska et al., 2018). Those British citizens who believed that

the exceptionality of their country was undermined and not sufficiently recognized by others voted to leave the European Union in the Brexit referendum. Xenophobia and rejection of immigrants allegedly undermining British economic superiority and “the British way of life” were the main drivers of the the association between British collective narcissism and the Brexit vote (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017).

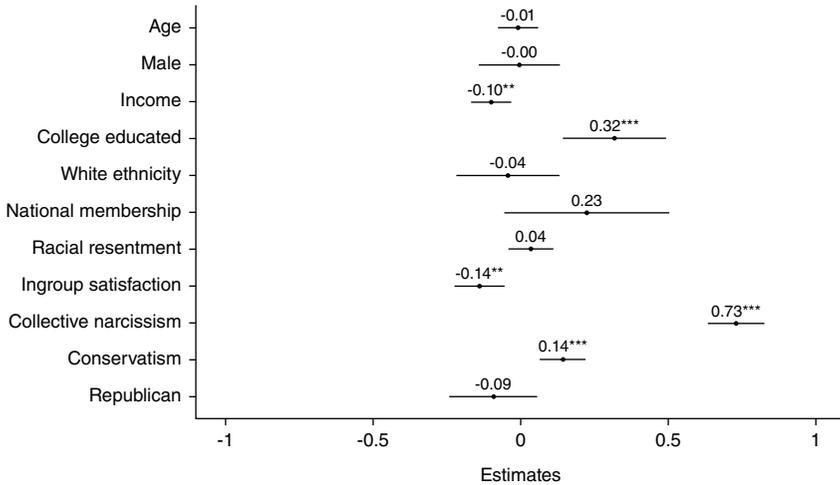
American collective narcissism predicted voting for Donald Trump in the United States in both presidential elections, in 2016 and 2020 (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). It explained the preference for Donald Trump better than political partisanship (Republican), self-reported political conservatism, economic dissatisfaction, right-wing authoritarianism, sexism, or racial resentment. Moreover, national narcissism was also the only aspect of national identification that predicted support for Donald Trump’s candidacy in comparison to national self-categorization and national ingroup satisfaction. In fact, national ingroup satisfaction predicted lower support for Trump’s candidacy in 2020 (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018; Federico et al., 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021).

National narcissism also predicted voting for populist politicians and parties in other countries. For example, Hungarian collective narcissism predicted voting for Viktor Orban (Lantos & Forgas, 2021). Polish collective narcissism predicted voting for the Polish ultraconservative Law & Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc) party (Marchlewska et al., 2018). Figure 7.3 based on data from the most recent presidential election in Poland illustrates the distribution of Polish collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction among participants who reported voting for Andrzej Duda favored by the ultraconservative and populist Law & Justice in comparison to participants who voted for Rafal Trzaskowski representing pro-democratic political center. The nationally representative data were collected by Ariadna Research Panel in late July 2020, just after the presidential election that took place on July 12, 2020. A nationally representative sample was approximated using quota sampling based on census data considering age, gender, region, and education. National collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction were visibly higher among participants who voted for the populist president.

Figure 7.4 shows additionally that national collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction in Poland predicted voting for the populist president independently. Thus, unlike in the United States, both narcissistic and non-narcissistic positive evaluation of the national ingroup predicted voting for the populist president in Poland. Their contribution was independent of such variables as self-reported political conservatism (which predicted voting for Duda rather than Trzaskowski) and the perception that one’s own economic situation is better than that of the co-nationals (which predicted voting for Trzaskowski rather than Duda).



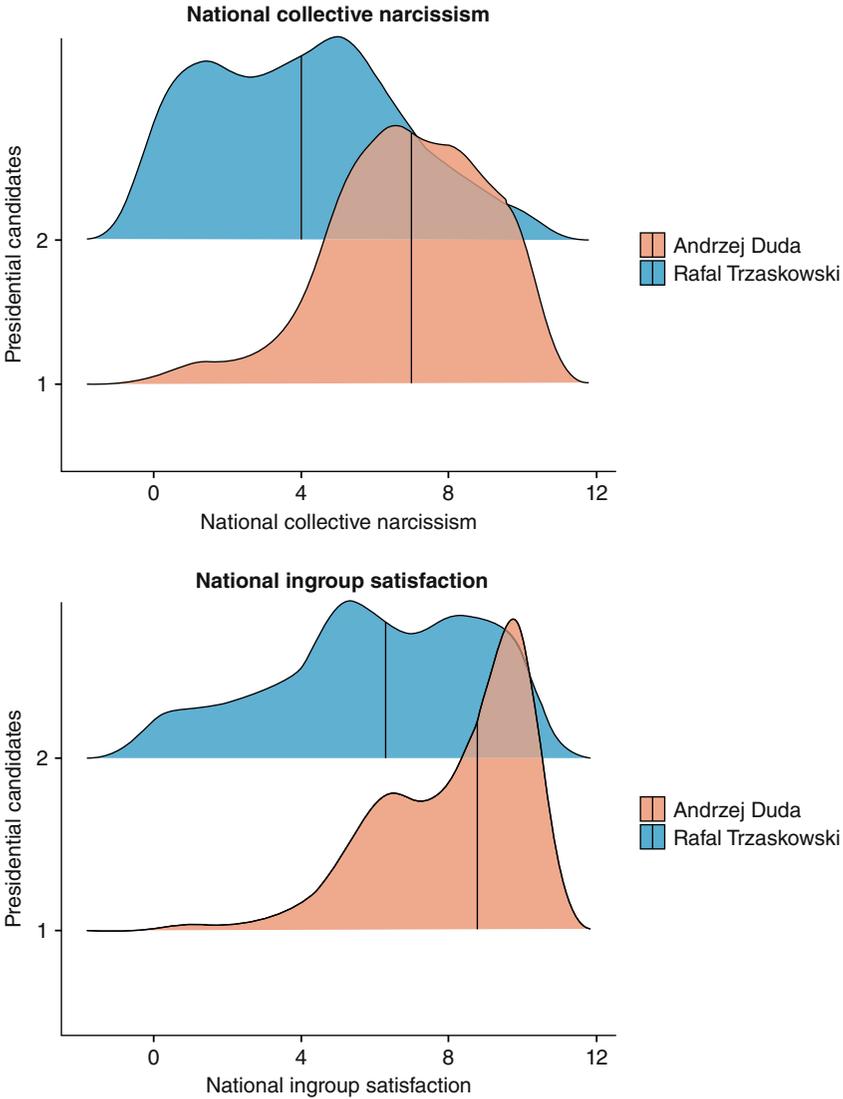
**FIGURE 7.1** Predictors of voting for Donald Trump in 2016 elections in an internet panel study by the University of Minnesota’s Center for the Study of Political Psychology collected through Survey Sampling International (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018).



**FIGURE 7.2** Predictors of voting for Donald Trump in 2020 elections in an internet sample of 308 MTurk workers (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021). Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Data collection financed by the National Science Centre grant 2017/26/A/HS6/00647.

### Collective narcissism and populist policies

Chapter 5 discusses in more detail how national narcissism is implicated in support for divisive and discriminatory policies, a prevalent feature of right-wing populism. Chapter 10 discusses the relationship between national narcissism and the spread of conspiracy theories: another pronounced feature of ultraconservative populism. In this chapter I focus on the link between national narcissism and populist approach to climate change crisis and global COVID-19 pandemic. Both challenges have been treated in a remarkably similar way by populist governments and leaders worldwide. Populist leaders have used the language of war and conspiracy to communicate about both crises spinning misinformation and conspiratorial explanations that hindered the understanding of the adequate responses (Lasco & Curato, 2019). Those reactions forced the understanding of the crises into the framework of antagonism between “the people” and unknown, secret enemies, or vaguely defined “elites.” The “elites” comprise liberal politicians, scientists, experts, and specialists undermining those whose knowledge should be used to inform the adequate responses. In consequence, people’s preferences and decisions have been based on ideological allegiances and group loyalties rather than understanding of the problem. National narcissism was used to fuel the partisan sentiments.

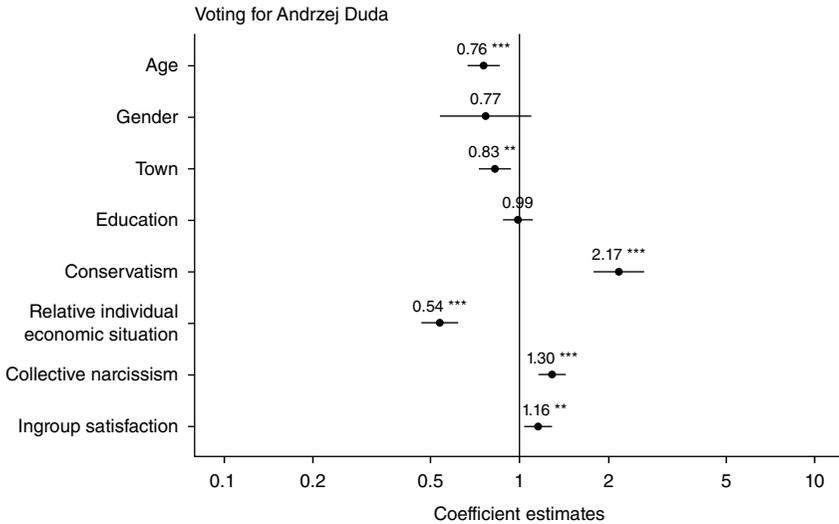


**FIGURE 7.3** Populist Andrzej Duda vs. centrist-liberal Rafal Trzaskowski voters in the second round of the presidential election in Poland in July 2020.

*Note:* The vertical lines in each density plot indicate the mean of the indicated variable in each group.

**Climate change denial**

Denial of anthropogenically caused climate change is a feature of ultra-conservative populism (Krange et al., 2021). Climate change denial and opposition to pro-environmental and conservationist policies promoted by the



**FIGURE 7.4** Predictors of voting for Andrzej Duda rather than Rafal Trzaskowski in 2020.

*Note:* Entries are logistic regression coefficients.

European Union are associated with nationalism in those European countries, in which the nativist populist rhetoric had led to populists' electoral successes. The opposition to pro-environmental policies in those countries is linked to negative attitudes toward the European Union and preference for isolationistic politics. National collective narcissism, a close associate of nationalism (Federico et al., 2022), has also been linked to support for anti-environmental policies.

Polish collective narcissists supported the government subsidizing the coal industry in the country that obtains 70% of its energy from burning coal, the highest number in the European Union. Burning coal is responsible for half of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (fine particulate matter) emissions in Poland placing Poland last on the EU green index ranking. Polish collective narcissists have defied the EU's efforts to reduce coal emission. They have framed the European regulation as "*foreign influence*" compromising Polish sovereignty. Similarly, Polish collective narcissists saw supporting the logging the primeval Bialowieza Forest as necessary to assure national sovereignty against the European Union. Since 1979 the Bialowieza Forest has been protected as UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, in 2016 the Polish State Forests began logging of the forest that continues despite the halt ordered in 2017 by the European Court (Cislak et al., 2018). At the same time, Polish collective narcissism stood behind the greenwashing campaigns, boasting the country's pro-environmental image without the actual engagement in pro-environmental policies (Cislak et al., 2021).

Populist opposition to the European Union is not the only attitude predicted by national narcissism that links it to climate change denial. Collective narcissism is also robustly associated with conspiratorial thinking (see Chapter 10). It has been linked to climate change denial via the conspiracy beliefs pertaining specifically to the climate change. Studies conducted in France showed that French collective narcissists agreed with statements like: “*Some scientists falsify their results, concluding that climate change is due to humans, in order to gain power and influence.*”; “*The government, in cahoots with large private groups, seeks to promote nuclear energy by spreading the idea that human beings emit too much carbon and that this causes climate change.*” or “*In order to increase their profits, some multinationals agree to finance organizations that accuse human beings of being the cause of climate change.*” Those beliefs mediated the link between French collective narcissism and climate change denial (Bertin et al., 2021).

### **COVID-19 and medical populism**

The populist treatment of public health issues and health recommendations from experts generated a phenomenon described as medical populism: “*a political style that constructs antagonistic relations between ‘the people’ whose lives have been put at risk by ‘the establishment’*” (Lasco & Curato, 2019, p. 1). Medical populism hinders the understanding of complex public health issues, unnecessarily politicizing, and dramatizing them as a struggle between “the people” and the untrustworthy “establishment” comprising the industry and scientific experts. Populist skepticism toward experts and science became particularly problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to its poor handling in many countries led by the populist leadership. Populist leaders initially downplayed and dismissed the threat of the pandemic. They misinformed the public and undermined the opinions of experts. They ideologized the pandemic suggesting they are fighting not a virus but dangerous and unknown “others” to be blamed for the pandemic and insufficiently effective response to its outbreak (Lasco, 2020).

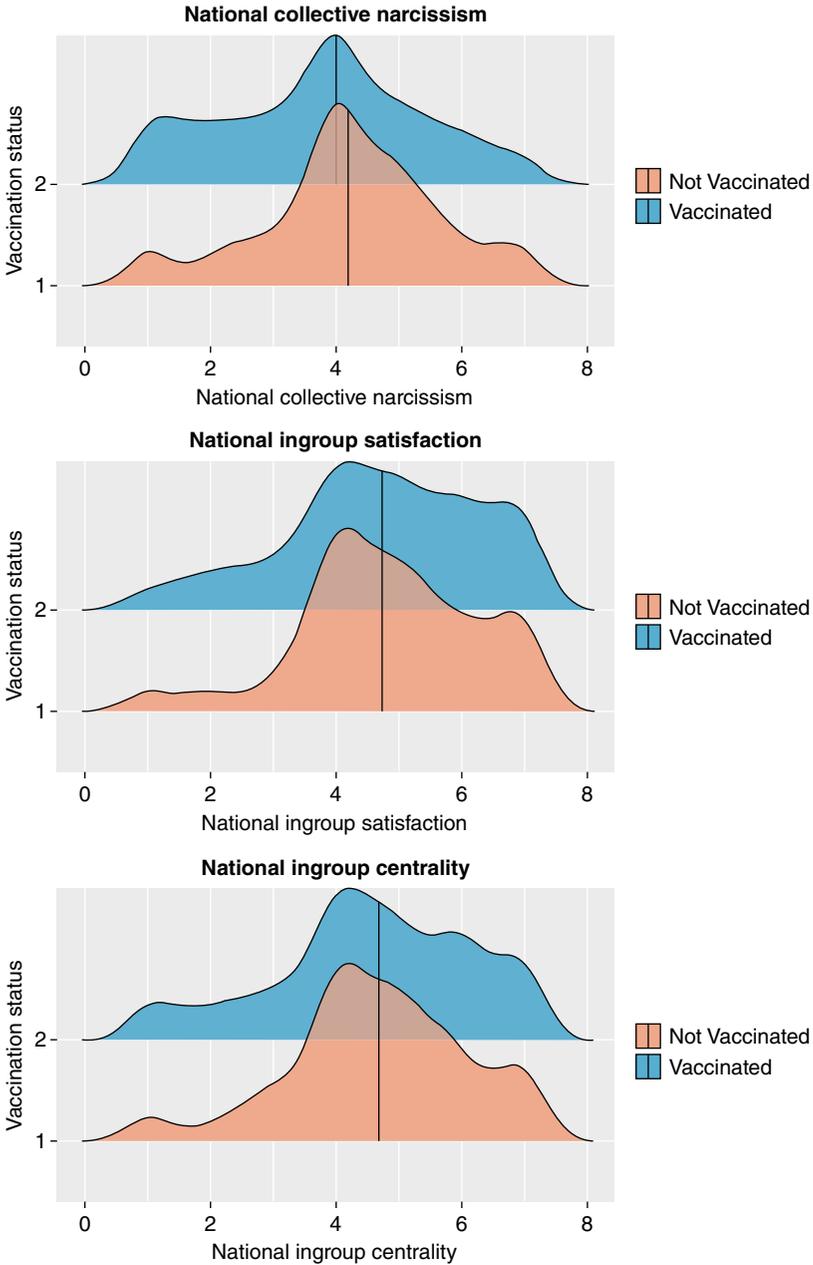
Findings converge to indicate that collective narcissism has been a major predictor of medical populism, which made an adequate response to the COVID19 pandemic difficult (Federico et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2023; Sternisko et al., 2023, for a review of factors Magarini et al., 2021, cf van Bavel et al., 2022). Collective narcissists refused to vaccinate against COVID-19 virus because they believed conspiracy theories about COVID-19 vaccines and vaccines in general. For example, Polish collective narcissists believed that “*Vaccines are harmful, and this fact is covered up*” or “*Tiny devices are placed in vaccines to track people*” (Cislak et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2022a). Collective narcissism was associated with a tendency to believe in and disseminate conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 virus (Hughes & Machan, 2021; Sternisko et al., 2023, see also Bertin & Delouée, 2021 for a similar findings in the context of the Zika epidemic). National collective

narcissism assessed in a large multinational study was associated with support of conspiracy theories about COVID19 over and above individual narcissism (which also predicted it positively) and national ingroup self-categorization and strength of national identification (that predicted it negatively, Sternisko et al., 2023). Findings linking national collective narcissism to conspiracy theories about the COVID19 pandemic were also obtained in China (Wang et al., 2021).

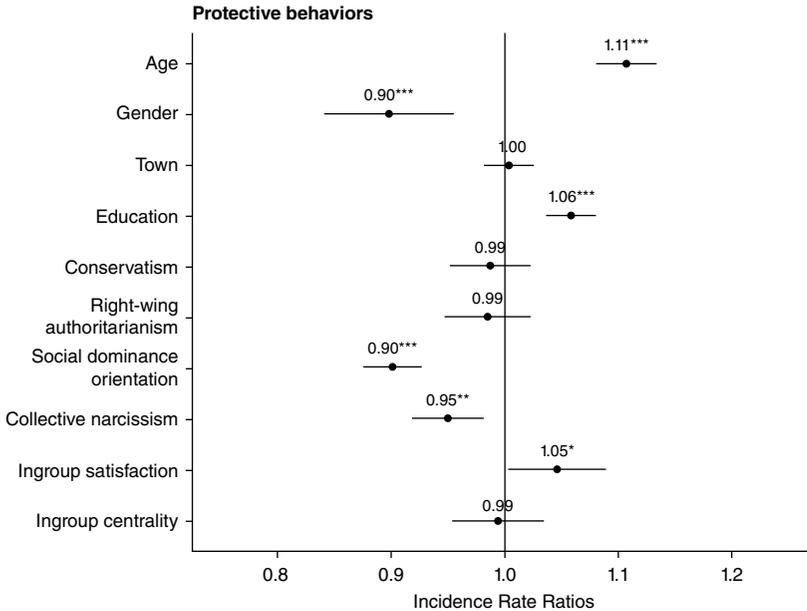
The contradictory content of the conspiracy theories upheld by collective narcissists clearly illustrates that the belief in those theories was ideologically motivated rather than based on any coherent understanding of the pandemic. American collective narcissists simultaneously believed that COVID-19 was a dangerous Chinese bioweapon and that it was a hoax spread by hostile media against the Trump administration. Similarly, British collective narcissism was simultaneously associated with the conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 virus was intentionally spread by humans for financial gains and that the COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax. Clearly, national narcissism was used to ideologize the response to COVID19 pandemic and use the pandemic to further divide the electorate.

Whether national collective narcissism was associated with actually engaging in preventive behaviors during the pandemic is unclear. The summative evidence across different behaviors suggests a null association. Specific studies bring contradictory findings. The multinational study showed that just as national identification (self-categorization and centrality); national collective narcissism positively predicted support for public policies to fight the pandemic in each of the examined 67 countries and a tendency to engage in preventive behaviors such as frequent hand washing and other physical hygiene recommendations as well as following recommendations regarding social distancing (Van Bavel et al., 2022). However, additional analyses on the same data indicate that the relationship between national collective narcissism was curvilinear (Pavlovic et al., 2022). This suggests that, in contrast to national identity, its association with following the health policies might have been moderated by other variables. Indeed, other findings are at odds with the positive role of collective narcissism in following national health guidance to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, Figure 7.5 illustrates the distribution of Polish collective narcissism, Polish ingroup satisfaction, and Polish ingroup centrality in the group of people that reported they had been vs. had not been vaccinated against COVID-19 in December 2022. The data were collected on the representative quota sample of Polish adults surveyed by Ariadna Research Panel. While the groups did not differ with reference to the strength of their national identification or positive, non-narcissistic evaluation of their nation, those still not vaccinated in December 2022 reported higher levels of national collective narcissism.



**FIGURE 7.5** Ridgeline density plots for distributions of national narcissism, national ingroup satisfaction, and national centrality among participants who reported being vs. not being vaccinated against COVID-19 in December 2022. The vertical lines indicate the mean of the indicated variable in each group.



**FIGURE 7.6** Predictors of recalled preventive behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic in a nationally representative sample of Polish adults in December 2022.

*Note:* Poisson regression analysis was performed on nationally representative panel data collected by the Ariadna Research Panel.

Figure 7.6 presents the results of the analyses on the same sample that looked at predictors of behaviors to prevent the spread of the pandemic. They included limiting travel and staying at home during the lockdowns, limiting contacts with other people, wearing face masks, and disinfecting hands and surfaces. Polish collective narcissism was the only aspect of national identification that negatively predicted engaging in those preventive behaviors. People who scored higher on the collective narcissism scale reported engaging in fewer preventive behaviors during the pandemic. National ingroup satisfaction predicted a higher tendency to engage in preventive behaviors, while the strength of national identification did not play a significant role. Moreover, national collective narcissism predicted lower tendency to engage in preventive behaviors over and above political orientation. Self-reported political conservatism or right-wing authoritarianism did not play a role; social dominance orientation predicted preventive behaviors negatively, but independently of collective narcissism.

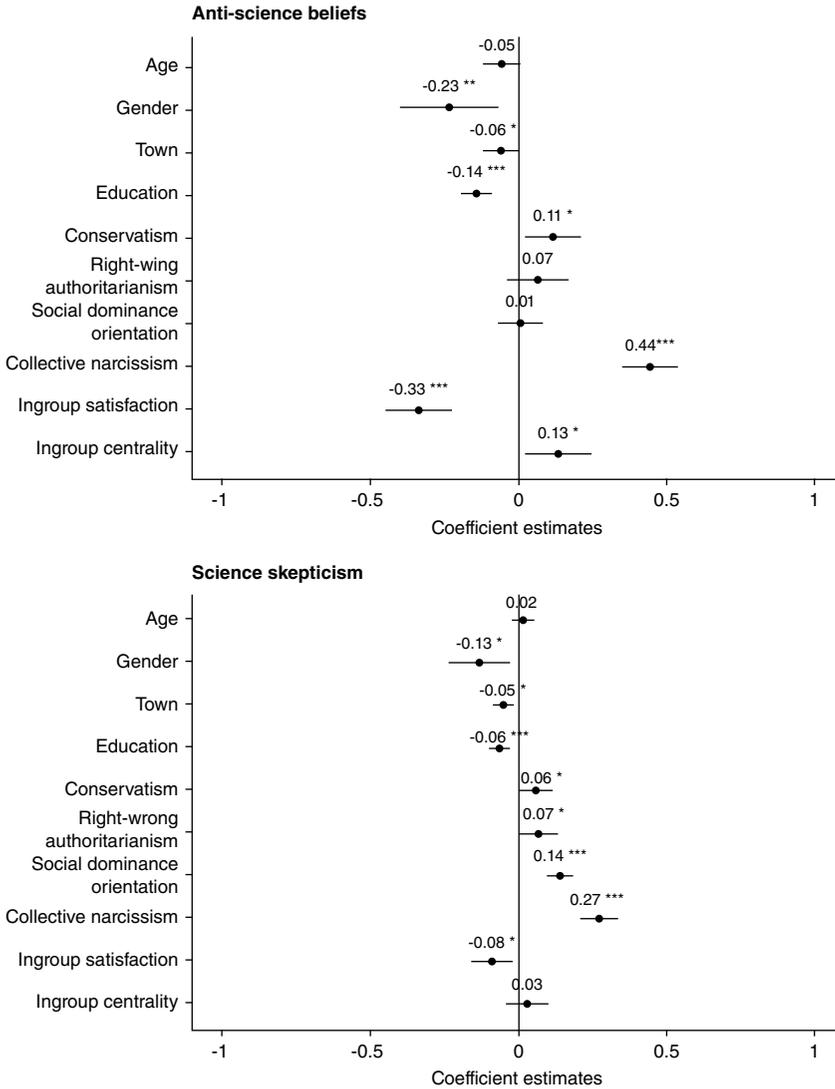
In line with those results, other studies showed that Polish collective narcissists refused to vaccinate against COVID-19, opposed national vaccination

programs (Cislak et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2022a), and refused to follow the governmental health regulations (Vaal et al., 2022). While they considered themselves vulnerable to infection, they did not consider it likely they would engage in recommended preventive behaviors (e.g., hand washing or obeying the lockdown); however, they consider it likely they would engage in hoarding behaviors triggered by the pandemic (e.g., stockpile of food, disinfecting products or protective products; Nowak et al., 2020).

Some nuance is added by findings suggesting the positive link between national collective narcissism and support for vaccination and hygiene-related preventive behaviors when they were positively framed as civilizational achievements. This study used machine learning to analyze two decades of online discourse around vaccines on the American White nationalistic message-board Stormfront. It pointed to collective narcissism of narrations of White racial superiority demonstrated by better hygiene and science that led to inventions of vaccines whose distribution should be limited to White people only (Walter et al., 2022). Similarly to findings regarding greenwashin, these findings suggest collective narcissists embrace vaccinations when they are framed in the way that boosts the nation's positive image.

Together this evidence suggests that the contribution of national collective narcissism to actual behaviors during COVID-19 most likely depended on the context of other salient beliefs and how they framed such behaviors (see for a similar argument, Imhoff & Lamberty, 2020). One finding, however, was very clear: Collective narcissism was a major predictor of the tendency to endorse and spread COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs (Sternisko et al., 2023). This suggests that national narcissism is likely to become tied to other beliefs that undermine the effective public health response to the pandemic. The tendency to endorse COVID-19 conspiracies reliably predicted negative responses to pandemic regulations (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2022), including opposition to vaccination, selfish hoarding, and lower willingness to follow regulations to contain the disease (Hornsey et al., 2018). Chapter 10 discusses in more detail why collective narcissism is associated with conspiratorial thinking. It explains that collective narcissists are likely to embrace any delusional beliefs upheld by their ingroup.

This tendency plays a role in another unhelpful feature of collective narcissism: its association with science skepticism. Anti-science beliefs and science skepticism were negatively associated with willingness to follow the health regulations and pre-emptive measures during the pandemic (Brzezinski et al., 2021; Seddig et al., 2022). People who endorse anti-science beliefs agree that scientist lie; their knowledge is not more accurate than those of ordinary citizens but they conspire with politicians to control ordinary citizens. Science skeptics believe that vaccines cause autism, homeopathy helps cure diseases, or that water fluoridation is unhealthy.



**FIGURE 7.7** Predictors of anti-science beliefs in nationally representative samples of Polish adults in December 2022 and January 2023. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Analyses show that national narcissism is a robust predictor of anti-science beliefs. Figure 7.7 illustrates the results of two nationally representative surveys that examined the association between Polish national identification and anti-science beliefs and science skepticism. Polish collective narcissism was the strongest predictor across the two surveys. National ingroup

satisfaction was related to rejection of anti-science beliefs with different strength across the studies. Together, the findings presented in this section suggest that collective narcissism is the specific aspect of ingroup identification that predicts beliefs and behaviors that undermine effective response to crises and result in harm to ingroup members.

### Against the ingroup

Findings reviewed above suggest that collective narcissism is associated with a tendency to make decisions that while attempting to project a grandiose ingroup image externally, often result in harm to the ingroup members. Collective narcissists care for the ingroup image but not for the ingroup's welfare. Chapter 8 reviews findings suggesting a negative association between national collective narcissism and the moral foundation of care. Moreover, results of a longitudinal study in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that Polish collective narcissism was associated with lower solidarity with co-nationals facing the threat of the pandemic, whereas national ingroup satisfaction predicted greater solidarity (Federico et al., 2021). National collective narcissism was also associated with support for the specific decision-makers' choices that ultimately undermined the well-being of the ingroup members during the pandemic. The support for those decisions was driven by the concern to save the nation's image.

For example, in the early days of the pandemic (March 2020), in the United Kingdom, national collective narcissism was related to support for the Tory government's decision not to participate in an EU's scheme to get extra ventilators to help those infected with COVID-19. This decision was a response to the EU's invitation for the United Kingdom to participate in the "ventilator scheme" (called "the EU solidarity in action") to leverage the single market buying power and secure faster and cheaper orders of ventilators and protective equipment for European citizens early in the COVID-19 pandemic. In face of the warning of possible shortage of both articles this decision endangered primarily the most severely affected by COVID-19 as well as the NHS staff whose well-being is dependent on the availability of the protective equipment. British collective narcissists agreed that the government's decision was good even if it hurt the British people. Moreover, the support for this decision among British collective narcissists was driven by their agreement with the statement "*The UK's reputation in the world would have been damaged by participating in the EU scheme*" (Gronfeldt et al., 2022).

Similarly, in the United States, national collective narcissism predicted a negative attitude toward mass testing for COVID-19 expressed by Donald Trump despite the fact that mass testing is one of the most effective strategies to contain the outbreaks of infectious diseases. American collective narcissists agreed that testing should be reduced because lower number of detected cases

would make the United States look better in international comparisons. They also agreed that testing should be reduced even if this ultimately led to health risk to American citizens. Again the link between American collective narcissism and the support for reduced testing was mediated by the ingroup image concerns. Finally, despite their skepticism toward the COVID-19 vaccination, American collective narcissists wanted to rush the release of the COVID-19 vaccine in the United States regardless of the potential risks the early release would have posed to the citizens' health. The pressure toward the early release was motivated by the concern over the country's reputation if it loses the competition with other countries to release the vaccine. American collective narcissists wanted the vaccine release fast even if insufficient testing could have threatened health of the population (Gronfeldt et al., 2022).

Those findings illustrate a tendency associated with collective narcissism to sacrifice the ingroup members' welfare for the sake of protecting the ingroup's external image. A similar conclusion can be drawn from another study conducted in Indonesia, which showed that collective narcissism predicted rejecting foreign aid to this country because of reputation concerns. Because of its location in the "Ring of Fire" (the area of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide), Indonesia is exposed to natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcano eruptions, or tsunamis. Hence, the presence of international humanitarian aid organizations in Indonesia is frequent and visible. However, some political groups resist this presence and the influx of international actors into the country. Collective narcissism was related to refusing humanitarian aid to Indonesia from developed countries resulting in slower recovery among victims of natural and humanitarian disasters. The association was driven by conspiratorial thinking about humanitarian organizations attributing them with intentions to undermine Indonesia and to control its people. In addition, Indonesian collective narcissist attributed workers in humanitarian organizations with intentions to show off their competence and generosity but not with empathy, compassion, or genuine motivation to help (Mashuri et al., 2022). Together those findings indicate that collective narcissists care more about projecting the ingroup's exaggerated image to the external world than about well-being and lives of individual group members.

### Collective narcissism of populist rhetoric

Given that the consequences of national collective narcissism are negative for individual ingroup members, what has made ultraconservative populism so appealing to voters. I argue that it is because national narcissism as an ideology is packaged with other beliefs that make the expression of superiority needs in the public domain seem justified or at least palatable. National narcissism is linked to nostalgia for the great national past (Mols & Jetten,

2017) and advocating the need of national re-birth (“*Make America great again*,” “*Take back control in the UK*”) via returning to “healthy and sound” traditional (unequal, hierarchical, and very often oppressive) organization of societies. Populists push the idea that the pursuit of liberal and progressive ideals undermined national grandeur and its adequate reception by the external world (Mudde, 2017; Müller 2017). They contrast the traditional, autochthonic (Dunn, 2015), pure-blooded (Betz, 2018) “people” with the self-interested, internationally oriented, progressive, “tall-skim double-mocha latte” or “chardonnay sipping,” “linguini-spined” “elites” that abandoned the “traditional ways” to pursue liberal values (Eierman et al., 2018). Collective narcissism supplies the “*resentful affectivity*” that fuels “*the forceful desire to return to the past*” (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018, p. 1272).

Linked to glorification of the revival of national greatness, national collective narcissism offers the self-proclaimed representatives of “the people” a moralized framework to justify exclusion of other members of the nation. The populist rhetoric suggests that those who feel wronged by emancipation of traditionally disadvantaged groups are indeed “the righteous” and “true” representatives of the nation concerned with restoring its undermined grandeur. Indeed, the “economic anxiety” or “losers of globalization” explanation of the recent wave of ultraconservative populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018) rely on data showing that high *and* low social and economic status predicts support for right-wing populism (Burgoon et al., 2018; Gidron & Hall, 2017). The “economic anxiety” or “losers of globalization” explanation of the recent wave of ultraconservative populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018) posits that increasing economic inequalities push people to feel betrayed, vulnerable, and susceptible to antagonistic rhetorics. Moreover, evidence suggests it is not the actual worsening of economic conditions or objective lack of economic means that inspires support for populism. What seems to sways people toward populist narrations is the subjective perception of one’s own economic situation as threatened or worsening *relative* to “the rest of society”, society,. Endorsment of right-wing populism is linked to the perception of unfair disadvantage in comparison to others, or so-called “*status anxiety*”, fear of losing one’s relative standing in a social hierarchy, standing that is often based on privileged status of the ingroup: being White, male, and rich (Nolan, & Valenzuela, 2019;2019; Mols & Jetten, 2017; Jetten 2019). While legitimizing prejudice and inequalities, national collective narcissism provides a biased, but persuasive, interpretation of the conditions that have challenged superiority expectations among members of historically advantaged groups. Those conditions have been created by economic and socio-cultural shifts that have redefined traditional group-based hierarchies.

Underscoring the importance of shared perceptions of threat to social status aligns with the “cultural backlash” explanation of conditions inspiring right-wing populism (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). This explanation posits that the post-war economic prosperity in Western Europe brought about a cultural shift toward post-material values of self-expression, equality, and tolerance. This conduced to relative emancipation of previously disadvantaged social groups (e.g., women, ethnic, religious, cultural, or sexual minorities) and undermined the traditional group hierarchies. Right-wing populism is a reactionary backlash in response to this shift, a “revolution in reverse,” against social change toward equality. This backlash is motivated by the desire to cling to traditional group/based privileges (Inglehart & Norris, 2017).

The fear of losing one’s privileged status makes people susceptible to ideologies that promise restoration of their status. As this fear binds people together, it may become a defining feature of their shared social identity. Populist leaders act as social identity “entrepreneurs,” who harvest and manage this binding aspect of status anxiety for political gain (Haslam et al., 2010; Mols & Jetten, 2016; Reicher & Haslam, 2017). They formulate and propagate a vision of national identity that encompasses and validates this fear making it a national problem. National collective narcissism is the core of this vision. This vision legitimizes the public expression of individual and collective superiority needs resulting in increased prejudice, escalation of intergroup hostilities, and societal polarization. While research links collective narcissism to a number of frustrated psychological needs, such as the need for control (Cichocka et al., 2018), secure attachment (Marchlewska et al., 2022b), or positive self-esteem (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020), I believe that collective narcissism is a case of motivated social cognition that predominantly expresses the superiority need, the need to be recognized as better than others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023). Collective expression of this need, “*in the name of the group*” is more socially acceptable than its individual expression (although see the popularity of Ayn Rand “*ethical egoism*” philosophy in the United States).

Thus, collective narcissism research suggests that despite of its overt claims, ultraconservative populism does not express a desire to take care of those impoverished and “*forgotten*” by globalization and losing in capitalist economic rivalry. Collective narcissism is robustly associated with individual narcissism and propagation of collective narcissism increases individual narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023, Chapter 1). As suggested by its overlap with collective narcissism in advantaged groups discussed in Chapter 9, national collective narcissism expresses a demand to fortify and advance traditional privileges on which members of advantaged groups based their sense of self-importance. National collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups (e.g., White people, men) justify advancing existing hierarchies by increasing discrimination and oppression of disadvantaged groups (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; 2023).

## Conclusion

Populism promises to speak for the disadvantaged, “*the people*” forgotten by the rich, liberal “*elites*.” But those overt claims do not represent what populism is about. Research on collective narcissism helps to understand populism as an antagonistic, anti-egalitarian, and undemocratic political orientation. National collective narcissism is a feature of ultraconservative populism. The very term “*collective narcissism*” was coined during the wave of conservative populism that preceded the Second World War. The current wave of ultraconservative populism pushed national collective narcissism from extremist fringes to the mainstream. Collective narcissism becomes legitimized as a publicly accepted belief defining national identity. It is used to justify social inequalities and discrimination of disadvantaged groups. It helps maintain and advance the group-based privileges that give members of advantaged groups reasons to feel better than others.

National collective narcissism stood behind voting for populist parties and leaders in many countries. It has also motivated support for populist policies harmful to nations and the planet. Specifically, national collective narcissism is associated with climate change denial, science skepticism, and support for anti-environmental policies. It is also associated with medical populism whose full expression could have been witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. National collective narcissism motivated endorsement of contradictory conspiracy theories regarding the pandemic, endorsement of anti-science beliefs representing the distrust toward experts and unwillingness to follow the preemptive health regulations. Contributing to zealous partisanship ignited by populist divisive rhetoric, national collective narcissism is associated with support for political decisions that undermine the health of the nation and the whole Earth to save and elevate the national ingroup image.

National narcissism is endorsed by people who try to fulfill the need to be recognized as better than others by partaking in grandiosity of their nation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2023). Through populist leaders those individuals gain a collective voice. But national collective narcissism is not the only way to conceptualize the nation. People who are likely to endorse national collective narcissism are also likely to endorse other visions of the nation. It is because their national identification is an important part of their broader sense of identity. Psychological research consistently shows that collective narcissism is related to ingroup centrality, ingroup attachment, and ingroup satisfaction (for a review see Golec de Zavala et al., 2019, see Chapter 2), national collective narcissism is also associated with genuine patriotism (Federico et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, see Chapter 3). Capitalizing on this overlap “*constructive*” aspects of national ingroup identification may help reduce collective narcissistic and its negative consequences.

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# 8

## REVOLUTIONARIES IN REVERSE

### Collective narcissism and political orientation

As discussed in Chapter 7, national narcissism in many countries has been associated with voting for populist, right-wing parties and politicians. However, the association between national collective narcissism and political orientation on the liberal-conservative or left-right dimensions is not straightforward. First, this association is affected by the fact that collective narcissists among members of advantaged groups hold conservative political orientation and support worldviews that justify traditional group-based hierarchies, but collective narcissists among members of disadvantaged groups reject political conservatism and hold progressive and egalitarian worldviews (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). Moreover, collective narcissism is an aspect of identification with any ingroup (Golec de Zavala, 2011), including political parties, regardless of whether their binding ideology is liberal or conservative. In other words, when collective narcissism is assessed with reference to political party, partisan collective narcissism in both parties predicts similar attitudes and perceptions of the relationships between the parties. Collective narcissism is associated with endorsing the ideological content represented by the party (Bocian et al., 2021; Cichocka et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, evidence converges to suggest that rather than predicting preference for a specific political ideology or political orientation, collective narcissism (national, in advantaged and disadvantaged groups) predicts preference for any ideology that favors ruthless leaders and justifies intergroup hostility. While national narcissism (similarly to collective narcissism with reference to advantaged groups) is related to political conservatism and preference for belligerent, autocratic leaders, it is also specifically related to preference for ruthless leaders whose politics disrupt rather than maintain existing social order. In this collective narcissism deviates from authoritarianism that is

oriented towards preserving status quo and existing social order. National collective narcissism seems to combine authoritarian servitude and admiration for power executed by coercion with rebelliousness and disruptive intergroup antagonism. National collective narcissism is simultaneously associated with political conservatism and anti-establishment orientation orthogonal to the liberal-conservative dimension (Uscinski et al., 2021) as well as with anti-hierarchical aggression and anti-conventionalism aspects of left-wing authoritarianism (Costello et al., 2022).

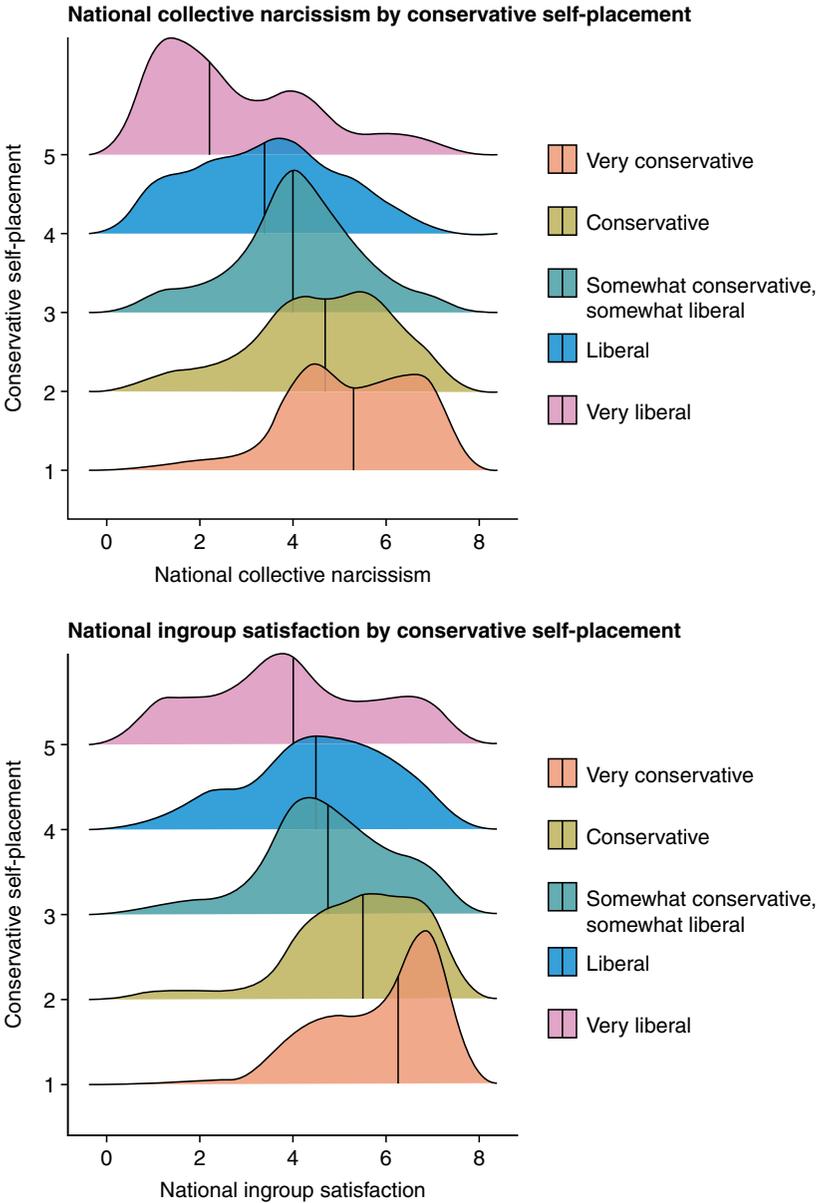
### Political conservatism

The association of national collective narcissism with support for ultra-conservative populism suggests that national collective narcissism is, at least to some extent, a feature of political conservatism or right-wing orientation. Political conservatism is an ideological orientation that involves commitment to the status quo, resistance to social change, traditionalism, and legitimization of social and economic inequalities, especially by meritocracy beliefs and reverence toward authorities (Duckitt et al., 2010; Jost et al., 2003). As it provides justification for why some groups should be considered better than the others, this ideological orientation attracts collective narcissists, especially (but not exclusively; see Chapter 9) in the advantaged groups.

National collective narcissism is associated with self-reported conservative political orientation and voting for conservative political parties (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). For example, a multinational study conducted in 67 countries indicated that national collective narcissism in each country was associated with self-reported right-wing political orientation (Van Bavel et al., 2022). Analyses of nationally representative sample in the United States indicate that national collective narcissism is endorsed by those Americans who report allegiance to the Republican Party rather than those who support the Democrats or identify as Independent (Federico et al., 2022).

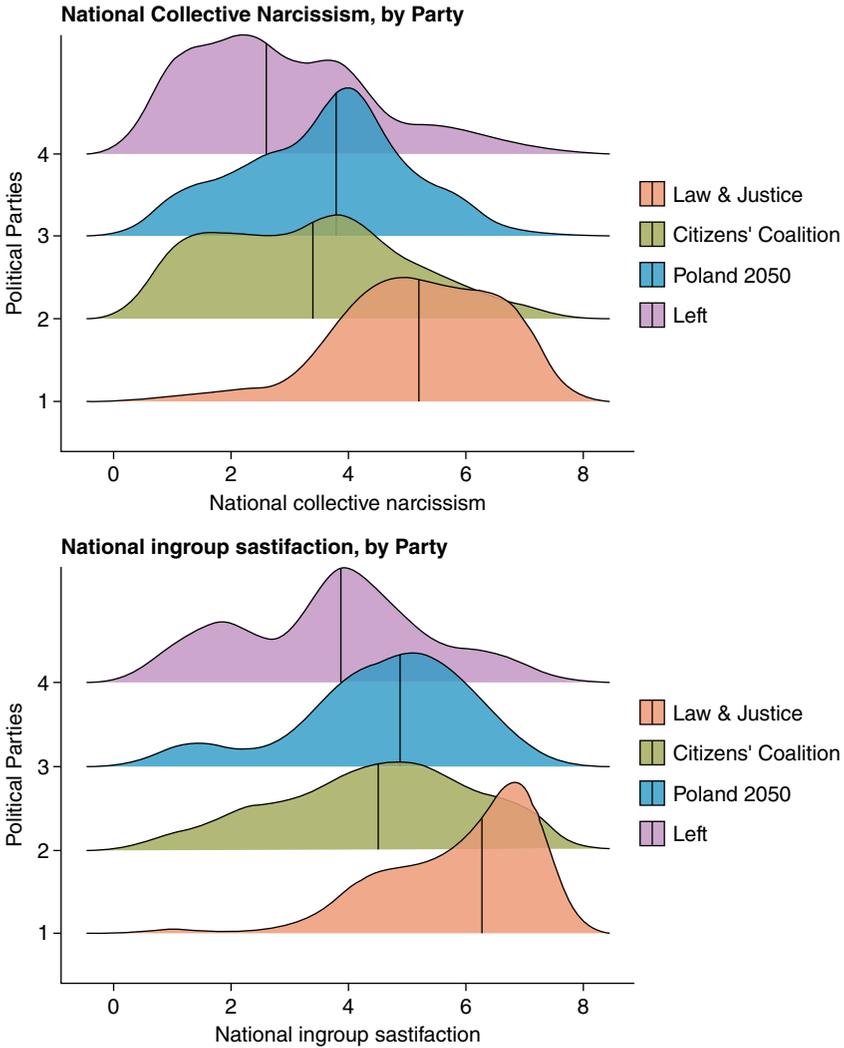
In a similar vein, results illustrated in Figure 8.1 indicate that national collective narcissism in Poland is endorsed primarily by people who self-identify as politically conservative. The analyses were performed on a nationally representative sample of Polish adults, approximated using quota sampling based on census data considering age, gender, region, and education. In comparison, while national ingroup satisfaction is the highest among those participants who self-identify as conservative and very conservative, national ingroup satisfaction does not seem to be just conservative “*specialty*.” It is higher among liberals than national collective narcissism.

Figure 8.2 presents results of analyses based on the same sample. It shows that national collective narcissism characterizes primarily the voters that support ultraconservative populist Law & Justice and conservative Poland2050. National narcissism was endorsed to a lesser extent by



**FIGURE 8.1** Ridgeline density plots for distributions of national narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction by liberal-conservative self-placement in Poland in December 2022.

*Note:* The vertical lines in each density plot indicate the mean of the indicated variable in that partisan group.



**FIGURE 8.2** Ridgeline density plots for distributions of national narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction by political party in Poland in December 2022.

*Note:* The vertical lines in each density plot indicate the mean of the indicated variable in that partisan group.

supporters of centrist Citizens Coalition or the Left. Levels of national ingroup satisfaction are notably higher than levels of national collective narcissism among voters of all parties apart from the Law & Justice, among whom the levels of both variables are comparable. Thus, national narcissists

report allegiance with right-wing and conservative populist political parties. Research also suggests that national narcissism overlaps with two ideological orientations political conservatism comprises: right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation.

### ***Collective narcissism, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation***

Psychological research points to the association between political conservatism and authoritarianism in Western societies, to the extent that the two terms are often used interchangeably (Duckitt et al., 2010; for a review, Nilsson & Jost, 2020). Authoritarianism was originally conceptualized, in the seminal book entitled “*Authoritarian personality*,” as a personality dimension associated with a tendency to endorse fascism. It comprised nine characteristics: authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission, conventionalism, cognitive rigidity and stereotypical thinking, a reverence for toughness and power, cynicism about human nature, sexual inhibition, avoidance of introspection, and projection of undesirable traits onto others (Adorno et al., 1950). After extensive research, this list was shortened to the first three features that form the core of the authoritarian syndrome. Right-wing authoritarianism is a cluster of submission to authorities defined by coercive power, conventionalism, and adherence to socially conservative norms as well as aggression toward those who threaten the social order and do not adhere to norms (Altemeyer, 1981; 1988).

Social dominance orientation – support for hierarchical organization of societies, inequality, and group-based dominance (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001) – complements submissive right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer et al., 1998). A dual-motivational model of political ideology (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley 2010) posits that right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation are two dimensions of ideological attitudes that can be described on the continuum from liberal to conservative. The two dimensions predict self-identification as politically conservative. They also predict similar political attitudes such as prejudice, punitiveness, and preference for autocratic leaders, but they are grounded in distinct worldviews, emerge in different social contexts, and are associated with distinct personality features.

According to the dual-motivational model of political ideology (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010), right-wing authoritarianism is associated with a “Dangerous World” worldview, a belief that world is a dangerous, threatening, and unpredictable place. As a manner of managing the world’s unpredictability authoritarians prioritize security, order, stability, and social cohesion. Authoritarianism is associated with low openness to experience but high conscientiousness and conformity. It is associated with preference

for political leaders that promote safety, law, order, tradition, and prejudice toward groups that are deviant and threaten social order, law, and tradition. Right-wing authoritarianism reflects heightened attachment to the ingroup (“*lethal partisanship*,” Costello et al., 2022, p. 3) and a desire for centrally controlled ingroup’s cohesion (Duckitt, 2006). It is associated with cognitive rigidity, dogmatism, prejudice, political intolerance (Costello et al., 2022; Jost et al., 2003; Sibley & Duckitt, 2010), social traditionalism, and preference for “*tight*” social structures that reduce uncertainty and provide clear rules and guidelines (Altemeyer, 1988; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Jost et al., 2017). On the other hand, social dominance orientation is associated with a “World as Competitive Jungle” worldview, in which the strong win and the weak lose, and people are motivated by greed, drive to power, dominance, and superiority. Social dominance orientation is associated with low agreeableness and tough-mindedness. It predicts prejudice toward disadvantaged groups and groups with which the ingroup competes or is in conflict. It predicts support for anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian leaders that promote economic inequalities (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010).

Studies summarized in Table 8.1 point to a reliable positive association between national collective narcissism (and collective narcissism in advantaged groups) with right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. Collective narcissism and right-wing authoritarianism overlap in aggressiveness, ingroup loyalty, reverence to coercive authorities, preference for coherence, and homogeneity of the ingroup. However, authoritarians prefer the ingroup cohesiveness, conventionalism, and obedience because of order and predictability they secure. Studies suggest that authoritarianism is associated with psychological well-being because of reduced cognitive uncertainty and enhanced the just-world beliefs (Napier et al., 2020). In contrast, for collective narcissists, the coherent, similarly minded ingroup serves as a vehicle to fulfill the superiority need and to mend their wounded self-importance. Collective narcissism does not improve group members’ well-being. Instead, it is associated with higher neuroticism, negative emotionality, low self-esteem, and vulnerable narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2019; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2023).

Collective narcissism and social dominance orientation overlap in preoccupation with the ingroup’s privileged position. While social dominance orientation combines group-based dominance with opposition to equality, for collective narcissists, the persistence of social hierarchies is not always the main concern. Thus, the association between collective narcissism and social dominance orientation is less stable than the association between collective narcissism and right-wing authoritarianism. Collective narcissistic belief about the ingroup’s entitlement does not have to be based on the ingroup’s power and dominance in intergroup hierarchies. The claim to privilege and special recognition may be based on extraordinary humility, generosity,

**TABLE 8.1** The associations of collective narcissism with right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation

	<i>RWA</i>	<i>SDO</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Reference</i>
National CN	.38***	.53***	263	USA	Students	Golec de Zavala et al., 2009
National CN	.08	.02	200	Mexico	Students	Golec de Zavala et al., 2009
National CN	.56***	.29***	153	USA	MTurk	Golec de Zavala et al., 2013
National CN	.30***	.25***	115	USA	MTurk	Golec de Zavala et al., 2013
National CN	.28**	.11	117	Poland	Opportunistic	Golec de Zavala et al., 2013
National CN	.47***	.17***	532	Poland	Representative, quota	Golec de Zavala et al., 2016
National CN	.51***	.23***	929	Poland	Representative, quota	Cichočka et al., 2017
National CN	.56***	.29***	285	UK	Mturk	Golec de Zavala et al., 2017
National CN	.49***	.45***	250	UK	Mturk	Golec de Zavala et al., 2017
National CN	.27***	–	1730	USA	Representative, quota	Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018
National CN	.43***	–	812	Poland	Representative, quota	Kofta et al., 2020
National CN	.47***	–	370	UK	Prolific	Kofta et al., 2020
Heterosexual CN	.46***	.22***	1992	Poland	Representative, quota	Górska et al., 2020
National CN	.50***	.07	659	Poland	Representative, quota	Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2020
National CN	.43***	.05	350	USA	Mturk	Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021
National CN	.27***	.54***	308	USA	Mturk	Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021
National CN	.54***	.15***	587	Poland	Representative, quota	Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2020
National CN	.57***	.35***	407	USA	Prolific	Marchlewska et al., 2022
National CN	.43***	.20***	570	Poland	Representative, quota	Marchlewska et al., 2022
National CN	–	.55***	800	USA	Representative, quota	Golec de Zavala et al., 2023

suffering, or achievements in different domains than power (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; 2019; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2021). It may be also based on the ingroup's pursuit of social justice and equality as the associations discussed in Chapter 9 suggest. Thus, collective narcissism and social dominance orientation may be more likely to overlap in powerful groups enjoying a dominant intergroup position or building the narration of grandiosity around their might, power, and dominance.

Collective narcissism, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation have some features in common, but they are distinct variables, not

reducible to each other. They make unique contributions to explaining variance in political outcomes such as voting, prejudice, intergroup hostility, or preference for militaristic attitudes. All three predict xenophobia and intergroup hostility independently and for different reasons (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017).

For example, research showed that in the United Kingdom, collective narcissism, social dominance orientation, and authoritarianism independently predicted support for Brexit via perceived threat from immigrants (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). In the United States, they independently predicted support for military actions in Iraq in 2003. Only the effect of collective narcissism was mediated by perceived threat from aggression of others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). In Mexico, only collective narcissism predicted support for destructive actions toward American businesses in Mexico in response to the construction of the wall along the American-Mexican border started by President George W. Bush starting in 2006. Mexican collective narcissists perceived the wall as an insult to Mexico and Mexicans. In contrast, Mexican authoritarians rejected destructive actions toward Americans because they did not perceive the wall as an insult. Social dominance orientation was related to rejection of destructive actions toward Americans via the perception that the United States helps Mexico to achieve economic dominance (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009).

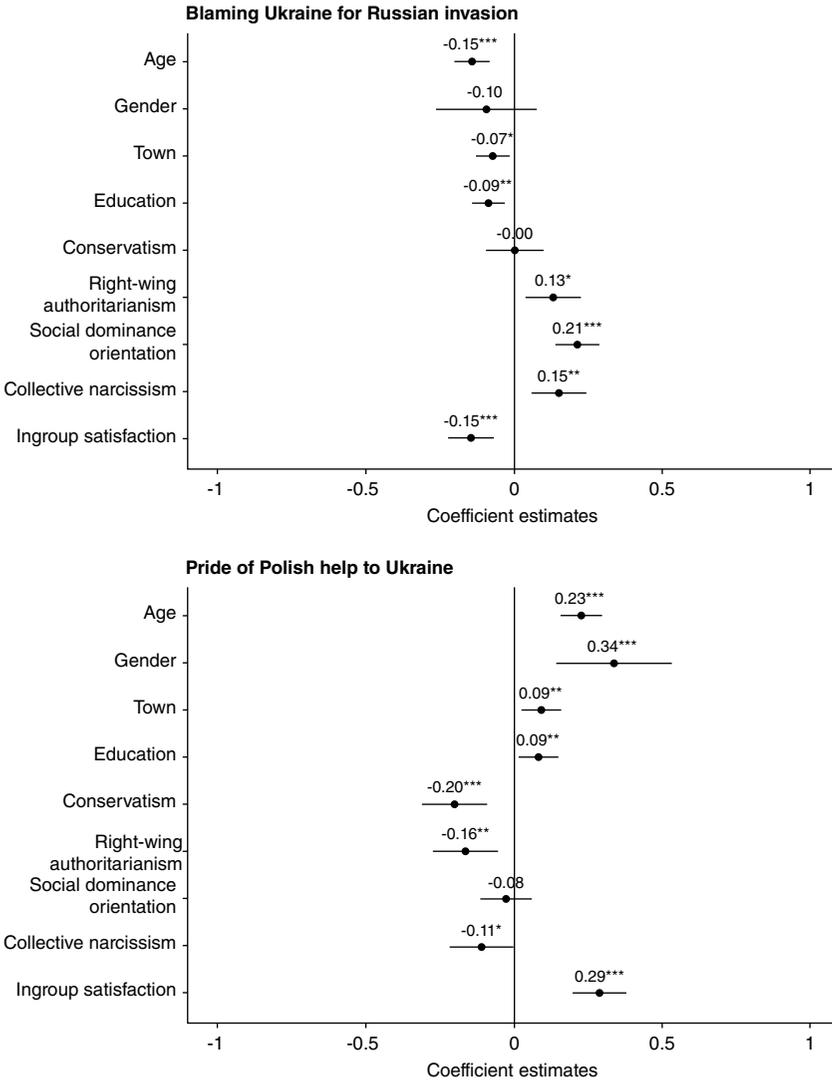
Collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016; Guerra et al., 2022) and right-wing authoritarianism (Feldman & Stenner, 1997) predict intergroup hostility especially under intergroup threat. However, collective narcissists are sensitive to different threats than authoritarians. For example, studies reported that right-wing authoritarianism is linked to intergroup hostility, especially in interaction with perceived threat to societal and political order (Feldman & Stenner, 1997). In contrast, collective narcissism predicts intergroup hostility especially under threat to the ingroup image (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; 2016) and threat to the claims to the recognition of the ingroup's exceptional status (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023; Guerra et al., 2023). For example, only collective narcissism (but not right-wing authoritarianism or social dominance orientation) predicted intergroup hostility when the ingroup image was undermined by external criticism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). In another study, Polish participants were reminded about *Pokłosie (Aftermath)*, a Polish movie based on the historic cases of Polish anti-Semitism, which threaten the narcissistic narration about the national tolerance and greatness. Again, only Polish collective narcissism was related to *schadenfreude*, opportunistic aggression toward the producers of the movie that referred to less laudable moments in Polish history (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Thus, while people high in social dominance orientation want to achieve and maintain a dominant position for the ingroup in the intergroup hierarchy and authoritarians want to achieve a homogenous and predictable social environment, collective narcissists use intergroup hostility to achieve special recognition for the ingroup.

### Rejection of democracy and preference for ruthless leaders

National collective narcissism is associated with a negative attitude toward democracy (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2022). American collective narcissists agreed that Donald Trump should stay in power despite the fact that he lost the democratic election. They supported Trump using illegal and undemocratic means of securing his position as president in the 2020 presidential election. National collective narcissism was a major predictor of the agreement that Trump should stay in office even if he had to “*compromise the rule of law*” and “*bend the rules of democracy*” (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021).

The association of national collective narcissism and disregard for democracy has also been illustrated by studies that linked American collective narcissism to support for the Capitol Hill raid on January 6, 2021 (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021). The riot broke after Donald Trump framed his loss of the presidential election to Joe Biden as fraud perpetrated by the Democrats. He claimed the Democrat’s candidate stole the election from him. Inspired by his speeches, contesting the outcome of democratic election, Trump’s supporters violently broke into the Capitol Hill building. In 2021, Donald Trump was impeached on a charge of incitement of insurrection. Two independent lines of investigation concluded that American collective narcissism predicted the perception of the Capitol attack as justified and presidential elections as unfair (Federico et al., 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021). American collective narcissism contributed to explaining the attitude toward the Capitol rioters over and above Republican partisanship, political conservatism, American national identification, right-wing authoritarianism, or social dominance orientation. American collective narcissists agreed that “*Those who stormed the Capitol on 6th of January 2021 were true Americans*” who were “*motivated by the love of freedom*” and opposing injustice (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021).

Findings show that national collective narcissists support anti-democratic leaders who use aggression and coercion to assert their power even if this harms the ingroup members, destabilizes societies, and the established status quo. For example, national collective narcissism in 40 countries was associated with support for economic ties with Vladimir Putin’s Russia before Russian invasion on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, but after the Russian annexation Crimea in 2014. Studies conducted in France and the United States after the Russian invasion on Ukraine showed that national collective narcissism in both countries was associated with moral justification of the invasion. Moreover, this association persisted even when participants were asked whether they would legitimize Russia invading their own country (Brown & Marinthe, 2022). In line with those findings, Figure 8.3 shows the predictors of the opinion that Russian invasion was provoked by Ukraine and its efforts to



**FIGURE 8.3** Predictors of legitimization of Russian invasion by shifting blame to Ukraine and feeling proud for Polish help in Ukraine in a nationally representative sample collected in Poland in October 2022.

*Note:* Gender coded “0” = “woman” and “1” = “man.”

become linked to NATO. The data were collected on the Polish nationally representative sample of 1,011 online participants in October 2022 after over 1.7 million Ukrainian refugees has settled in Poland after Putin’s Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Polish collective narcissism predicted

shifting the blame for the invasion to Ukraine independently of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation that were two other significant predictors. In contrast, Polish national ingroup satisfaction predicted refusal to blame Ukraine for the invasion. It also predicted feeling proud for Polish support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

Research has also demonstrated that the link between collective narcissism and preference for disruptive, ruthless, and autocratic leaders is generic and does not depend on a particular political context. Collective narcissism predicts loyalty to coercive leaders and preference for strong-arm political means even in make-believe intergroup contexts. In one study, participants were asked to imagine a fictional country in a role-playing game (see Chapter 6 for a description of a similar paradigm). They were asked to respond to the Collective Narcissism Scale as a citizen of this country. Then they were asked to evaluate four candidates for presidency in this country after reading their speeches.

In their speech, the *populist candidate* emphasized the importance of guaranteeing the country's recognition as great and powerful by others, even if that required taking action "by any means," against those who did not fully acknowledge the country's greatness. The *authoritarian candidate* emphasized collective security and tightly controlled group norms as well as using force against those who threaten the country's safety and values. The *nationalist candidate* emphasized the importance of power and status and suggested that military assertiveness over other nations was the most important goal. The *democratic* candidate focused on political equality and national inclusion of diverse groups, where cooperation is an important value. Collective narcissism with reference to the fictional country predicted support for the populist leader, followed by slightly lower support for the authoritarian and the nationalist leaders but rejection of the democratic leader. Authoritarianism predicted support for populist and authoritarian leader over nationalistic and democratic leaders. Social dominance orientation predicted support for nationalistic leader over populist and authoritarian leader and rejection of the democratic leader (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021).

Those findings illustrate that while right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and national collective narcissism all reject democratic leaders, they prefer different types of leaders oriented toward different goals. Authoritarians prefer leaders fostering social order, people high in dominance orientation prefer leaders pursuing dominance, and collective narcissists prefer leaders pursuing status, recognition, and external admiration of the ingroup. There are reasons to think that especially collective narcissists and people high in social dominance orientation prefer those goals to be achieved by coercive means. Indeed, as discussed below, collective narcissism and social dominance orientation are associated with disregard of suffering of others.

### **Moral intuitions of collective narcissism**

The findings regarding moral intuitions associated with national collective narcissism complement the findings that point to collective narcissism combining servility toward autocratic leaders and callousness against rivals and disadvantaged groups (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021). Moral intuitions (or moral foundations), evaluative sentiments organized “*in advance of experience*” and giving us a sense that an act is “*good*” or “*moral*” or “*evil*” and “*immoral*,” function like individual difference variables. People differ with respect to moral intuitions that inspire and justify their actions (Graham, 2013; Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Moral foundation theory differentiates *individualizing* and *binding* moral intuitions. The individualizing intuitions comprise moral intuitions of *care* and *fairness*. The moral intuition of care focuses on the value of compassion and harm prevention. This is the intuition that it is immoral to hurt another sentient being. The moral intuition of fairness focuses on equitable distribution of resources. This is the intuition that unequal and unfair distributions are wrong. Individualizing moral intuitions support the rights of individuals and curb the consequences of self-interest. The binding moral intuitions enhance cooperation between individuals and facilitate the formation and maintenance of cohesive coalitions that put group interests over interests and rights of individuals. Binding moral intuition includes *ingroup loyalty*, *authority*, and *purity*. People who are guided by ingroup loyalty intuition believe it is moral to conform to and sacrifice individual goals and happiness for the ingroup. Those who value authority believe obedience is a value, and it is important to be conscientious and do what we are told by those who have power and authority over us. The intuition of purity or sanctity is associated with disgust with everything that challenges and contaminates sacred values and norms of the ingroup (Haidt & Joseph, 2007).

Binding moral intuitions prioritize groups over individuals. They are respected more in collectivist cultures (Graham et al., 2011) and associated with attributing a high value to political partisanship regardless of political orientation (Clifford, 2017). They predict ingroup favoritism, exaggeration of the importance of the ingroup (Churchill et al., 2019), and outgroup derogation. For example, binding moral foundations predicted support for torture for the ingroup’s benefit and denying necessary help to outgroup members (Smith et al., 2014). While all moral foundations are valued by self-identified political conservatives, liberals tend to systematically value individualizing moral foundations over the binding ones (Graham et al., 2009; Kivikangas et al., 2021).

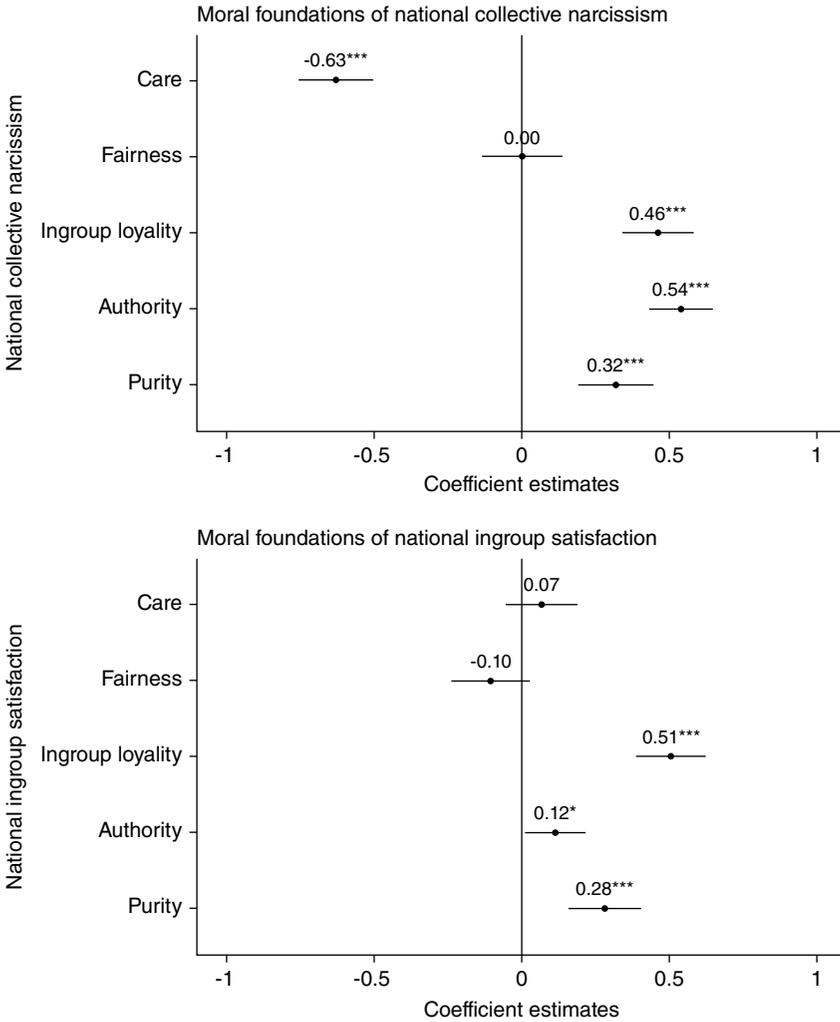
Right-wing authoritarianism is associated with endorsing all moral foundations, with stronger preference for binding moral foundations (Federico et al., 2013). This aligns with the interpretation of authoritarianism as

preference for values of conformity over openness (Duckitt, 2001; Feldman, 2003). However, in contrast, social dominance orientation is not associated with binding moral intuitions. Instead, it is negatively associated with individualizing moral intuitions of care and fairness. This aligns with the association of social dominance orientation with the belief that the world is a competitive jungle (Duckitt, 2001; 2006). Thus, people who score high on social dominance orientation do not value collaboration and group life and reject the moral intuitions that would prevent them from acting in their self-interest in the way that threatens values of not harming others and acting fairly (Federico et al., 2013).

Against this background, collective narcissism seems to be a specific combination of group conformity with ruthless pursuit of self- and group-interest. Figure 8.4 illustrates the associations of national collective narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction with moral foundations in Poland. The results are based on analyses performed in a nationally representative sample collected in March 2020. They complement a series of other analyses on nationally representative samples collected in Poland between 2017 and 2019. The results consistently indicate that national collective narcissism is associated with endorsement of binding moral intuitions but rejection of the individualistic moral intuition of care. In other words, national collective narcissists feel bound by ingroup loyalty and obedience to authority but not by the principle of not harming others. Such results align with findings suggesting the robust association between collective narcissism and political violence including terrorist violence and sacrifice of individual lives for the sake of the recognition of the ingroup (Jaśko et al., 2020; Yustisia et al., 2020). This is in contrast to national ingroup satisfaction that is positively associated with all binding moral foundations and the individualizing moral foundation of care.

### Revolutionaries in reverse

While findings link collective narcissism to right-wing authoritarianism, conformity, and political conservatism, evidence also suggests that collective narcissists believe themselves to be nonconformist revolutionaries. What they really want, though, is to follow disruptive leaders that give them a convincing justification and targets for outgroup hate. National collective narcissism does not share right-wing authoritarian attachment to the known, predictable, and time-honored status quo. Collective narcissists are willing to disrupt known social order if it serves to further elevate their ingroup's importance. Indeed, national collective narcissism is related to support for reactionary social movements advocating change toward more hierarchical and oppressive organization of societies (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022, see Chapter 9), whereas collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups is associated with



**FIGURE 8.4** National narcissism and national ingroup satisfaction as a function of the five moral foundations in a nationally representative panel study in Poland in March 2020.

*Note:* Data were collected as a part of the research project financed by the National Science Centre grant 2017/26/A/HS6/00647.

behavioral intentions to challenge the existing status quo using disruptive and violent means. Collective narcissists in disadvantaged groups support progressive social movements, but what they seem to really want is to disrupt the existing social order to reverse the hierarchy (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022, see Chapter 9).

### **Left-wing authoritarianism**

National collective narcissism is simultaneously positively associated with conservative right-wing authoritarianism and progressive left-wing authoritarianism, linked to political liberalism and endorsement of an egalitarian worldview (Costello et al., 2022). The question of whether authoritarianism can be embraced on the left of the political spectrum has been a subject of discussion since the publication of *Authoritarian Personality* in 1950 (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1998; Costello et al., 2022). Robert Altemeyer (1998) conceptualized left-wing authoritarianism as authoritarian aggression, submission, and conventionalism in people who oppose the established hierarchies. According to this conceptualization, left-wing authoritarians are “*revolutionaries who (1) submit to movement leaders who must be obeyed, (2) have enemies who must be ruined, and (3) have rules and ‘party discipline’ that must be followed*” (Altemeyer, 1998, pp. 219–220).

Consider the example of the Weather Underground, a terrorist organization active in the United States between 1969 and 1977. It emerged from the Students for Democratic Society, a progressive student organization inspired by communism and anti-imperialism. It opposed racism and American war in Vietnam and openly argued for social and economic equality. It used terrorist means to express its liberal and progressive political goals. While endorsing revolutionary and egalitarian ideas, members of this organization displayed many authoritarian features regardless of their left-wing ideology: “*the Weathermen discouraged individualism, were centrally controlled by charismatic leaders, punitively enforced in-group obedience and conformity, aggressed against different others, clung dogmatically to their beliefs, and reacted harshly to threat*” (Costello et al., 2022, p. 1).

Thus, although right-wing authoritarianism is explicitly conservative and traditional and left-wing authoritarianism is explicitly rebellious and progressive, they share common structural, “*content-free*” features. They overlap in “*preference for social uniformity, prejudice towards different others, willingness to wield group authority to coerce behavior, cognitive rigidity, aggression and punitiveness towards perceived enemies, outsized concern for hierarchy, and moral absolutism*” (Costello et al., 2022, p. 1). They are both related to acceptance of violence as political means. While right-wing authoritarianism is associated with support for pro-state violence (Webber et al., 2020), left-wing authoritarianism is associated with acceptance of anti-state violence (Costello et al., 2022).

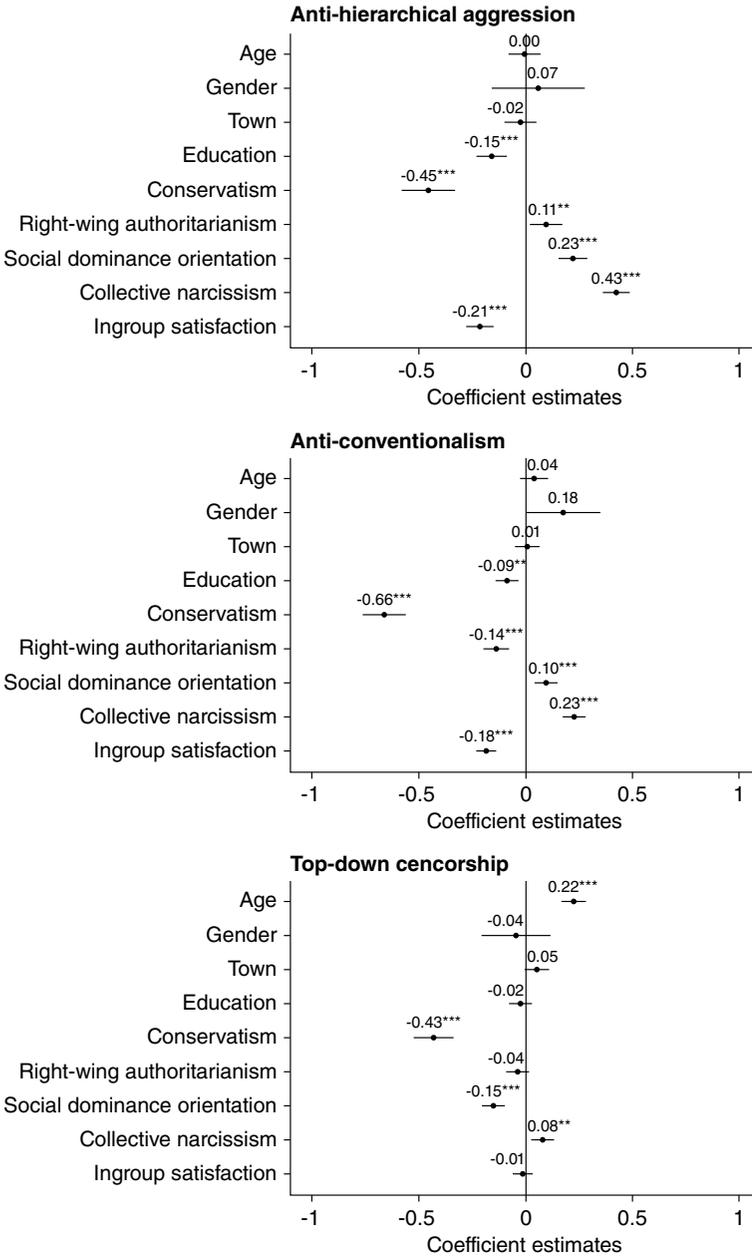
Empirical work on left-wing authoritarianism defines it as a syndrome of three attitudes: anti-hierarchical aggression, anti-conventionalism, and top-down censorship (Costello et al., 2022). Anti-hierarchical aggression “*reflects motivations to forcefully overthrow the established hierarchy and punish those in power*” (Costello et al., 2022, p. 38). Anti-hierarchical

aggression is associated with social dominance orientation, which suggests that despite superficial rebelliousness and opposition to establishment, left-wing authoritarianism represents a desire to flip the hierarchy rather than attenuate it, “*turn the tables*” rather than rethink the organization of society. Left-wing authoritarian aggression is assessed by items such as “*The rich should be stripped of their belongings and status.*”; “*If I could remake society, I would put people who currently have the most privilege at the very bottom.*”; or “*When the tables are turned on the oppressors at the top of society, I will enjoy watching them suffer the violence that they have inflicted on so many others.*”.

The remaining aspects of left-wing authoritarianism are anti-conventionalism, rigid rejection of traditional norms and conventions and top-down censorship, acceptance of the group authorities controlling public expression of ideas that contradict liberal and progressive worldview. They reflect rigid adherence to liberal and progressive values and the undemocratic and illiberal desire to coercively impose those values on others to achieve ideological homogenous ingroup coherence (Costello et al., 2022). Thus, just like right-wing authoritarianism, left-wing authoritarianism expresses a desire to control of what group members think and do. The difference is in the content of what group members are required to believe and value. Anti-conventionalists agree that “*Deep down, just about all conservatives are racist, sexist, and homophobic.*” or “*The 'old-fashioned ways' and 'old-fashioned values' need to be abolished.*”. People who support top-down censorship agree that “*University authorities are right to ban hateful speech from campus.*” or “*We must line up behind strong leaders who have the will to stamp out prejudice and intolerance.*”

Figure 8.5 illustrates findings regarding the predictors of three aspects of left-wing authoritarianism obtained from a nationally representative sample of Polish adults in October 2021. Results indicate that national collective narcissism is the strongest predictor of anti-hierarchical aggression, followed by social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism (with which national collective narcissism is also positively correlated). National collective narcissism predicts anti-conventionalism that is also positively predicted by social dominance orientation but negatively predicted by right-wing authoritarianism. It predicts top-down censorship, which is negatively predicted by social dominance orientation and not predicted by right-wing authoritarianism.

In sum, national collective narcissism is especially closely associated with anti-hierarchical aggression, significantly more than with other aspects of left-wing authoritarianism. This suggests that while national collective narcissism is associated with ingroup loyalty, authoritarian conformity, and submission to strong leaders, it also predicts group-based aggression, whether it is aggression to uphold the status quo or to flip it, violently overthrow the



**FIGURE 8.5** Predictors of three aspects of left-wing authoritarianism – anti-hierarchical aggression, anti-conventionalism, and top-down censorship in a nationally representative sample of Polish adults in October 2021.

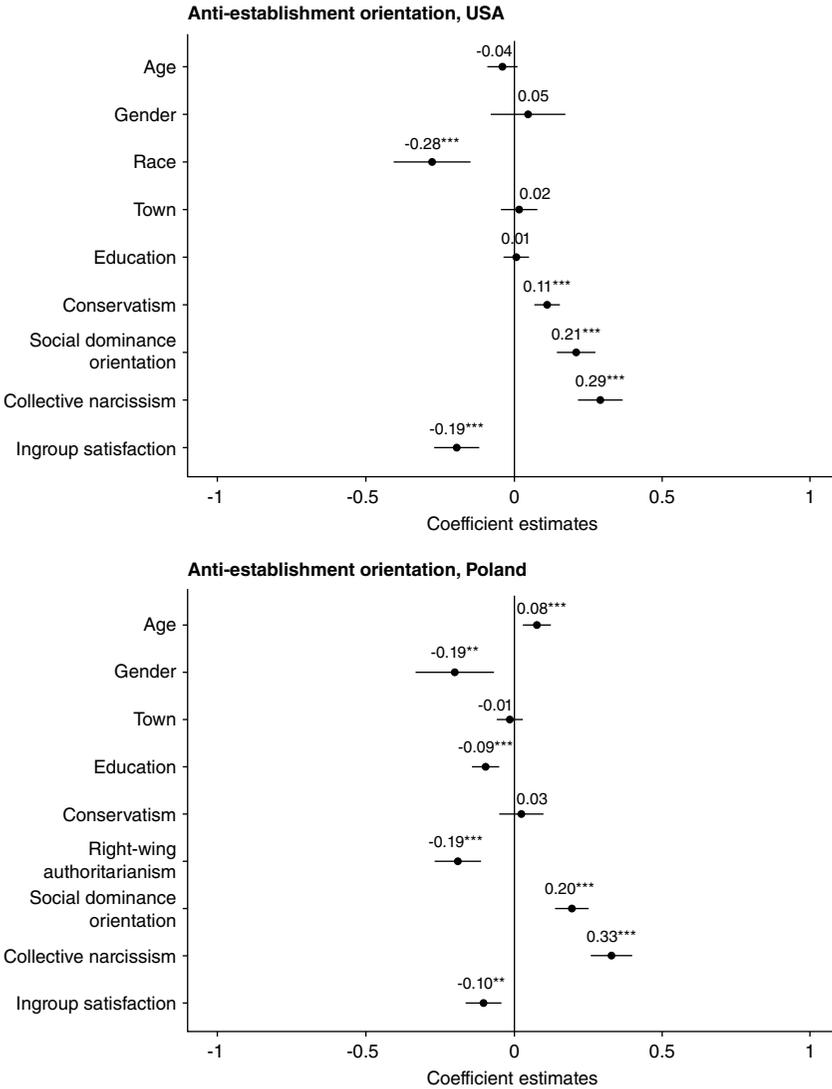
Note: Gender coded “0” = “woman” and “1” = man.”

existing hierarchies and replace them with new ones as long as the new ones would allow collective narcissists to use their ingroup to satisfy their need to feel better than others.

### **Anti-establishment orientation**

The idea that rebelliousness and antagonism toward the “*establishment*” and the traditional social order is an independent dimension of political ideology, orthogonal to the left-right or liberal-conservative dimension has been expressed in the concept of anti-establishment orientation (Uscinski et al., 2021). This orientation captures negative orientation toward the established political order irrespective of partisanship or ideology. It comprises conspiratorial assumptions that powerful groups work toward malevolent and unlawful goals and populist Manichean contrasting of the “*good*” people with the “*evil*” elites. Anti-establishment orientation, while free of political ideology, may be strategically assimilated by political right or left. It is the anti-establishment orientations, rather than a specific political ideology, that is related to intergroup antagonism, support for political violence, and undemocratic attitudes (Uscinski et al., 2021).

Figure 8.6 (left panel) shows the association between American collective narcissism and the anti-establishment orientation in a nationally representative sample of American White people and Black people collected in December 2022. The association is positive in both racial groups. American collective narcissism (in contrast to American ingroup satisfaction which predicts it negatively) is the strongest predictor of anti-establishment orientation together with social dominance orientation. The association between American collective narcissism and anti-establishment orientation is independent of the positive association between national collective narcissism and conservative self-placement. In comparison, the unique association between national ingroup satisfaction and anti-establishment orientation is negative. Figure 8.6 (right panel) shows similar results from a Polish nationally representative sample obtained in December 2022. Polish collective narcissism is positively, whereas Polish ingroup satisfaction is negatively associated with anti-establishment orientation. Independently, Polish collective narcissism (but not Polish ingroup satisfaction) is positively associated with conservative self-placement, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation. As in the American sample, in the Polish sample national collective narcissism and social dominance orientation were the strongest and independent predictors of anti-establishment orientation. Analogously to its association with the rebellious left-wing authoritarianism, right-wing authoritarianism was negatively associated with anti-establishment orientation.



**FIGURE 8.6** Predictors of anti-establishment orientation in the nationally representative samples of American and Polish adults.

*Note:* Data were collected as a part of the research project financed by the National Science Centre grant 2017/26/A/HS6/00647. Gender coded “0” = “woman”, “1” = man.” Race coded “0” = “Black” and “1” = White.”

In sum, findings indicate that national collective narcissism is not simply associated with political conservatism and right-wing ideology. It is associated with anti-establishment orientation orthogonal to the ideological dimension. Thus, the association of national collective narcissism and political right-wing

may reflect the current assimilation of the anti-establishment orientation by the ultraconservative, populist right. In a different political context, collective narcissism may become attached to political left-wing. It will depend on the end of the political spectrum at which the most destructive political leaders are winning at the given moment.

## Conclusion

While national collective narcissism seems to be embraced particularly by the supporters of right-wing and ultraconservative political parties, the relationship between collective narcissism and political orientation is complex. In disadvantaged groups, collective narcissism is related to egalitarian worldview, whereas national collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups are related to political conservatism, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation. National collective narcissism seems to simultaneously reflect readiness to follow and overthrow authoritarian leaders. It is associated with variables pertaining to authoritarian ingroup loyalty and conformity – right-wing authoritarianism and binding moral foundations. At the same time, it is associated with disregard for the moral intuition of care. Collective narcissism is simultaneously associated with authoritarian aggression against dissenters and anti-hierarchical aggressiveness of dissenters. Most likely, collective narcissism characterizes volatile supporters of ruthless leaders ready to follow those leaders when they are in power but equally ready to switch loyalties once another stronger and more brutal leader emerges. It is not the social order but following the tougher leader that matters.

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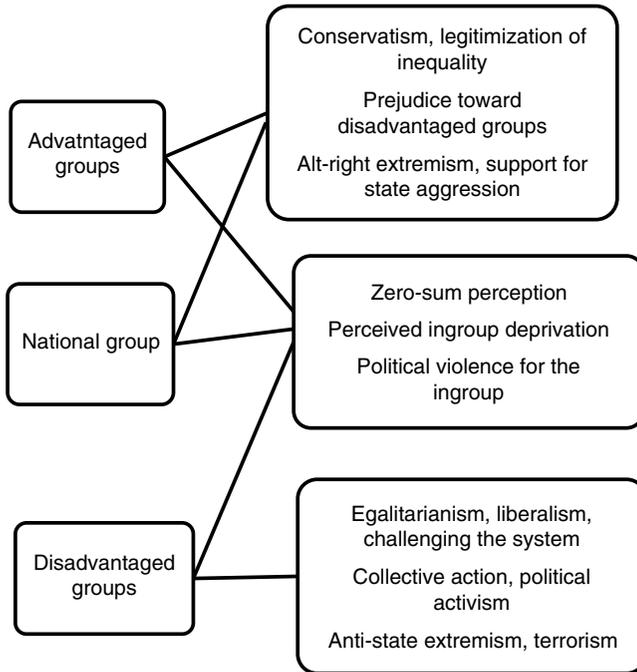
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# 9

## COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM AND PURSUIT OF EQUALITY

Chapter 7 discusses in detail how the narrations about the need of “*national rebirth*” by coming back to “*national traditions*” are used to legitimize and strengthen the “*traditional*” social hierarchies, foster existing inequalities, and justify political violence to keep the disadvantaged groups in check. Chapter 5 links national collective narcissism to prejudice, which legitimizes group-based inequalities. The present chapter continues this argument. It discusses the obstacles and incentives to pursuit of equality that collective narcissism creates on different levels of ingroup identification: with the nation (as national collective narcissism) and hierarchically organized groups within the nation: historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups (e.g., White people and Black people; men and women).

To understand how collective narcissism is implicated in pursuit of equality, it is important to understand that pursuit of equality presents different challenges to members of advantaged (giving privileges away) and disadvantaged (challenging privileges) groups. In many ways, the interests and needs of advantaged and disadvantaged groups clash as far as pursuit of equality is concerned (Hässler et al., 2020; 2021; Osborne et al., 2019). Group members who endorse collective narcissism are more likely than others to approach this clash antagonistically (see Chapter 4). At the same time people simultaneously identify with national ingroup and various intersecting, hierarchically organized smaller ingroups within the nation. Members of advantaged groups are likely to project their ingroup interests onto the whole nation. Thus, the predictions of national collective narcissism and advantaged groups’ collective narcissism are likely to align. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, national narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups predict prejudice toward disadvantaged groups



**FIGURE 9.1** The summary of findings on similar and divergent predictions of collective narcissism in advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

(Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). In contrast, the predictions of national collective narcissism and disadvantaged group's collective narcissism are likely to be opposite and cancel each other out (Figure 9.1). Thus, to clarify the inconsistent findings regarding attitudes towards equality, it is important to simultaneously examine the predictions of collective narcissism on different levels of social identification: national and with advantaged or disadvantaged groups within the nation.

### Collective narcissism in advantaged groups

Given that collective narcissism is sometimes interpreted as exaggerated ingroup love, it may seem puzzling why it predicts prejudice toward and hatred of the ingroup members (e.g., Gronfeldt et al., 2022). To understand this mystifying lack of ingroup loyalty, it is important to consider that advantaged groups within the nation project their advantaged subgroup identity (e.g., White or male) onto the national identity. They usurp national representation to frame the preservation of the advantaged ingroup's privilege as patriotic advancement of national interests (e.g., Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

Three lines of evidence support this conclusion: (1) The already mentioned results discussed in Chapter 5 that national collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups make the same predictions regarding prejudice the disadvantaged groups; findings indicating that (2) the correlation between national collective narcissism and subgroup collective narcissism (e.g., ethnic or gender group) is stronger in advantaged groups than in disadvantaged groups and that (3) national collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups predict support for and legitimization of social hierarchies that disadvantage them.

### ***Collective narcissism and ethnocentric projection***

The asymmetry in the overlap in national and subgroup collective narcissism was observed in two lines of research in different national and intergroup contexts. In the United States, American and White collective narcissism overlapped stronger than American and Black or Latino collective narcissism (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023). In Poland, Polish and gender collective narcissism overlapped stronger among men than among women (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022). Those results align with the findings that members of advantaged groups have a greater sense of ownership of the nation than members of disadvantaged groups (Molina et al., 2014), national identification is stronger among men than women (Van Berkel et al., 2017) or among White people than among ethnic minorities (Sidanius et al., 1997; Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001). However, those results are only robust for collective narcissism and not other aspects of ingroup identification. Thus, the collective narcissism research specifies that especially those members of advantaged groups who endorse collective narcissism are the most likely to feel they represent and own the nation. Members of advantaged groups who do not endorse collective narcissism do not feel that way. They may be more likely to support members of disadvantaged groups in their pursuit of equality. Studies though may produce conflicting results depending on how much the measures of ingroup identification they use tap into collective narcissism.

Collective narcissism research qualifies previous findings on *ethnocentric projection*, advantaged groups claiming national prototypicality (Brewer et al., 2013; Devos et al., 2010) and *intergroup projection*, members of advantaged groups (more than members of disadvantaged groups) projecting the characteristics, values, and interest of their advantaged ingroups onto the nation (Wenzel et al., 2016). Collective narcissism research clarifies that not all but specifically those advantaged group members who endorse collective narcissism (e.g., collective narcissists among men or White people) engage in those projections.

Given the association between collective narcissism violence, coercion, and conflict escalation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019, see also Chapter 4),

propagation of national collective narcissism should be seen as an adversarial strategy to legitimize expansion of advantaged group's privileged position within the national hierarchy (see Chapter 7). This explains why overpowering women may become a matter of national importance for some men in patriarchal countries like Poland (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022) or why increasingly callous means of controlling ethnically diverse immigration may win voters in ethnically diverse societies like the United States or the United Kingdom (Reyna et al., 2022). In Poland, national collective narcissism advanced by the populist government goes in hand with this government using the state power to crash street protests against the draconian anti-abortion law introduced in Poland in October 2020. In the United States, national collective narcissism is linked to conspiracy theories about "*the great replacement*" arguing that White people are purposefully exterminated through immigration and inter-racial relationships (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). National collective narcissistic rhetoric stood behind acts of domestic terrorism such as the 2022 Buffalo shooting by a White supremacist aimed at Black people.

### ***Collective narcissism and legitimization of inequality***

Findings discussed in Chapter 5 provide an illustration of the alignment of the predictions of national and advantaged groups' collective narcissism in terms of prejudice toward disadvantaged groups. There is also extensive evidence directly linking national collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups to legitimization of inequality.

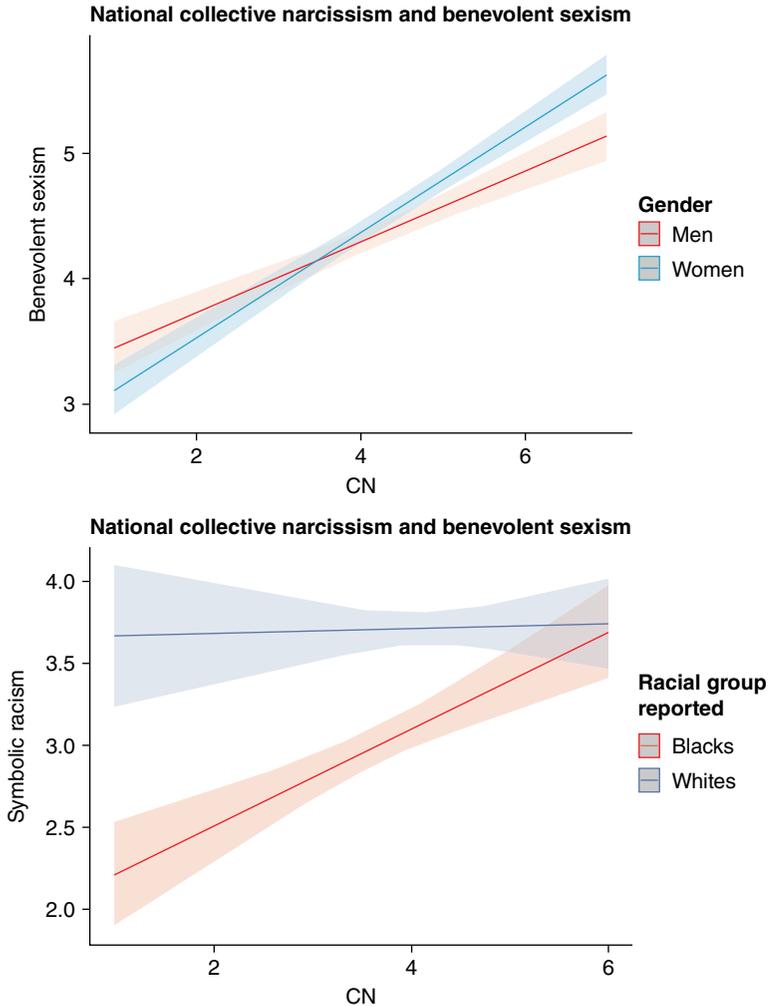
The results of collective narcissism research conducted in the United States align with research on American *White nationalism*, a belief that White people are inherently superior to other racial groups within the nation and deserve preferential treatment and protection (Reyna et al., 2022). They point to (1) the stronger overlap between American and racial collective narcissism among American White people than among American Black people or Latinos, and (2) the remarkably similar attitudes toward social equality predicted by national and White people's collective narcissism. For example, White collective narcissism was positively associated with support for the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville that involved protests against the removal of a statue of Robert Lee, a symbol of the Confederate States, but it was negatively associated with support for the Black Lives Matter social movement for racial equality (Marinthe et al., 2022). Similarly and more generally, American collective narcissism as well as White collective narcissism are associated with alt-right attitudes aligning with the "*reversed*" discrimination beliefs. At the same time, national and White collective narcissism predicts opposition to law protecting Latinx immigrants in the United States as well as actions to protect Black Americans from state

violence. Both are also linked to support for the government using the state power to crash the Black Lives Matter movement and persecute its activists (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023). Additionally, collective narcissism research demonstrates that White nationalism is not specific to the United States as studies conducted in the United Kingdom showed the same pattern of results. Thus, this phenomenon is unlikely to be related to any specific content of national identity (cf Osborne et al., 2019), but it seems specific to collective narcissism. Moreover, this phenomenon is not specific to racial relations but extends to other group-based hierarchies as demonstrated by studies in the context of gender hierarchy in Poland.

Gender collective narcissism among Polish men predicted lack of solidarity with the All-Poland Women's Strike, a civic organization spearheading social movement for women's rights established in Poland in September 2016 in response to the government's tightening of the already strict anti-abortion law in Poland. The All-Poland Women's Strike has since co-ordinated multiple nationwide protests against violation of women's rights. Street protests intensified in October 2020 when the controversial Constitutional Tribunal introduced a near-total abortion ban. The protests met with violent repression from the state. Collective narcissists among Polish men did not support women in those protests (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; Górska et al., 2020). They did not feel concerned by exclusion of women (Golec de Zavala, 2022). Moreover, Polish and male collective narcissism are both associated with support for strict anti-abortion laws, state control over women's sexuality, and the use of state power to break down women's protests and to prosecute activists. They are also directly associated with hierarchy-enhancing political conservatism and beliefs legitimizing gender inequality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023).

While such findings are worrisome, research also indicates that among Black people in the United States and among women in Poland, national collective narcissism is associated with internalization of the ingroup oppression. Figure 9.2 illustrates the interaction of American collective narcissism and racial group (Black people vs. White people) in predicting symbolic racism in a representative sample of 800 American Black and White people collected in late 2022. It shows that at the highest levels of collective narcissism symbolic racism is higher among Black people than among White people. Figure 9.2 also illustrates the interaction of Polish collective narcissism and gender (men vs. women) in predicting benevolent sexism in a nationally representative sample of ten Polish adults collected in late 2022. It shows that at the highest levels of national narcissism women endorse benevolent sexism more strongly than men.

The predicament of minorities endorsing national collective narcissism deserves further research. It represents a case of group members investing in



**FIGURE 9.2** The interaction of national collective narcissism and status in predicting prejudice toward disadvantaged groups. Left panel: benevolent sexism among men and women in Poland. Right panel: symbolic racism among Black people and White people in the United States.

pursuing the external recognition of the ingroup in which, by definition of their disadvantaged status, they are second-class members. They may feel compelled to overcompensate for the lower status. Women who endorse national narcissism may be, for example, exceptionally hostile toward other women, especially those who violate traditional gender norms and those who challenge gender inequality. They may participate in movements

opposing gender equality like women representing the Polish Life and Family Foundation, a proponent of the “Stop abortion” bill, the most restrictive abortion law penalizing any case of abortion, or women who label proponents of reproductive women’s rights as “fans of killing babies” (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023).

### Collective narcissism as an incentive to pursuit of equality

In contrast to national narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups, collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups predicts opposition to discrimination (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; 2023; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022). In disadvantaged groups, collective narcissism is also an incentive to pursue equality via collective action. For example, among Black people in the United Kingdom, racial collective narcissism is associated with challenging anti-Black racism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Among Black people and Latinx participants in the United States, racial collective narcissism is linked to support for the Black Lives Matter movement, egalitarian values, and intentions to engage in collective action for racial equality (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023). Among the LGBTQIA+ community in Turkey, collective narcissism predicts collective action challenging discrimination against sexual minorities (Bagci et al., 2022). Gender collective narcissism among women in Poland is associated with anger and distress at women’s exclusion by men (Golec de Zavala, 2022). It motivates women to endorse egalitarian worldview and to reject beliefs legitimizing gender inequality. Gender collective narcissism among women also predicts support for the All-Poland Women’s Strike and engagement in collective action for gender equality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; 2023).

Such findings demonstrate, for the first time, potentially constructive social consequences of collective narcissism (cf Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). They align with the argument that intergroup conflict, when well managed, has a potential of bringing up a constructive social change and more equal organization of societies (Dixon et al., 2012; Dixon & McKeown, 2021; Hässler et al., 2020). Some intergroup antagonism and willingness to fight for the ingroup’s goals are necessary to pursue equality, as historical evidence indicates greater equality is more often won than deservingly received or voluntarily given away (Osborne et al., 2019). Persistent collective action for equality may inspire sustainable social movement to bring about the desired change (Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020).

Collective action of the disadvantaged groups is seen more favorably when it uses normative and legal means in contrast to violent and illegal means (Orazani & Leidner, 2019; Teixeira et al., 2020). However, moderately disruptive, non-normative collective action, when combined with

transparent constructive intentions (e.g., egalitarian cause), elicits concessions from advantaged groups (Shuman et al., 2021; 2022). Studies point to greater effectiveness of protests that mix normative and non-normative collective actions. Such “*constructively disruptive*” protests strike a balance between being perceived as disrupting the system but with constructive intentions behind them (Shuman et al., 2021). For example, a combination of normative and non-normative collective actions associated with the Black Lives Matter movement has been linked to increased support for the policy reforms advanced by this movement (Shuman et al., 2022). Exposure to the 2017 Women’s Marches against the presidential nomination of openly misogynistic Donald Trump made men more sympathetic toward the women’s plight (Saguy & Szekeres, 2018). Collective narcissism as a robust predictor of preference of coercive actions may be a factor motivating members of disadvantaged groups to take action to challenge the inequality.

However, while collective narcissism may motivate members of disadvantaged groups toward effective collective action, it is also likely to motivate their radicalization when the actions of the peaceful movement for social change are met with reactionary backlash. Reactionary backlash to pursuit of equality elicits pessimism regarding the possibility of systemic change in disadvantaged groups (Tabri & Conway, 2011; Tausch & Becker, 2013) and pushes them toward more extreme and disruptive collective action (Louis et al., 2020; Simon, 2020). The antagonistic mindset associated with collective narcissism (see Chapter 4) is likely to facilitate black-and-white and zero-sum perception of the intergroup relations. It is likely to prevent members of disadvantaged groups from seeing the possibility of reconciliation or allyship with advantaged groups (Hässler et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2012; Shnabel & Ullrich, 2013; Urbiola et al., 2022). While collective narcissism in advantaged groups motivates the reactionary backlash to disadvantaged groups’ pursuit of recognition (see Chapter 7), in disadvantaged groups it may motivate radicalization toward political violence and terrorism (Jaško et al., 2020, see Chapter 4).

One aspect of collective action, though, may have a disarming effect on radicalization of collective narcissists. Among disadvantaged groups, the ingroup’s goals align with social justice goals and egalitarian values. This underscores moral aspect of the protests as well as the importance of communal, selfless emotions (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). Exposure to communal, self-transcendent emotions reduces the robust association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility and helps collective narcissists to constructively deal with distress they experience in face of intergroup exclusion (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023, see Chapter 5). Thus, the typical collective narcissistic hostility may be neutralized by communal normative context and positive, prosocial emotions that accompany collective pursuit of social equality.

### Collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups is still collective narcissism

Since I first proposed collective narcissism theory (Golec de Zavala, 2007; 2011; 2012; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), a frequently asked question was whether collective narcissism means the same in disadvantaged groups (e.g., among women or ethnic minorities) as in advantaged groups and whether in disadvantaged groups the Collective Narcissism Scale taps into narcissistic grandiose delusions or realistic assessment of the group's objective situation: the lack of the ingroup's recognition (see this discussion in Golec de Zavala, 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; 2023).

While it is pretty clear that collective narcissism – the belief that the ingroup does not receive the recognition from others – is delusional in advantaged groups that enjoy power and privilege, this belief is less obviously biased and mistaken in disadvantaged groups that do not get the same recognition advantaged groups enjoy and are sometimes blatantly oppressed by the advantaged groups. However, it is important to clarify that even in disadvantaged groups, collective narcissism is still collective narcissism. It represents not only the desire for the ingroup to be recognized as *equal*, but the strive for the ingroup to be recognized as *better and more special* than other groups, more worthy of privileged treatment. While the first need is a desire for hierarchy attenuation, the second is a desire for hierarchy reversal. In disadvantaged groups collective narcissists motivated by the need of superiority will march arm in arm with protesters motivated by the need of social justice and empowerment and emancipation of the disadvantaged. Thus, while collective narcissists in disadvantaged groups may drive the social change toward equality, they are unlikely to be that change. Unless, they also change in the course of collective action.

There are also empirical reasons to argue that collective narcissism in disadvantaged and advantaged groups is the same variable. Several studies pointed to the group status (disadvantaged vs. advantaged) as a moderator of the attitudes toward equality. They compared predictions of collective narcissism in advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022). To make those comparisons meaningful, it is necessary to first validate the concept and its measurement in both groups to assure both groups respond to the measurement in similar ways.

In this vein, we showed that collective narcissism is similarly associated with variables derived from collective narcissism theory in both advantaged and disadvantaged groups. We showed that in both groups collective narcissism is associated with other aspects of ingroup identification, intergroup antagonism, zero-sum perception, and exaggeration of threat from the other group (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023).

Moreover, studies demonstrated the metric invariance of the Collective Narcissism Scale among men and women and among American White, Black, and Latinx participants. This means that all items of the scale measure the same variable equally well in the compared groups and serve equally well to order group members on a continuum from low to high levels of collective narcissism (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). This also means that we can meaningfully compare the associations and predictions of collective narcissism between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

### Collective narcissism as an obstacle to pursuit of equality

As far as processes of ingroup identification are concerned, there are more obstacles than incentives to pursue equality, which at least partially answers the question why members of disadvantaged groups do not universally challenge but sometimes even endorse unequal social systems (Brandt, 2013; Caricati, 2018; Jost, 2019; Owuamalam et al., 2018; 2019). Evidence consistently indicates that national collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups thwart pursuit of equality. Advantaged groups propagate ideologies and pursue politics that discourage disadvantaged groups from challenging inequality and justify those politics as serving the whole nation.

In contrast to national collective narcissism, the evidence is inconsistent regarding the role of non-narcissistic aspects of national identification in pursuit of social equality (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023). The predictions of non-narcissistic ingroup identification, more than those of national collective narcissism, seem to depend on normative prescriptions embedded in the particular contents of different national identities (i.e., whether nations overtly pursue equality, Osborne et al., 2019). Our results suggest that the role of ingroup satisfaction, both on national and subgroup levels of social identity, is problematic as far as pursuit of equality is concerned. For example, national ingroup satisfaction was unrelated to support for gender equality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022) but was related to benevolent sexism among men in Poland (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021). National ingroup satisfaction was unrelated to support for racial equality in the United States. Americans satisfied and proud of being Americans did not support the Black Lives Matter protests, but they also did not support repression of those protests by the state. This is in contrast to American collective narcissists who supported state repression against those protests and rejected the protests and their cause (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023). Thus, the role of national ingroup satisfaction is not clear. Recent results cast doubts on its positive role in peaceful organization of societies (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021). Instead, they suggest its satiating role (Saguy et al., 2008).

## Relevance for social justice research

Collective narcissism research offers a nuanced explanation of the role of positive ingroup identification in shaping attitudes toward equality among advantaged and disadvantaged groups. The results of this research are in line with the proposition that ingroup identification should be considered at different levels of self-categorization (subordinate and superordinate group memberships) to provide an explanation of system legitimization vs. system challenge (Owuamalam et al., 2018; Reynolds et al., 2013). The theory of collective narcissism offers a common perspective to integrate the system justification (e.g., Jost, 2019) and collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2018) literatures (see Osborne et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020) with the critical reflection on the role of intergroup contact and positive identification with the common, superordinate ingroup in pursuit of equality (Dixon & McKeown, 2021; Dovidio et al., 2009; Hässler et al., 2020).

### ***System justification***

The system justification theory proposes that members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups are motivated to endorse the hierarchical status quo in which they participate. The need to justify unequal systems increases under threat and when people feel vulnerable and perceive inequality as inevitable. System justification theory also poses three contested assumptions that (1) justifying the social system is a need (cf Reynolds et al., 2013) (2) whose satisfaction in advantaged and disadvantaged groups alike serves a palliative function, and therefore, (3) members of disadvantaged groups may be even more than members of advantaged groups motivated to justify inequality and favor the advantaged outgroups over the disadvantaged ingroup (cf Brandt, 2013; Caricati, 2018; Owuamalam et al., 2018; 2019). Justifying inequality reduces uncertainty, whereas challenging inequality requires the ability to deal with uncertainty, which explains why members of advantaged groups display better mental health, happiness, and well-being than members of disadvantaged groups (Jost, 2019).

The collective narcissism research clarifies that members of disadvantaged groups endorse inequality and its justifying ideologies especially at high levels of national narcissism. For example, Polish women and American Black people who endorsed national narcissism also endorsed prejudice that disadvantaged their ingroup. National collective narcissism in advantaged and disadvantaged groups alike predicts endorsement of beliefs legitimizing unequal social systems. However, there does not seem to be anything palliative about this endorsement. National narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2019) and collective narcissism in advantaged and disadvantaged groups is associated with

negative emotionality and undermined well-being (Bagci et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; 2023).

In sum, members of disadvantaged groups who endorse national collective narcissism do not challenge inequality. They embrace national norms allowing discrimination of their disadvantaged ingroup and align their attitudes toward equality with those of the advantaged groups (projected on the whole nation). Thus, the disadvantaged groups' tardiness in challenging inequality can be explained in terms of ingroup identification processes (Reynolds et al., 2013), provided that collective narcissism is differentiated as an aspect of ingroup identification.

### **Collective action**

The social identity model of collective action defines collective action as “*any action undertaken by individuals as psychological group members to achieve group goals in a political context*” (van Zomeren, 2016, p. 89). The studies inspired by this model predominantly examine collective action in terms of actions taken by disadvantaged groups to challenge inequality. Based on the assumptions of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this model posits that members of disadvantaged groups are motivated to improve their status by advancing goals of equality. The more the group members identify with their disadvantaged ingroup, the more they should engage in collective action for equality. However, research has quickly established that identification with disadvantaged ingroup is not enough to predict engagement in collective action. Instead people need to identify with a specific social movement pursuing collective action rather than with a specific disadvantaged group (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021). They also need to feel frustrated and angered by perceived unjust treatment from the advantaged outgroup(s), trust that the social movement is capable of bringing about the desired social change, and endorse ideology underscoring moral value of social justice and equality (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; van Zomeren et al., 2018).

Collective narcissism is an aspect of ingroup identification that comprises in one variable all preconditions for collective action. It is strongly correlated with perceiving the disadvantaged ingroup as important to the self. As an overly positive evaluation of the ingroup it is associated with an exaggerated idea about the ingroup efficacy (Bagci et al., 2022). It is associated with an exaggerated sense of ingroup deservingness that conduces to seeing the ingroup as constantly deprived of what it deserves and wronged by others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021). It is also an emotion-laden aspect of ingroup identification associated with resentment and anger directed at threatening outgroups. Indeed, as indicated by the findings reviewed in this chapter, the predictions of the social identity model of collective action are robustly supported on high level of collective narcissism among disadvantaged groups.

Collective narcissism research qualifies the predictions derived from the theoretical integration of the system justification and collective action models (e.g., Osborne et al., 2019). This integration proposes to differentiate system justifying and system challenging collective action, and it predicts that the association between ingroup identification and justification of unequal systems should depend on the group status: it should be positive in advantaged groups and negative in disadvantaged groups. Conversely, ingroup identification should be associated positively with system challenge in disadvantaged group but negatively in advantaged groups (Jost et al., 2017). Those predictions are consistently supported at high levels of collective narcissism but not supported at high levels of ingroup identification.

In sum, the collective narcissism research qualifies the findings indicating that positive ingroup identification predicts positive attitudes toward equality among disadvantaged groups but system justification among advantaged groups (Osborne et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). Those opposite predictions are specific to collective narcissism which robustly and directly predicts positive attitudes toward equality and negative attitudes toward inequality in disadvantaged groups and opposite attitudes (positive toward inequality and negative toward equality) in advantaged groups.

### ***Ingroup harmony and recategorization***

The collective narcissism research aligns with the recognition of change-inspiring potential of intergroup conflict. Salience of group boundaries, discrepancies of the interests of involved groups, and intergroup conflict management are necessary aspects of pursuit of equality as it meets resistance of advantaged groups (Dixon et al., 2010; 2012). Even when members of advantaged groups support equality in principle, they often oppose specific policies to actually increase equality (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004). Thus, collective action for equality has a greater chance to be effective when positive intergroup connections are accompanied by awareness and salience of unjust disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Saguy et al., 2008). Indeed, protests are more effective when they mix confrontational and coercive means with pursuit of egalitarian values (Shuman et al., 2021; 2022). Collective narcissism is associated with preference for such means and thus, when managed, it may be a factor inspiring pursuit of social justice among disadvantaged groups.

Findings of collective narcissism research are also in line with the literature suggesting that reducing prejudice and tensions between advantaged and disadvantaged groups by efforts to foster recategorization and identification with a common ingroup (e.g., a nation) may impair the chances for a social

change toward greater equality. Identification with the common ingroup discourages members of disadvantaged groups to pursue the ingroup interests. It raises their unrealistic expectations regarding fairness in resource distribution between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. It also prompts their over-optimistic expectations regarding the individual's ability of attaining high social status regardless of their group membership (Dovidio et al., 2009; 2016; Saguy et al., 2008; Ufkes et al., 2016). Our research clarifies that as far as pursuit of equality is concerned, promoting the "broader we" identification is counterproductive, especially when it takes a form of propagating national collective narcissism. National collective narcissism is associated with blatantly pursuing the interests of advantaged groups. However, even non-narcissistic national ingroup identification encourages the perception of existing inequalities as justified.

## Conclusion

Research differentiating collective narcissism at different levels of social identity (national vs. gender, ethnic) advances our understanding of how collective narcissism is implicated in pursuit of equality. National collective narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged groups are both associated with rejection of egalitarian values and endorsement of beliefs legitimizing inequality. This is in contrast to other aspects of national and racial identification whose predictions are less consistent. Members of disadvantaged group who endorse national narcissism endorse and internalize beliefs that legitimize inequality and oppression of their disadvantaged ingroup. Interests of advantaged and disadvantaged groups clash when it comes to pursuit of equality. Propagating national harmony by fostering identification with the "broader we" impairs the possibility of social change toward equality, especially when it takes a form of promoting national collective narcissism. However, when managed, collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups may be a factor contributing to a constructive societal transformation.

Collective narcissism in disadvantaged is a robust predictor of egalitarian values, rejection of beliefs legitimizing inequality, and engagement in collective action to pursue equality. However, collective narcissism expresses the need of superiority, not the need for empowerment. Collective narcissists seek to reverse rather than attenuate hierarchy. They are prone to antagonistic action and are likely to radicalize toward political violence if pursuit of equality meets the backlash from advantaged groups. Nevertheless, some degree of disruptive collective action, especially when its goals are morally acceptable, helps eliciting concessions of advantaged groups. Such collective action elicits self-transcendent emotions that reduce the association between collective narcissism and intergroup hostility.

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# 10

## “TO THE POINT OF IRRATIONALITY”

### Collective narcissism and conspiracy theories

The link between populism and conspiracy theories has been a subject of an intense scientific inquiry (Bergmann, 2018; Golec de Zavala, 2020; Pirro & Taggart, 2022; van Prooijven et al., 2022). As discussed in Chapter 7, populism has also normalized national narcissism as a mainstream discourse about the content of national identity (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021). There exists a reliable positive association between collective narcissism and a tendency to endorse conspiracy theories. Collective narcissism and conspiracy theories serve similar political functions. They help ruthless leaders who advance undemocratic forms of governance to gain followers. They give followers of such leaders a handy excuse to justify coercion and political violence as means of advancing their political goals (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021). This chapter discusses the evidence behind the association between national collective narcissism and conspiracy theories. This link, together with collective narcissistic propensity to endorse biased beliefs about the ingroup and outgroups (see discussion in Chapters 4 and 5), suggests that collective narcissism expresses and generates psychological motives that bias information processing. As Erich Fromm put it “*Group narcissism is (...) the pathology of our time, and it is rooted in the failure of modern society to provide the individual with a sense of belonging and purpose. The group, therefore, becomes a substitute for the individual’s sense of identity, and the individual identifies with the group to the point of irrationality.*” (Fromm, 1973, p. 357). Thus, collective narcissism can be interpreted as motivated social cognition skewed by a desire to arrive at specific conclusions that confirm the collective narcissistic beliefs about the ingroup and a nonspecific desire to endorse any coherent beliefs regardless of their content to signal social allegiances and to address the need to engage in a meaning-making activity (Golec de Zavala, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2022).

### The link between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories are explanatory beliefs that – usually without evidence – attribute causes of salient events to secret, malevolent plotting of collective actors (e.g., Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999). They represent a vastly heterogeneous phenomenon (for a recent review see Horsney et al., 2022). People who endorse conspiracy theories proclaim limited faith in logic, empirical evidence, and scientific method. Instead, they believe in supposedly harmful effects of vaccines, or that AIDS, ZIKA, or COVID-19 have been manufactured and spread by unknown, malevolent actors for political or financial gain, or that they are a deception and a hoax, or that the U.S. government knowingly helped the 9/11 terrorist attackers, or that the manmade climate change and global warming are a swindle that serves the interests of secretive and malevolent groups (see also Chapter 7 on medical populism).

Despite their varied content, evidence suggests that a belief in one conspiracy theory is correlated with a belief in other conspiracy theory. A propensity to believe in specific conspiracy theories seems to be an individual difference variable (e.g., generic conspiracist beliefs, Brotherton, French & Pickering, 2013; conspiratory mindset, Imhoff & Bruder, 2014; conspiracy mentality, Imhoff et al., 2022; conspiratorial predispositions, Uscinski et al., 2016). Regardless of their specific content, conspiracy theories are, more often than not, explanations of perceived intergroup injustice and moralizing attributions of blame (van Prooijven et al., 2021). They assume secretive, malevolent plots involving multiple actors: a mysterious “them” who “run” things and work against “us.” Thus, more often than not, conspiracy theories are intergroup phenomena.

While conspiracy theories have an attention-grabbing, entertaining aspect (van Prooijven et al., 2021), their real-life consequences can be destructive and dangerous. For example the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic was intensified by increased salience of contradictory conspiracy theories about corrupt elites hiding dangerous side effects of vaccines, secretive outgroups manufacturing the COVID-19 vaccines, or faking the COVID-19 pandemic to control the world (Romer & Jamieson, 2020). Believing in and being exposed to COVID-19 conspiracy theories decreased trust in governmental health regulations and willingness to comply with them (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2022, see Chapter 7) delaying containment of the disease.

Conspiracy theories do not serve to accurately explain reality. They serve to proclaim social identity. They go against the official explanations of events. People who endorse them consider themselves rebellious and better than others. Being “in the know” signals they are special and somehow heroic in their nonconformist opposition to facts. The shared knowledge about the secretive plots of others gives them a sense of social identity and an illusion of control. There is certain collective, delusional arrogance in the

assumption that “we” know the way things really are better than others, that “we” are above the rules that bind others, and “we” are the special target of conspiracies. Not surprisingly, collective narcissism is a robust predictor of generic conspiratory mindset and a propensity to endorse specific conspiracy theories (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; 2022).

As explained in Chapter 7, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, collective narcissism has been associated with the lack of solidarity with others in face of the pandemic (Federico et al., 2021), political decisions to putting the image of the ingroup over the well-being of its members (Gronfeldt et al., 2022) and (although inconsistently) with the refusal to follow health guidelines, the refusal to vaccinate (Marchlewska et al., 2022, cf van Bavel et al., 2022). Studies also pointed to a robust association between collective narcissism and a propensity to endorse and spread conspiracy theories regarding the COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccines (Górska et al., 2022; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Sternisko et al., 2021). However, the association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories goes beyond the theories that explain highly visible events. This association is stronger when conspiracy theories pertain to particular intergroup contexts and attribute secretive plotting to specific outgroups.

### ***Robust and specific***

Figure 10.1 illustrates the results of the most comprehensive to date meta-analytical summary of studies that examined the association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories and conspiratorial thinking (Golec de Zavala et al., 2022).

Table 10.1 presents detailed information about the studies and the content of the specific conspiracy theories they assessed. We reviewed over 20 papers and 32 independent samples and differentiated three categories of conspiracy theories linked to collective narcissism: (1) theories pertaining to conspiracies of specific outgroups against the ingroup; (2) conspiracy theories about specific salient events and threats; and (3) a generic conspiratory mindset, a general individual tendency to believe in miscellaneous and unrelated conspiracy theories.

Figure 10.2 illustrates the comparison of various predictors of conspiracy theories (Hornsey et al., 2022). The contribution of collective narcissism is one of the strongest, comparable only to paranoia and individual narcissism (for the distinction between collective and individual narcissism see Chapter 1. For the distinction between collective narcissism and paranoia see Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). The association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories is independent of the associations between individual narcissism and paranoia. It is the association between individual, not

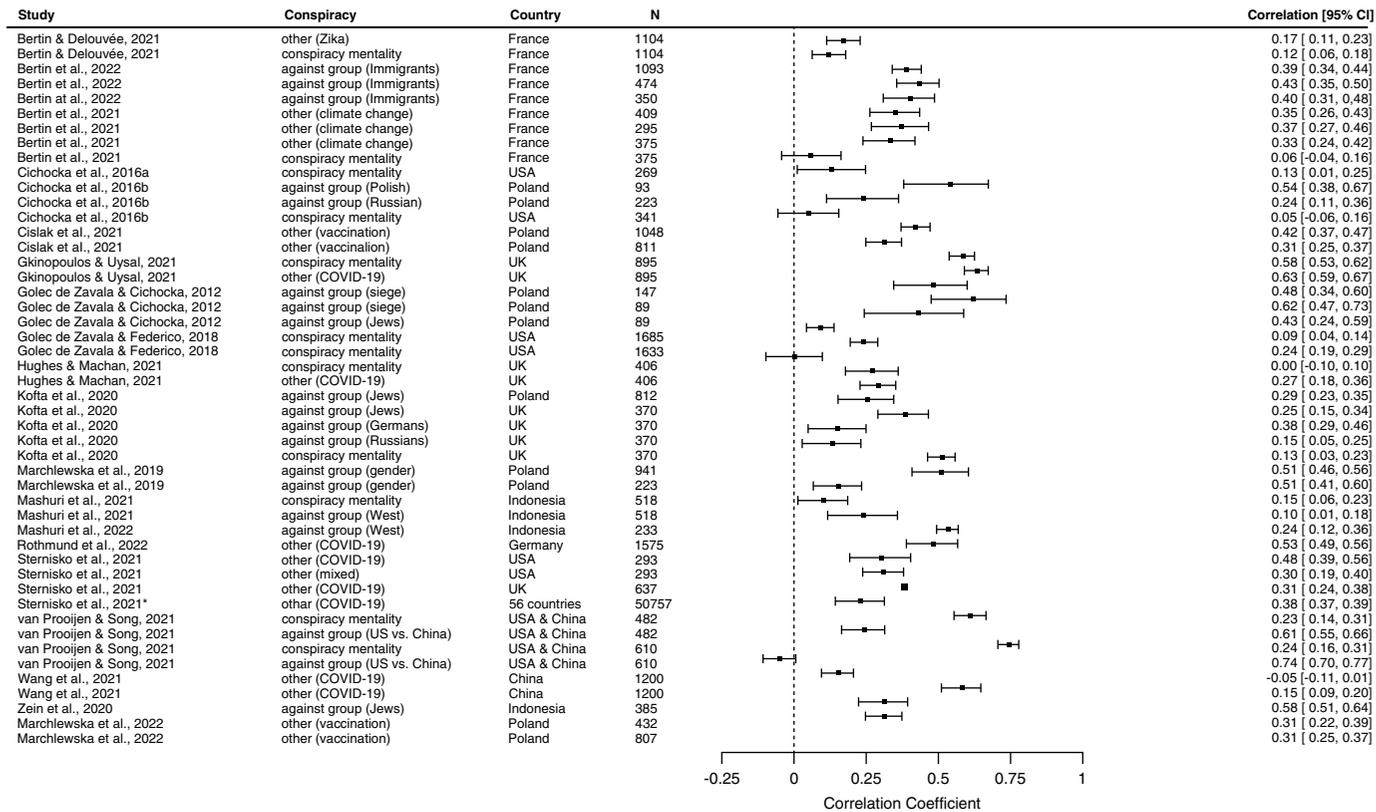


FIGURE 10.1 Summary of studies linking collective narcissism and conspiracy theories (based on Golec de Zavala et al., 2022).

**TABLE 10.1** Conspiracy theories associated with collective narcissism grouped by the content (based on Golec de Zavala et al., 2022)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Conspiracy beliefs about specific outgroups	
	Typically assessed as mediators predicting prejudice and discrimination of the targeted outgroups or the rejection of the foreign aid to the ingroup from the targeted outgroup	
	Bertin et al., 2022	Immigrant conspiracy beliefs: nine items from previous studies in the French context, e.g., “Immigrants are often involved in secret plots and schemes intended to disrupt French society”
	Cichocka et al., 2016b	Beliefs in anti-Polish conspiracy, four items, e.g., “Western countries conspire against Polish people and intentionally falsify the history”
	Cichocka et al., 2016b	Belief in Russian conspiracy, three items, e.g., “The [Smolensk] catastrophe was most likely a result of Russia’s secret actions”
	Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012	Siege beliefs: 12-item General Siege Mentality Scale, translated (e.g., Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992), items reflecting the belief that the in-group is constantly threatened; e.g., “Most nations will conspire against us, if only they have the possibility to do so”
	Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012	Belief in Jewish conspiracy: six-item Jewish Conspiracy Stereotype Scale by Kofta and Sędek (2005), e.g., “Members of this group reach their goals through secret agreements”
	Kofta et al., 2020	Belief in Jewish conspiracy: six-item scale (Bilewicz et al., 2013), e.g., “Jews achieve their collective goals by secret agreements”
	Kofta et al., 2020	Endorsement of conspiracy stereotype of Jews (group is assigned conspiratorial intentions), six items
	Kofta et al., 2020	Endorsement of conspiracy stereotype of Germans (group is assigned conspiratorial intentions), six items
	Kofta et al., 2020	Endorsement of conspiracy stereotype of Russians (group is assigned conspiratorial intentions), six items
	Mashuri et al., 2022	Specific conspiratorial beliefs: four items, e.g., “The 2004 tsunami in Aceh was not caused by natural factors, but as a result of an Underwater Nuclear Bomb made by the United States and Israel”

(Continued)

**TABLE 10.1** (Continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Mashuri et al., 2022	Conspiratorial beliefs, six items, e.g., “Developed countries have secretly collaborated to undermine Indonesia’s existence”
	Marchlewska et al., 2019	Gender conspiracy beliefs, three items, e.g., “Gender [ideology] is introduced in a secret way”
	Marchlewska et al., 2019	Gender conspiracy beliefs, eight items, e.g., “Gender [ideology] is introduced in a secret way”
	van Prooijen & Song, 2021	Intergroup conspiracy theories, seven items; e.g., “The secret agency of China has been trying to influence political decision-making in America”
	Zein et al., 2020	Belief in Jewish Conspiracy: 12-item scale (Swami, 2012), e.g., “Jews are secretly running the United States government in collaboration with Israel”
2	Conspiracy theories explaining specific events	
	Typically assessed as mediators predicting specific actions in accordance to the content of the theory: climate change denial, refusal of vaccination; refusal to follow health and safety measures to contain COVID-19 pandemic	
	Bertin & Delouvé, 2021	Zika conspiracy beliefs: five items (Piltch-Loeb et al., 2019) and (Klofstad et al., 2019), e.g., “Zika was a form of population control”
	Bertin et al., 2021	Climate change conspiracy beliefs scale, five items (Lewandowsky et al., 2013), e.g., “Some scientists falsify their results, concluding that climate change is due to humans, in order to gain power and influence”
	Bertin et al., 2021	Climate change conspiracy beliefs scale, three items, e.g., “In order to increase their profits, some multinationals agree to finance organizations that accuse human beings of being the cause of climate change”
	Cislak et al., 2022	Vaccination conspiracy beliefs, five items (Jolley & Douglas, 2014), e.g., “Tiny devices are placed in vaccines to track people”
	Gkinopoulos & Uysal, 2021	Conspiracy beliefs about COVID-19, nine-item scale, e.g., “There is a vaccine against coronavirus, but it is kept secret by those who have it, in order to increase its value”

*(Continued)*

**TABLE 10.1** (Continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Górska et al., 2022	COVID-19 environmental conspiracy beliefs, two items, e.g. “The coronavirus was created by environmentalists to reduce world population and improve the state of the environment” and “The coronavirus is a way to secretly implement the plans of the climate change movement”
	Górska et al., 2022	COVID-19 medical conspiracy beliefs, four items, e.g. “Coronavirus was created by pharmaceutical companies,” “Drugs that are designed to help people suffering from coronavirus actually worsen their condition,” “Coronavirus is injected into people in vaccines,” “Medical doctors are aiming for the spread of coronavirus”
	Górska et al., 2022	COVID-19 Chinese conspiracy beliefs, two items, e.g., “Coronavirus was created by the Chinese to take control of the global economy” and “Coronavirus was deliberately spread by the Chinese in diners/via food products.”
	Górska et al., 2022	COVID-19 American conspiracy beliefs, two items, e.g., “Coronavirus was created by the Americans to improve the US position in the economic war with China” and “Coronavirus was created by the US government to take control of the global economy.”
	Hughes & Machan, 2021	Beliefs in COVID-19 conspiracies (Bertin et al. 2021), e.g., “There is no hard evidence that Covid really exists”
	Marchlewska et al., 2022	Beliefs in COVID-19 conspiracies, 14 items from Kowalski et al., 2020, e.g., “The coronavirus does not really exist—it was invented to distract attention from behind-the-scenes political games” and “The coronavirus was made up to restrict people’s freedom and control them”
	Marchlewska et al., 2022	Willingness to conspire against the ingroup, a five-item scale based on Douglas and Sutton (2011), e.g., “If I were in the position of governments, I would manipulate the information about the coronavirus to increase my influence”

(Continued)

TABLE 10.1 (Continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Marchlewska et al., 2022	COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy beliefs, five-item scale (Jolley & Douglas, 2014), e.g., “COVID-19 vaccines are harmful, and this fact is covered up”; “Tiny devices are placed in COVID-19 vaccines to track people”; “Pharmaceutical companies, scientists, and academics work together to cover up the dangers of COVID-19 vaccines”; “COVID-19 vaccines will cause autism”; “The COVID-19 vaccine allows the government to monitor the elderly through the implantation of tiny tracking devices”
	Rothmund et al., 2022	Belief in COVID-19 conspiracies, four items (Sternisko et al., 2021) e.g., “The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a conspiracy to take away citizen’s rights for good and establish an authoritarian government”
	Sternisko et al., 2021	Average rating of belief in eight different conspiracy theories, two related to COVID-19, others unrelated to COVID-19, e.g., “Scientists are creating panic about climate change because it is in their interests to do so”
	Sternisko et al., 2021	Belief in COVID-19 conspiracies, e.g., “Certain officials and media outlets are exaggerating the threat of coronavirus (COVID-19) to weaponize it and hurt the Trump administration”
	Sternisko et al., 2021	Belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories: average ratings of agreement with seven conspiracy theories related to COVID-19, e.g., “The coronavirus (COVID-19) was deliberately spread by world leaders to take away their citizens’ rights”
	Sternisko et al., 2021	Belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories: average rating of agreement with four conspiracy theories that did not implicate particular national groups (Belief in Deflection conspiracy theories and Belief in Denial conspiracy theories)
	Wang et al., 2021	Risk-rejection conspiracy beliefs, two items, e.g., “In reality, the novel coronavirus is similar to influenza; it is just that some organizations and people purposefully exaggerate its severity”

(Continued)

**TABLE 10.1** (Continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Wang et al., 2021	Risk-acceptance conspiracy beliefs, three items, e.g., “The spread of the novel coronavirus was caused by some people intentionally”
3 Generic conspiracy beliefs		
	This generic predisposition was shown to increase in time as a function of collective narcissism	
	Bertin & Delouvé, 2021	Conspiracy mentality: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (Bruder et al., 2013), e.g., “I think that events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities”
	Bertin et al., 2021	Conspiracy mentality: the French version of the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ, Lantian et al., 2016), five items, e.g., “I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about”
	Cichocka et al., 2016a	Conspiracy beliefs: two versions (own and foreign government) of 11 items based on the Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013), e.g., “Certain significant events have been the result of the activity of a small group who secretly manipulate world events”
	Cichocka et al., 2016b	Conspiracy beliefs: two versions (own and foreign government) of 11 items based on the Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale (Brotherton et al., 2013)
	Gkinopoulos & Uysal, 2021	Conspiracy mentality: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ, Bruder et al., 2013), five items, e.g., “Politicians usually don’t tell us about the true motives for their decisions”
	Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018	Conspiracy thinking, four items (Uscinski et al., 2016), e.g., “Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places”
	Hughes & Machan, 2021	Conspiracy mentality: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ, Bruder et al., 2013), e.g., “I think that events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities”

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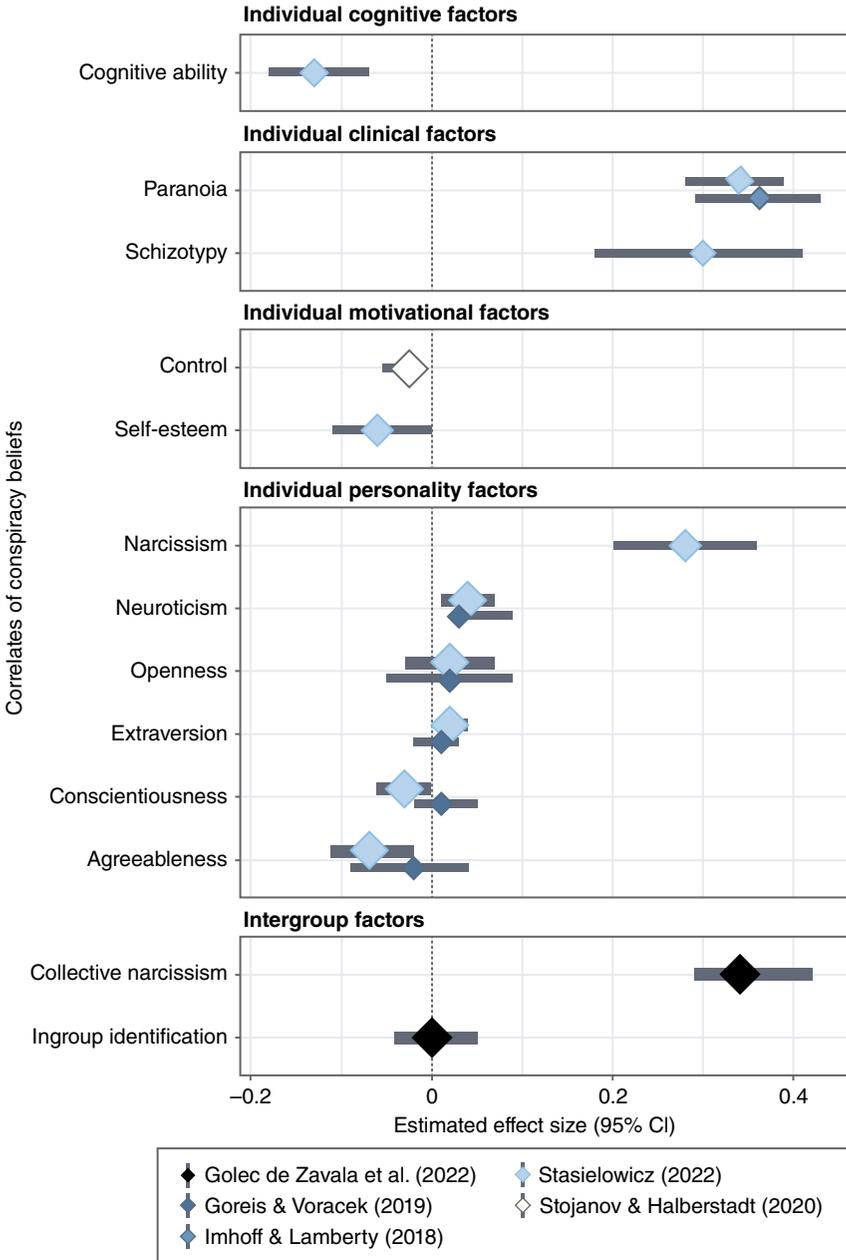
**TABLE 10.1** (Continued)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Kofta et al., 2020	Other conspiracy beliefs (three scales treated as one measure): (1) Conspiracy mentality: (CMQ, Bruder et al., 2013), (2) Generic conspiracist beliefs (Brotherton et al., 2013), e.g., “The government is involved in the murder of innocent citizens and/or well-known public figures and keeps this secret”, (3) Conspiracy of financial institutions
	Mashuri et al., 2022	Generic conspiratorial beliefs: 15 items adapted from Brotherton et al. 2013, e.g., “A small, secret group of people is responsible for making all major world decisions, such as going to war”
	van Prooijen & Song, 2021	Conspiracy mentality: 12-item scale (Imhoff and Bruder 2014), e.g., “There are many very important things happening in the world about which the public is not informed”

collective, narcissism and conspiratorial thinking that is accounted for by proclivity toward paranoid thinking (Cichocka et al., 2016). Predictions of collective narcissism are also independent of cognitive and motivational (such as political knowledge, need for cognitive closure) as well as ideological variables (such as political conservatism, partisanship, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation, Federico & Golec, 2018; Górska et al., 2022). Figure 10.2 also shows that the association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories depends on the content of conspiracy theories and that the association is specific to collective narcissism. Non-narcissistic aspects of ingroup identification (typically centrality, solidarity, or satisfaction) do not predict conspiratorial thinking (Golec de Zavala et al., 2022). Thus, there is something specific to collective narcissism, not individual narcissism that explains its association with conspiratorial thinking.

### **Directional**

Although the majority of studies that examined the association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories are cross-sectional, there exist some longitudinal evidence that suggests that collective narcissism conduces to conspiracy theories and the conspiratorial mindset. One study was conducted in the United States during Donald Trump’s first election campaign (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018). This study found that as presidential



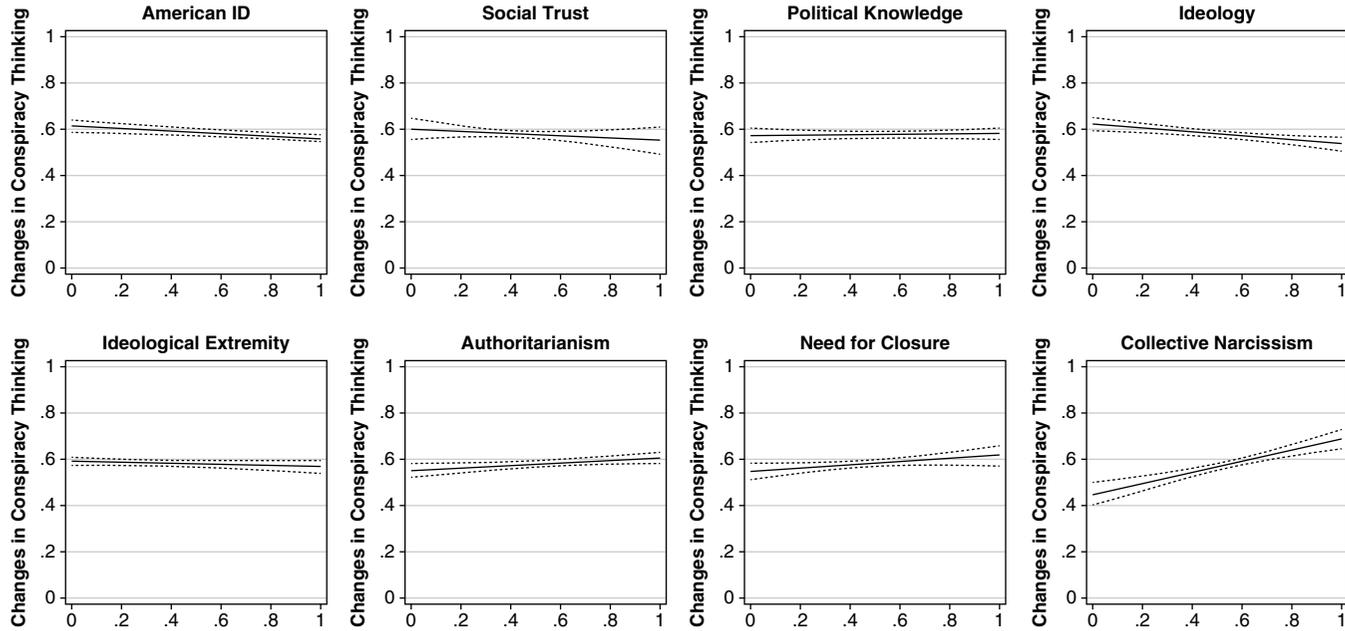
**FIGURE 10.2** Psychological predictors of conspiracy theories (Horsney et al., 2022).

campaign unfolded over the course of the 2016 and exposed the public to increasing number of conspiracy theories, generic conspiratorial thinking increased. This increase was a function of American collective narcissism. In this study, we assessed generic conspiratorial mindset with the following items: “*Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places*”; “*Even though we live in a democracy, a few people will always run things anyway*”; “*The people who really run the country are not known to the voters*”; and “*Big events like wars, economic recessions, and the outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us*” (Uscinski et al., 2016). We found that collective narcissism was the strongest predictor of an increase in the generic predisposition to endorse conspiracy theories tapped by those items from July to November 2016, over and above all other predictors: ingroup identification, social trust, political knowledge, political ideology, ideology extremity, authoritarianism, need for cognitive closure, and political partisanship (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018, Figure 10.3).

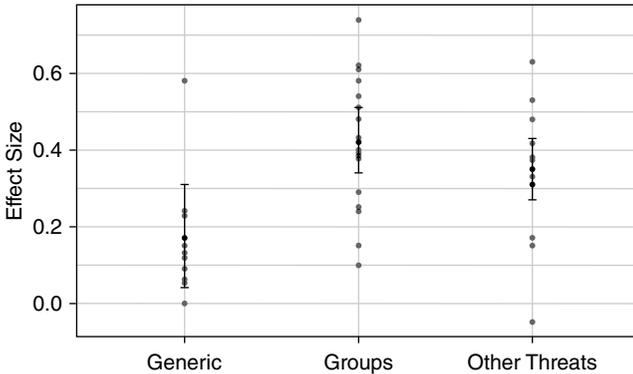
Another three-wave longitudinal study was conducted in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic and yielded similar results (Górska et al., 2022). The data were conducted between March 2020 and April 2020 and comprised five samples out of which three were analyzed, collected roughly every two weeks. Polish collective narcissism predicted endorsement of several COVID-19 theories. Some attributed fabrication of COVID-19 virus to environmentalists trying to decrease the Earth’s population (“*The coronavirus is a way to secretly implement the plans of the climate change movement.*”), others to pharmaceutical companies for profit (“*Coronavirus was created by pharmaceutical companies.*”), or to the United States aiming to dominate China (“*Coronavirus was created by the Americans to improve the US position in the economic war with China*”) or to China to take control over the world (“*Coronavirus was created by the Chinese to take control of the global economy*”). Based on Polish collective narcissism the authors could predict a tendency to believe in COVID-19 conspiracy theories two weeks later. Although the opposite association was also significant, conspiracy theories in T1 predicted T2 collective narcissism less strongly than T1 collective narcissism predicted T2 conspiracy theories. Those results were independent of political conservatism, right-wing authoritarianism, or social dominance orientation.

### **Moderated by content**

Figure 10.4 presents the average association between collective narcissism and a tendency to endorse a given conspiracy theory depending on its content. The association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories is the strongest for those conspiracy theories attributing secretive malevolent



**FIGURE 10.3** Predictors of the increase in conspiratorial thinking during the 2016 presidential campaign (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018).



**FIGURE 10.4** Effect sizes of collective narcissism on conspiracy beliefs by conspiracy content (Golec de Zavala et al., 2022).

intentions and harmful deeds to specific outgroups in specific intergroup contexts. Next, there is a medium size association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories pertaining to miscellaneous threats attributed to vaguely defined, powerful “others.” Finally, the weakest, but still significant, is the association between collective narcissism and generic conspiracy thinking.

### Collective narcissism as motivated social cognition

The association between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories illustrates collective narcissism as motivated social cognition. Motivated social cognition takes place when motivations affect reasoning and elicits reliance on biased cognitive processes pertaining to how people store, remember, interpret, and evaluate events (Kunda, 1990). People may be motivated to arrive at an accurate conclusion whatever it may be, or to arrive at a particular conclusion regardless of evidence, or to arrive at *any* conclusion regardless of evidence. To put otherwise, people may be motivated to know the truth and to understand reality as accurately as possible (Kruglanski & Klar, 1987), to believe what they want to believe, or to believe whatever rather than face uncertainty (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). When motivated to arrive at an accurate conclusion, people would use careful, deliberative, complex reasoning, and cognitive strategies to avoid misinformation and bias. When motivated to avoid uncertainty and arrive at any conclusion as fast as possible, they would use first, the most available and the most salient cues. Once they achieved closure, they would be motivated to maintain it and unwilling to change their mind. The need to arrive at accurate vs. fast conclusion is an individual difference variable that is captured in concepts such as the need for cognition

(Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), the need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), or the need for structure (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993).

The need to arrive at a particular conclusion results in people choosing information processing strategies that are more likely to lead to the conclusion they desire. They would attempt to seem rational and construct justifications for the desired conclusion to maintain the “illusion of objectivity” or at least a shared consensus. The objectivity is illusory because usually people are oblivious to bias in their cognitive processing, in their attention, retrieval, and interpretation of information (Kruglanski, 1980; Kunda, 1990; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). For example, people are often motivated to maintain positive self-esteem which results in self-serving bias, bias in information processing that skews the cognition about the self to arrive to conclusions that are flattering for the self. An example of such bias is a tendency to attribute our failures to external circumstances (e.g., a bad day) and successes to our dispositional characteristics (e.g., intelligence).

In their seminal paper *Political conservatism as motivated social cognition* John Jost and colleagues (2003) argue that people adopt conservative and right-wing political ideologies not because they want to build an accurate understanding of the social and political reality using rational information processing strategies and avoiding bias but because they engage in biased cognition which satisfies their directional (the need to see the world as safe, stable, non-threatening, predictable and in the way that boosts self-esteem) and nondirectional motives (a desire to avoid uncertainty, complexity, inconsistency). Like other ideological beliefs, political conservatism is an expression of psychological needs (especially for safety and certainty) rationalized to seem logical and legitimate. In a similar vein, Johannes Keller (2005) argues that psychological essentialism – a belief that social categories have an underlying biologically determined nature – satisfies a number of directional and non-directional motives and represents another case of biased, motivated social cognition. Essentialism is closely linked to stereotyping and prejudice. Perceiving groups as necessarily (and genetically) distinct, exclusive, and immutable serves to maintain societal inequalities (Haslam et al., 2000; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Yzerbyt et al., 1997). The directional motive underlying psychological essentialism is the need to believe the inequalities are just and fair. Essentialism is, thus, an inequality “legitimizing myth” (Sidanius, 1993). However, psychological essentialism also satisfies epistemic needs: the need to achieve cognitive closure and avoid uncertainty.

The persistent link between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories (and other beliefs that are clearly delusional and serve to justify collective narcissistic preference for violence, see Chapters 4 and 7) suggests that collective narcissism can be interpreted through the lens of the literature on motivated social cognition. Collective narcissists want to arrive at specific

conclusions that their ingroup is exceptional and their violence justified. They also want to avoid the cognitive inconsistency resulting from the fact that they hold two incongruent beliefs: that their ingroup is magnificent and superior and that it is not recognized by others.

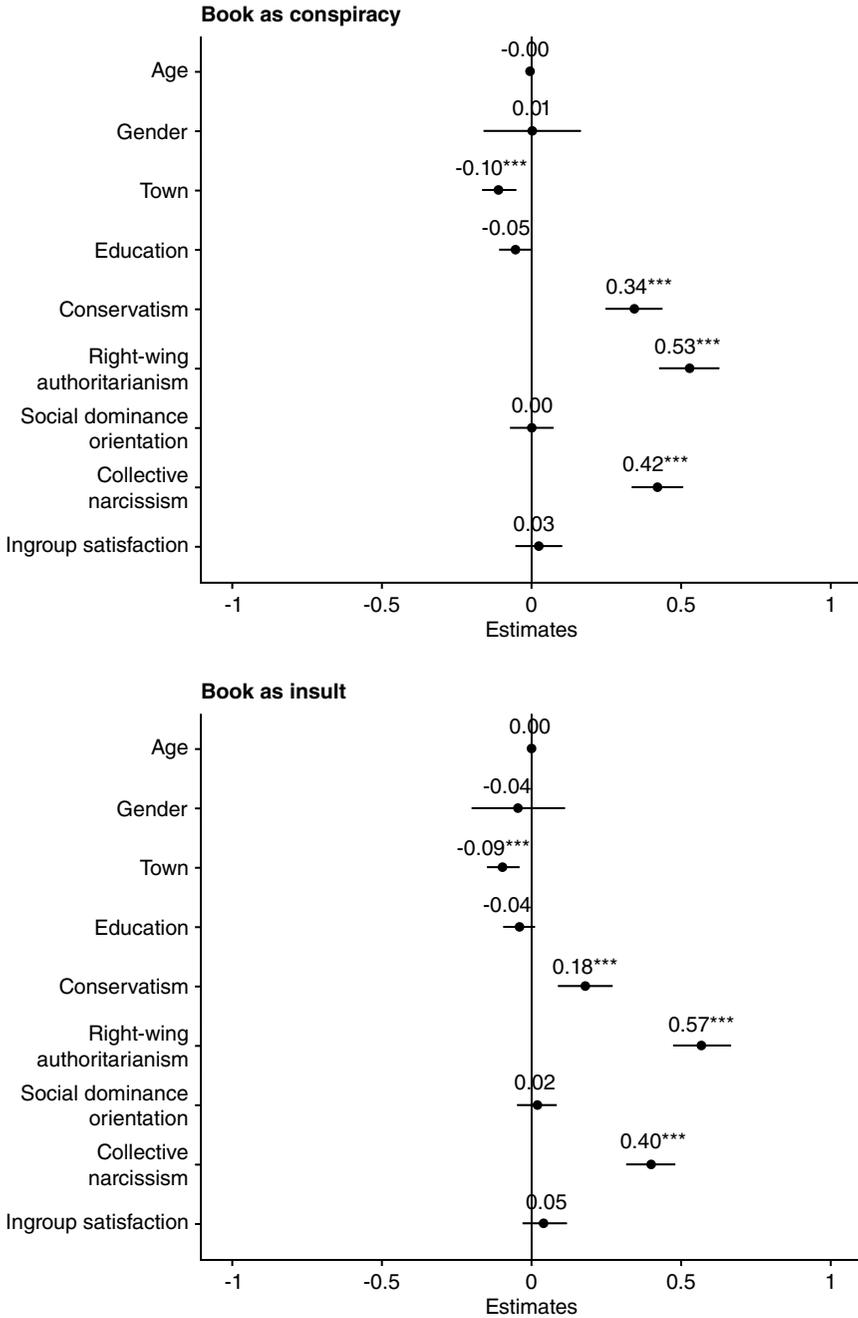
## Directional motives

### **Self-importance**

Collective narcissists want to arrive at the conclusion that their ingroup – and themselves by the virtue of being the ingroup members – is better than others. Thus, they seize and freeze on sufficient explanations that allow them to hold onto this conclusion despite the ingroup’s objective reality. Their recognition of the fact that this reality somehow exists is seen in their own belief that the greatness of the ingroup is not sufficiently recognized by others. Conspiracy theories that attribute malevolent intentions and secretive actions to specific “others” provide collective narcissists with a fitting and flattering explanation for why others fail to acknowledge the ingroup’s exceptional greatness and why they should treat this lack of recognition as a problem they need to address in others. Conspiracy theories allow externalizing the problem and attributing it to jealousy and malevolence of others. The conspiratorial explanation is simple and focused: The ingroup does not receive the recognition it deserves because others conspire to undermine it out of spite, fear, and especially, jealousy. This explanation also provides reassurance that the ingroup is important enough to be noticed and attract secretive plots from others (Golec de Zavala, 2020; Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2022).

The collective narcissistic tendency to endorse delusional beliefs to boost the ingroup image does not express itself only via the attraction to specific conspiracy theories. It can also be seen in other predictions of collective narcissism. Collective narcissism is related to other forms of aggrandizing of the ingroup image such as nationalism (Federico et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019), blind patriotism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), or ingroup glorification (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; 2019). Collective narcissists also tend to question unwelcome facts from the ingroup’s history that may negatively tint their ingroup image, like anti-Semitism in Poland during the Second World War (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Another example of collective narcissistic biased interpretation of facts can be seen in Figure 10.5.

Figure 10.5 illustrates the results of a nationally representative opinion survey that asked participants whether they thought that the book “*Maxima Culpa. John Paul II Knew*” was a leftist and Russian conspiracy against Poland. The book was published in Poland by Agora.SA, Nisza, in early 2023. It is authored by Ekke Overbeek, a Dutch journalist living in Poland who writes about sexual abuse and pedophilia in Catholic Church. The book



**FIGURE 10.5** Predictors of reactions to “*Maxima Culpa: John Paul II Knew*” in Poland in March 2023. Entries are standardized regression coefficients.

presents convincing evidence-based argument that Karol Wojtyła knew about pedophilia and sexual violence in the Catholic Church and protected priest-perpetrators in his functions as a cardinal and as a pope. Although similar allegations have been a matter of public knowledge for several decades, the book caused a heated debate in Poland in the wake of parliamentary elections. Conservative media and commentators challenged the reliability of the evidence and professionalism of the author, Polish citizens marched the streets of Warsaw in protest against the book and the Polish Parliament passed a resolution “*In defence of the good name of Pope John Paul II.*” The book is perceived as an attack on Poland, an insult, and a threat. In data collected in Poland in March 2023, I analyzed collective narcissism as a predictor of the belief that “*Maxima Culpa*” is an insult to Poles and to Poland and a result of conspiracy against Poland. As can be seen, together with right-wing authoritarianism, Polish collective narcissism was one of the strongest predictor of perceiving the book critical toward the Polish pope as an insult to Poland and a conspiracy that threatens the nation.

### ***Justification of oppression and hostility***

As discussed in Chapter 4, another specific conclusion at which collective narcissists are motivated to arrive is that violence and hate their ingroup engages in is justified and moral. Conspiracy beliefs about the malicious plotting of other groups against the ingroup fit the general tendency associated with collective narcissism, to adopt a posture of intergroup hostility across multiple intergroup distinctions and to blame it on others. In particular, they fit and perpetuate the collective narcissistic hypersensitivity to and a tendency to exaggerate threat to the ingroup’s image (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Conspiracy theories provide a specific target for the ingroup to blame (van Prooijven, 2018) and serve to legitimize their own hostility as a “*necessary defence*” of the ingroup. The “*necessary defence*” justifies the ease with which collective narcissists engage in aggression, violence and war and the certainty with which they diminish and proclaim hatred toward others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

Conspiracy theories justify coercion and violence as a means of advancing the ingroup over other groups. For the ingroup to be better, other groups need to be worse. Thus, conspiracy theories also serve to justify prejudice, discrimination, and hostility toward disadvantaged groups. Members of disadvantaged groups endorse conspiracy theories that justify discrimination of disadvantaged groups. Collective narcissists in advantaged groups believe in secretive and malevolent intentions of minorities such as Jews in Poland (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Kofta et al., 2020) and the United States (Zein et al., 2020) or immigrants in France (Bertin et al., 2021). Collective narcissism is also related to conspiracy theories among competing countries. Two studies

showed that American collective narcissists believed China conspires against the United States, whereas Chinese collective narcissists believed the United States conspires against China (van Prooijen & Song, 2021).

Different conspiracy theories justify hostility toward powerful and advantaged groups and toward disadvantaged groups (Nera et al., 2021). Disadvantaged extremist groups use conspiracy theories in the attempt to justify their redressing their circumstances by violent means (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Indeed, conspiracy mentality is related to the willingness to engage in violent actions against formal political and state authorities representing the advantaged groups (Imhoff et al., 2021). Similarly, collective narcissism in extremist organizations representing ethnic and religious minorities is associated with acceptance of terrorist violence against the powerful majorities (Jaško et al., 2020). Moreover, collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups is associated with distrust and conspiracy theories about the more powerful groups leading to rejection of their aid to advance the disadvantaged ingroup (Mashuri et al., 2022).

### **Meaning maintenance motive**

While the complementary content of collective narcissism and conspiracy theories may be obvious in case of some conspiracy theories, other conspiracy theories do not seem to fit the narration about the ingroup’s misunderstood greatness in any obvious way. It may be easy to understand why Polish collective narcissists believe that Germans and European countries conspired to undermine the significance of Poland as a major contributor to the collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes. The fall of Berlin wall is commonly considered as a symbol of the end of the Communist era in Europe. However, the first significant event that started the changes was the Warsaw Round Table negotiation that peacefully ended communism in Poland. This fact gives Poles a sense of entitlement to be recognized for their role in leading this historic systemic change. It is easier to explain the frustration of this entitlement by spinning a conspiracy theory about German secretive plotting than to face the alternative interpretations for example that Germany may enjoy higher status than Poland among the European countries and what happens there is of more consequence for the whole Europe than what happens in Poland or simply that falling of a wall is a better metaphor. Similarly, it fits better the narration about national grandiosity that the 2010 crash of the Polish presidential plane, which killed the president and 95 prominent Polish politicians on their way to Smolensk in Russia, was a result of Russian conspiracy rather than a consequence of a series of unfortunate errors in judgment on the Polish rather than the Russian side. The belief that Russians conspired to undermine Poland serves to boost the belief that it is Poland’s fate to “*rise from its knees*” and wage revenge (Golec de Zavala, 2020).

But why would collective narcissists care to believe that Princess Diana was assassinated, AIDS, ZIKA, or COVID-19 were created in a scientific lab or did not exist, the moon landing was a fake, or that governments hide evidence about extra-terrestrials visiting the Earth? As collective narcissists believe in those conspiracy theories as well, this may suggest that conspiracy theories serve multiple psychological functions, and they serve multiple functions to collective narcissists (Hornsey et al., 2022). They may satisfy their nondirectional cognitive motivation to arrive at any stable belief in the face of contradiction. Collective narcissism represents a case of violation of a committed belief, which produces a motivation to engage in *any* meaning-making activity (Heine et al., 2006). Conspiracy theories address this need very well.

Whatever the reason for group members to claim that the ingroup is great, and exceptional, crucial to collective narcissism is the resentment that the ingroup greatness is not recognized by others. In other words, collective narcissism simultaneously comprises two contradictory ideas: that the ingroup is great and that nobody notices it enough. Thus, collective narcissism represents a case of violation of a committed belief – that the ingroup is exceptional, by another belief – that it is not noticed and recognized by others. According to the meaning maintenance model (Heine et al., 2006; Proulx & Heine, 2009), the violation of a committed belief elicits aversive states: anxiety, cognitive uncertainty, loss of agency, and control. It produces a desire to compensate by seizing on any available belief as a meaning making activity. This desire is especially strong when the committed belief is relevant to the self-evaluation (Proulx & Heine, 2009; 2010), which is the case with collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; 2023a).

Compensation can be also achieved by affirmation of another, unrelated belief even if it does not share any content with the belief that was violated. It should, however, be coherent and abstract enough to dispel uncertainty (Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012). Conspiracy theories provide unifying, even if false, frameworks to interpret events that are otherwise difficult to connect and explain. Any conspiracy theory, even one that does not immediately explain the lack of recognition of the ingroup, provides an explanation and interpretation of disperse events that are otherwise difficult to connect and account for. People who endorse collective narcissism may be chronically motivated to affirm such interpretations whatever their content. Indeed, collective narcissism is positively associated with various forms of motivated reasoning such as a motivation toward cognitive closure (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018) and negatively associated with careful and reflective evaluation of information (Sternisko et al., 2021), dispositional open and receptive attention to unfolding experience, and motivation to appear unprejudiced (Golec de Zavala et al., 2023b).

## Conclusion

The interpretation of collective narcissism as motivated social cognition provided a coherent explanation of the psychological bases of collective narcissism that can account for its various, seemingly unrelated correlation patterns. It produces bias to arrive at specific conclusions: that the ingroup is still exceptional while being unrecognized and still great while engaging in immoral actions intergroup oppression and intergroup hostility. Collective narcissism also generates a motivation to engage in meaning making activity, to hold on to any coherent belief that provides an assuring explanation of salient events or any belief that suggests that events form meaningful patterns. This non-specific cognitive need may account for the link between collective narcissism and a tendency to believe and disseminate conspiracy theories and fake news (Mashuri et al., 2022), especially those that align with ideological partisanship (Harper & Baguley, 2019). Collective narcissism is a particularly insidious belief as it produces general gullibility and predilection toward fake news and conspiracy thinking with a specific preference for conspiracy theories that justify intergroup violence. They serve ruthless leaders to attract followers. They give followers of such leaders justification for coercion and violence as means of advancing their political goals.

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