That's "Who-I-Am!": An Identity Regulatory Model of Narcissism

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Despite advances in understanding narcissism, limited attention has been paid to articulating a higher-order construct that explicitly captures the multi-faceted nature of narcissistic motives and displays. To address this missing link, this study presents an identity-based self-regulatory model of narcissism. We draw from identity control theory (ICT) and propose that dominance identity, a personal identity central to the narcissistic self-concept, is the overarching psychological motive driving narcissistic beliefs and behaviors. Validating, promoting, and protecting this dominance identity is the primary goal that guide narcissistic self-regulatory processes. We identify grandiose self-views, narcissistic self-promotion, and interpersonal aggression as the primary intra-personal and interpersonal strategies employed to sustain narcissistic personal identity. Complementing the prominent self-esteem based regulatory model of narcissism, the central premise of this framework is that dominance identity acts much like a thermostat that sets identity goals. Meanwhile, self-esteem, like a thermometer, is an evaluative indicator of such identity -goal attainment. This identity regulatory model provides a parsimonious way to organize current understanding of the underpinning psychological drivers of narcissism.

Keywords: identity, self-regulation, identity-regulation, narcissism, dominance

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Chatterjee and Hambrick's (2007) influential work on CEO narcissism and its effects on firm strategy and performance, narcissism personality has increasingly captivated organizational scholars' attention. Current research in this space is primarily guided by two prominent conceptual perspectives. The first one is a trait approach, which conceptualizes narcissism as a personality trait with both positive and negative implications (Back et al., 2013; Judge et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2018). On the positive side, narcissistic individuals are more likely to emerge as leaders and often perceived as the preferred type of leaders during crisis (Fatfouta, 2019; Nevicka et al., 2018). On the negative side, narcissism is known to be related to destructive behavior that can produce undesirable organizational outcomes (e.g., Chandler & Fields, 2010; Martinko et al., 2013). The challenge of the trait framework is that it has paid less attention to articulating a higher-order construct to capture the array of psychological

motives and needs driving narcissistic behaviors. Empirically, trait research primarily focuses on the direct link between narcissism and its manifestations.

The second popular perspective in the field encompasses the self-esteem self-regulatory models (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Morf et al., 2011). Within this framework, narcissism is conceptualized as a self-regulatory process motivated by the ultimate need to sustain and enhance self-esteem. This approach offers a dynamic psychological motive - self-esteem needs - for narcissistic behavior, but only with mixed empirical findings (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

These accumulated advances in the field have provided a broad understanding of narcissism within organizational contexts. Specifically, they have helped identify prominent narcissistic cognitive and behavioral patterns and their impact on organizational effectiveness. In the meantime, scholars are calling for more research into the psychological processes underpinning narcissistic displays. Compared to the direct link between a personality trait and its observable expressions, psychological constructs can help answer the black-box questions by providing greater conceptual clarity and illuminate proximal predictors for narcissistic manifestations (Finkelstein et al, 2009). For instance, some studies point out that narcissistic leaders are "principally motivated by their own egomaniacal needs and beliefs; superseding the needs and interests of the constituents and institutions they lead" (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, p. 629; Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007, 2011; Patel & Cooper, 2014; Petrenko et al., 2016). Yet, these psychological motivation factors have only been operationalized with distal proxies such as educational background or organizational tenure and without an organizing high-order concept. Taken together, challenges remained for identifying psychological constructs that can help illuminate underlying narcissistic needs and motives.

To help address the research gaps surrounding narcissistic psychological mechanisms, we present a new construct, dominance identity, to capture the unique personal identity for narcissism. Built upon this dominance identity concept, we develop an identity-based self-regulatory model of narcissism. The proposed conceptual framework draws from research on self-concept and closely related identity and self-system theories. The core principle of these self-system perspectives is that people are motivated to stay true to their identity (i.e., self-definition). A personal identity is generally constructed around a set of claims, attributes, and ideals that are distinct, enduring, and central to an individual (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Put simply, self-concept is about the way we see ourselves at a most fundamental level. Erikson (1964) describes identity as the very core of one's being that guides the way one makes sense of reality. Others have also echoed that identity defines "the way we feel, think and behave, and for the things we aim to achieve" (van Knippenberg et al., 2004, p. 827; see Leary & Twangney, 2003 for an overview). In essence, from an identity perspective, behaviors are intentional acts driven by the needs to validate and sustain the self (Leary, 2007; Swann, 1984).

In summary, this identity model provides a parsimonious way to organize the psychological motives of narcissism and contributes to the conversation about narcissism in organizational setting in serval ways. First, by introducing the construct of dominance identity and the identity-based motivational framework, our study provides a dynamic perspective that explores the psychological mechanisms and better addresses the "why and how" questions about narcissism. This framework complements current self-esteem-based self-regulation models and provides an alternative – and more proximal - motivational mechanism. We conceptualize dominance identity as being analogous to a thermostat that sets the "temperature" of motives and needs for narcissists while self-esteem operates like a thermometer that signals the degree of attainment of these desired self-goals (i.e., motives and needs defined by identity). This more nuanced distinction between identity and self-esteem provides greater construct clarity and helps address inconsistent findings related to self-esteem in narcissism research.

Second, this identity-driven perspective provides a coherent framework to organize a wide range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral expressions of narcissism investigated by scholars. Built on the principle of the need for self-affirmation, identity is thought to manifested in two processes, the internalization and externalization of identity; and intra- and interpersonal self-regulatory strategies that follow. By focusing on the narcissistic self-goals, this approach helps reconcile the positive and negative effects of narcissism on organizational outcomes. Those who score high on narcissism scales will behave

consistently with their self-goals. The positive or negative implications on organizational outcomes will depend on whether there is alignment between narcissistic self-goals and those of the organization.

Third, our model sheds light on leader narcissism and leader motives. Although our focus is not on leader narcissism per se, the perspective of the model offers can be especially helpful in unpacking leader motives in strategic decision-making processes. Consequently, it can be a useful tool to better understand the costs and benefits and costs that frequently arise when narcissists occupy leadership roles. In addition, research in this area mostly relies on distal proxies to operationalize psychological attributes; introducing the construct of dominance identity provides a promising way to incorporate proximal motivational measures into the conversation.

Fourth, our study also contributes to personality and dispositional research. For the most part, the personality and identity literatures are fairly independent of each other. That is, there is not an extensive body of research that examines the personality-personal identity link. Yet, identity can offer a promising lens for injecting greater dynamism into the personality literature and providing a more proximal link between traits and outcomes. The reverse is also true: personality can be a useful predictor for personal identity and other self-relevant constructs. We hope this preliminary exploration can help generate more interest in an integrative conversation among researchers. The personality literature could benefit from expanding beyond what an individual is like (in descriptive terms) and exploring what one does and why (in process terms).

In the following sections, we briefly review key literature on narcissism, the theoretical frameworks for the self-system, introduce the concept of dominance identity, and detail the identity-motivated self-regulatory model of narcissism. We conclude with a general discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our model.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Current Theoretical Approaches to Narcissism in Organization Research

Organizational research considers narcissism to be a multidimensional personality trait instead of a pathological condition as is the case in clinical psychology. In this sense, narcissism is a particular type of personality that is normally distributed across the general population (Campbell et al., 2011; Raskin & Hall, 1981). Emmons' (1984) provided validity evidence for the four-factor structure of narcissism as reflected by the popular Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI, Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981), which includes: 1) leadership/authority; 2) superiority/arrogance; 3) self-absorption/self-admiration; and 4) exploitativeness/entitlement. There are two primary theoretical approaches in narcissism research: the personality approach and the self-esteem driven regulatory approach, which will be briefly reviewed in the following sections.

The traditional personality approach to narcissism aims to map out the relationships between narcissism and other personality traits and identify behavioral expressions of the narcissistic personality type. For instance, narcissism is correlated with high extraversion and low agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Miller et al., 2011) and associated with high dominance and low affiliation (Ruiz et al, 2001; Vize et al., 2019). A list of typical narcissistic behaviors often includes demanding attention, bragging and boasting about abilities and competencies, and putting others down (Buss and Chiodo, 1991; Miller et al., 2017).

The personality approach to narcissism has established a wide range of behavioral signatures associated with people who score high in narcissism. Despite its contribution, the personality approach to narcissism is limited in identifying psychological mechanisms underlying these seemingly paradoxical narcissistic manifestations. Addressing these gaps, the self-esteem self-regulatory model (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and the agency model of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2006) are two prominent self-regulation frameworks that focus on the psychological mechanisms of narcissism. The central contention of these two models is that self-esteem is an ultimate human need. Under this assumption, narcissism is conceptualized as a self-regulatory process motivated by self-esteem goals. To put it differently, sustaining and enhancing self-esteem are the ultimate motives driving narcissistic self-regulatory processes.

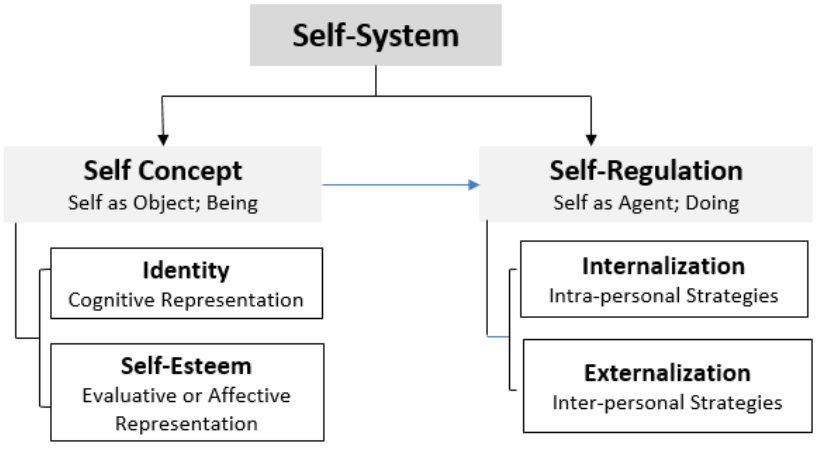
The personality and self-esteem regulation approaches to narcissism reviewed above have their own pros and cons. The personality approach enriches understanding by identifying an array of narcissistic displays but stops short of explicating the underpinning psychological mechanisms with a parsimonious construct. In comparison, the self-esteem self-regulatory approach presents a more dynamic picture of the manifestation of narcissism. This framework depicts self-esteem as the central needs and motives that drive narcissistic expressions. However, it has its own limitations due to mixed empirical findings (Bosson et al., 2008). In addition, self-esteem self-regulation model cannot provide satisfying explanations for the question of why narcissistic pursuit of self-esteem can lead to positive organizational outcomes in some cases and negative organizational outcomes in others. Expanding on these two prominent approaches to narcissism, we propose that dominance identity (instead of self-esteem) as the proximal psychological construct that effectively captures the narcissistic needs and motives. Specifically, dominance identity prescribes self-goals to be fulfilled, which in turn explains the diverse cognitive and behavioral strategies adopted by narcissists. Our bridging point for the proposed identity regulatory perspective is the self-system concept (Figure 1), which is shared by current self-esteem regulatory models. In the following section, we will further explain the self-system conceptual lens and how the self-esteem regulatory approach only articulates part of the self-system and resulting limitations.

The Self-System Perspective of Narcissism

Self-Concept: Identity vs. Self-Esteem

The self-system, also referred to as the self or selfhood, is presented as a unifying concept that serves as an umbrella for a diverse range of cognitions, emotions, motives, and behaviors (Leary & Tangney, 2003). As an encompassing and dynamic psychological system, the self is defined as "the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that arise from the awareness of self as object and agent" (Hoyle et al., 1999, p. 2). The distinction between the self as object and agent is also termed as "being" versus "doing" (Figure 1.). The object aspect of self, or being, refers to the descriptive features of the self, i.e., how people think about themselves (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). This part of the self is also referred to as the self-concept, self-representation, or self-knowledge such as identity and self-esteem (Hoyle et al., 1999), The agent aspect of self, or doing, describes the ways of thinking and behaviors "aimed at asserting, protecting, or repairing identity or self-esteem, also known as self-regulation" (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006).

FIGURE 1
SELF-SYSTEM



Within this self-system framework, identity and self-esteem capture two closely related but distinct aspects of the self-concept, with identity serving as a cognitive self-representation while self-esteem is an affective or evaluative self-representation (Rosenberg, 1979). Identity (i.e., the cognitive self), refers to the

"mental repository of autobiographical information, reflected appraisals, self-ascribed traits and competencies, and self-schema including possible selves, self-with-others, and undesired selves" (Rhodewalt & Morf, 2005, p. 130). Identity prescribes the self-definition. In comparison, self-esteem is considered as "the attendant evaluation of what is known about the self, in terms of "the valence and stability" (Rhedowalt & Morf, 2005, p. 130). Thus, self-esteem functions more as an evaluative indicator of identity goal attainment (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). When identity is affirmed, self-esteem is enhanced; when identity is threatened, self-esteem will suffer as a result.

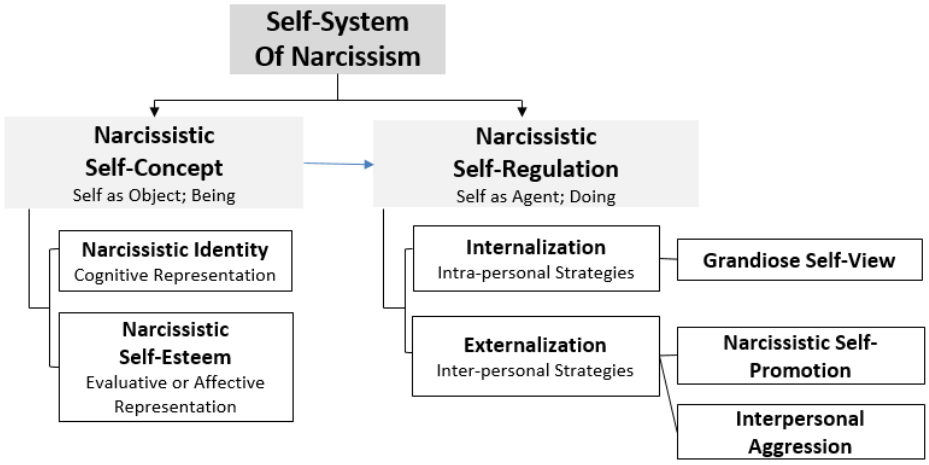
Self-Regulation: Intra-personal and Interpersonal Strategies

The self is a dynamic system because of its ability to self-regulate. A self-system functions via self-goals, which are the motives to enhance, expand, and defend the self. In other words, self-regulation is a mechanism motivated by self-goals (Rhodewalt & Morf, 2005; Swann, 1984). Under normal conditions, the self-system can function and maintain stability within adaptive limits through adjustments and modifications with no need for external intervention (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). "Self-regulatory strategy" refers to both automatic (subconscious) and consciously intentional responses and actions within the self-system (Mischel and Morf, 2003; Morf et al., 2011). There are two main categories of self-regulatory strategies, the intra-personal and inter-personal strategies. These self-regulation strategies are contextualized because specific strategies are employed to respond to specific social environment cues.

Self-System Perspective of Narcissism

Within the self-system of narcissism, a narcissistic self-concept comprises of a dominance personal identity, narcissistic self-esteem, and associated intra- and interpersonal self-regulation strategies (Figure 2). Thus, narcissists' cognitions, affect, and behavior can be understood as responses to and/or in service of narcissistic self-goals (dominance identity- and self-esteem-related goals). Grandiose self-view is the typical intra-personal regulatory strategy of narcissism. Similarly, narcissistic social interactions are a function of these narcissistic self-goals manifested in narcissistic interpersonal strategies (e.g., self-promotion, aggression).

FIGURE 2
SELF-SYSTEM OF NARCISSISM



While acknowledging that self-concept incorporates both identity and self-esteem, current self-esteem self-regulatory models of narcissism have focused primarily on narcissistic self-esteem as the motivational self- goal. With a self-esteem-only model, two important questions about narcissism are not well addressed. First, because self-esteem is conceptualized and indexed in terms of high and low levels, the specific contents of self-concerns, as reflected in identity, are not clear. Such lack of descriptive information

prescribed by identity makes it difficult to address the sources of self-esteem: What type of information would be considered as self-relevant? Which domain is elf-esteem related to? These limitations are particularly evident when confronted with questions about the seemingly contradicting self-regulation strategies that narcissists adopt. Consequently, the prominent self-esteem models provide only a partial story about the narcissistic self and its strategy implications.

To address these issues, we propose an identity-driven model of narcissism to complement current self-esteem motivated frameworks. As Burke (1991) posited, the relationship between identity and self-esteem is like the relationship between a thermostat and thermometer: personal identity is the fundamental self-goal that motivates the narcissistic self-regulation processes (i.e., a thermostat). The role of self-esteem within this identity- motivated system takes a backseat, as a marker of identity goal attainment (i.e., a thermometer) (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). While there is research that addresses this content issue and examines contingent self-esteem (e.g., Kuykendall et al., 2020; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2008), this line of inquiry appears to be in sync with our proposal here regarding the critical role of the descriptive self-content of identity. Different personal identities prescribe self-relevant goals in different domains, the attainment of which are signaled via different domain-specific (contingent) self-esteem thermometers.

In summary, our conceptual framework emphasizes the role of dominance personal identity, a more proximal self-goal than self-esteem, in motivating narcissistic expressions. This perspective complements the self-esteem models and can help address the theoretical limitations and gaps of current narcissism literature. Next, we introduce the personal identity concept and propose dominance identity as a unique type of narcissistic personal identity. These are the conceptual building blocks for the identity-based regulatory model of narcissism to be articulated thereafter.

Narcissistic Personal Identity: A Dominance Identity

Personal Identity and Its Motivational Role

As a cognitive dimension of the self-concept, a person's identity is how one defines themself as a unique and distinct person. Identity encompasses the idea that it is personally essential for the individual to possess a particular set of qualities and attributes (identity internalization), and to communicate these characteristics and images to others in everyday activities (externalization or identity symbolization). Thus, identity can be understood as self-beliefs or self-theories that reflect the attributes and values a person wants to possess. Identity is about having the ideals that are central to the sense of self instead of the traits one actually possesses.

Identity as a self-theory is also developed and maintained through interpersonal agreements, in an actual or imagined sense, as a reflection of what the self is and how the self relates to others (Cornwell et al., 2017). This me-versus-others interpersonal aspect of identity affects how individuals perceive and judge others, interpret social feedback, experience interpersonal relationships, and influence how they coordinate their own needs and the needs of others (Schlenker et al., 2009).

The function of identity in self-processes is to prescribe meanings and define self-goals. McAdam (2009) describes the role of identity as integrating "disparate roles, goals, needs, fears, skills, and inclinations into a coherent pattern, a pattern that specifies how the merging adult will live, love, work and believe in a complex and changing world" (p.18). People behave in a manner that validates and protects their identity. Maintaining self-consistency and self-coherence are fundamental needs of human beings (Swann, 1984). To achieve self-goals, the interaction between the self-system and the social context is dynamic and reciprocal and necessitates a wide range of self-regulation strategies. Despite seemingly diverse or even paradoxical behaviors, identity theories assert that self-regulatory strategies are generally motivated and cohered to sustain, enhance, and defend the identity, thus are inherently coherent as a common whole at the fundamental level of "serving the self."

Personal identity is considered as an individual difference (Blasi, 1983; Erickson, 1950), reflected in both the content and the centrality of an identity. The content is the very definition and descriptive features of an identity. Centrality of an identity is another critical property of identity. Considering we all have multiple personal and social identities in our self-system (e.g., role identity, academic identity), Blasi (1984) stipulated that the self is an organizing system that determines the order and hierarchy among self-defining

ideals, attributes, and competence, and multiple identities. This organizing order is based on the extent to which a person cares about possessing them. The most central identity is one that is considered as indispensable and essential to the self. The more central an identity is, the more self-schematic it is, and the more accessible it is across situations. A central identity is thus the core of the self. Simply put, an identity of high centrality has more predictability for the identity- actions link.

In current literature, there is an absence of extensive research on specific types of personal identities, with the exception of moral identity. Following the trait approach to the self, Aquino and Reed (2002) defined moral identity as "a self-conception organized around a set of moral traits" (p. 1424) such as e.g., caring, compassionate, fair, honest, and kind. Compared to those with lower scores on moral identity centrality, people with higher scores are more likely to identify with and think of themselves as having these moral traits and behave consistently with these characteristics (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). They are also more likely to prefer receiving feedback from others that validates these identity-related attributes and judge others based on these standards (Winterich et al., 2013). In addition, they are more likely to feel dissatisfied or even threatened when they think they are being regarded as less moral or amoral.

Building off the critical functions of personal identity and its centrality, we propose that there is a personal identity that is particularly relevant to narcissism and reflects the core meaning of a narcissistic self, which we refer to as a dominance identity.

Defining Dominance Identity

Inspired by moral identity research, we define dominance identity as a self-conception organized around a set of dominance traits. Thus, the defining descriptors for this narcissistic identity are dominance-related values, traits, and attributes. Specifically, a dominance identity represents a self-belief of being superior, high status, and entitled (i.e., a sense of uniqueness and specialness). Such self-beliefs also tend to share an egocentric world view (i.e., thinking about oneself without taking the perspectives of others into account) and values that strongly lean towards grandiosity, dominance (i.e., power and control), and achievement, with a lack of consideration for affiliation and communal needs.

This set of meanings provide the identity standards that directly motivate the narcissistic self's functioning. Narcissistic self-worth is based on attaining dominance and a sense of superiority. The corresponding self-regulation strategies for a dominance identity often include, although are not limited to, grandiose self-views, narcissistic self-promotion, displays of self-importance, a yearning for fame and power, exploitation of others, and indifference towards the needs of others in social relationships.

Dominance Identity as a Narcissistic Personal Identity

Our literature review reveals a lack of compelling conceptual frameworks for investigating the mechanisms through which personality influences an individual's personal identity. Studies on identity that do involve personality often stop at the assertion that personality may be a factor contributing to identity (e.g., Hart & Matsuba, 2009). Maslow's (1987) work on the motivational theory of personality touches briefly on individual differences in motives and goals. We draw from his depiction on the path way of personality-needs/motives/goals-behavior and build out the narcissism-dominance identity link. His theory posits that personality expressions are motivated means of serving the self. People have diverse needs and desires, but only some of them are fundamental (e.g., self-relevant goals). According to Maslow (1987), personality becomes manifest as each person strives to achieve focal self-goals. Put it another way, personality defines goals that motivate behavior. Notably, the paths to achieving these goals may vary and are subject to the influence of immediate situation among many other forces.

Empirically, the current literature on narcissism provides abundant evidence that dominance-oriented traits, which reflect the content meanings of a dominance identity, are the essential elements of narcissistic self-representation. Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI, Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981) has been shown to have the highest correlations with interpersonal dominance and Exhibition (Vize et al., 2019; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2021) In addition, the NPI is highly correlated with the circumplex's agency axis and is essentially unrelated to the Communion axis (Gebauer et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2014). Ruiz et al. (2001) mapped narcissism along the two primary dimensions: dominance versus submissiveness, and friendliness versus

hostility. The correlate-pattern revealed that high composite NPI scores were positively associated with high dominance and low affiliation, and that narcissism was the best predictor of dominance.

Despite the prominent role of self-esteem in the current literature on narcissism, evidence of a direct relationship between self-esteem and narcissism has been inconsistent (Bosson et al., 2008; Rosenthal et al., 2020). That is, there is no conclusive support for a positive link between narcissism and high self-esteem (Rosenthal et al., 2020). Campbell et al. (2002) stated that "narcissism does not appear simply to reflect exceptionally high self-esteem" (p. 365). Brown and Zeigler-Hill (2004) raised the possibility that the dominance aspect of narcissism has not been explicitly addressed or measured in the current literature. They argued that the essence of narcissism is the pursuit and maintenance of a dominant status that affords prominence, influence, and respect. Thus, narcissists are attracted to opportunities that allow them to demonstrate their social dominance, influence, and control over circumstances and people, as well as opportunities to exploit others in pursuit of self-centered goals. To test these assertions, Brown and Zeigler-Hill (2004) compared the results from using self-esteem scales saturated with dominance (e.g., the Self-Attributes Questionnaire, SAQ; the Texas Social Behavior Inventory, TSBI) with those using scales that do not tap into dominance components (e.g., Rosenberg self-esteem scale; RSES, 1965). Their results showed that the link between narcissism and self-esteem is significantly stronger, and more variance is explained by self-esteem, when dominance is incorporated in the model. This evidence suggests the crucial role dominance plays in narcissism.

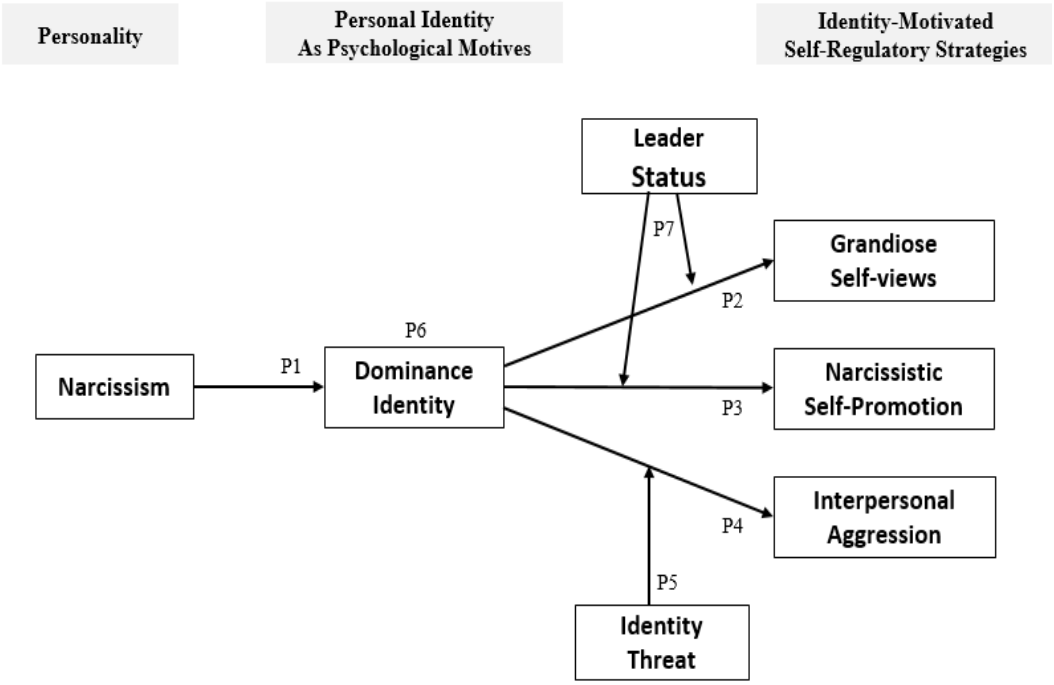
The self-reported findings in Brown and Ziegler-Hill's study are particularly telling in terms of identifying a set of fundamental traits, in particular dominance-oriented traits, that narcissists themselves consider to be self-descriptive. In addition to traits per se, another line of research findings related to the motives and desire for dominance further support the link between narcissism and the dominance identity (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). Narcissism has been found to predict a predisposition for grandiosity and dominance (i.e., power and control; Raskin et al., 1991; Rosenthal et al., 2020). These authors further argued that narcissism carries a defensive self-regulatory orientation, or a "warriors" interpersonal style, which is a motivation marked by a drive for "glory (i.e., status, wealth, power, fame and adoration)" (Raskin et al., 1991, p. 911).

The evidence on the correlates of narcissism reviewed here directly supports the core meanings captured by the dominance identity, which (1) is organized by a set of dominance-related traits that are highly central to the narcissistic self and characterizes who the narcissistic self; and (2) provides meanings, motives, and self-goals for narcissistic self-regulation processes. Thus, we propose that the narcissistic personality is likely to adopt a dominance identity, a distinct type of identity built around a set of traits, characteristics, and values central to narcissistic ideals.

Proposition 1. *Narcissism is positively related to a high versus low dominance identity.*

Next, we turn our focus to discuss how exactly an identity operates within the self-regulation processes using Burk's (1991) identity control theory (ICT) and build a narcissistic self-regulatory model centered around dominance identity (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
IDENTITY-BASED SELF-REGULATORY MODEL OF NARCISSISM



Identity-Motivated Self-Regulation

Humans have a fundamental need to maintain a sense of psychological coherence of self, a state that provides a sense of regularity and control (Swann, 1987). People engage in self-verification (Swann, 1987) to validate their self-concepts (Cable & Kay, 2012) and to self-preserve, which in turn provides a sense of continuity, control, and predictability (Swann & Ely, 1984). According to Identity Control Theory (ICT; Burke, 1991), such the self-verification process involves a negative feedback loop motivated by identity goals. The process starts with the activation of an identity as a response to social environmental cues, which sets the identity feedback loop in motion. When an identity is activated, its meanings become salient and take on a self-schema role to inform subsequent information attending, event interpretation, and course of action formulations. Consequently, identity meaning serves as an internal thermostat, which sets the expectations of the desired state, a referent, and a standard for assessing self-relevant information derived from social feedback (i.e., situational input).

The goal of the identity control system is to match the situational input to the identity (meanings) standard, the internal set-point for the system (i.e., the "thermostat"). When there is congruence between the situational input and identity standard, the identity is verified and self-esteem is registered as high, an indicator of self-goal attainment. Resulting output strategies and actions are carried out in a routine-like pattern. And this business as usual is a dynamic process rather than a static one. Hence, for narcissists, their very nature requires a constant narcissistic supply (affirmation of sense of dominance), which will be discussed further in the proposition development. However, when there is incongruence or discrepancy between the situational input and the internal thermostat set by identity meanings (i.e., an error signal), negative emotions, such as sense of distress and feeling upset arise, and narcissistic self-esteem is threatened and alarmed. As a result, output behaviors are modified in an attempt to alter the input in order to bring it into alignment with the standard. The restoring process aims to control the situational input while sustaining and protecting the "standard" rather than revising it.

From this identity-control-system perspective, narcissism is a self-regulation process motivated by a dominance identity. The self-defining meaning of a dominance identity sets the ultimate expectations and standards and provides self-relevant goals and motives. The central self-goal is to maintain the dynamic congruence between perceived self-relevant social feedback and dominance identity meanings. Two key principles of identity-motivated self-regulation are essential to our conceptual model. First, the regulatory process involves a negative feedback system that responds to discrepancies by reducing deviations from standards and goals (Lord et al., 2010). Second, it is perpetually dynamic. Over time, this identity-verification control process tends to become more and more automatic, especially for identities with high centrality and high self-importance. Thus, using this identity control lens, we can expect a unique pattern of output strategies that narcissists employ to sustain and protect dominance identity. In the following sections, we further develop propositions to predict narcissistic intra-and interpersonal self-regulation strategies including a grandiose self-view, narcissistic self-promotion, and aggression.

Dominance Identity and Narcissistic Self-View

Identity-based self-regulation processes anchor on identity meanings. Burke (1991) used the terms "the standard" and "set point" to describe the role of identity and its meanings. A dominance identity involves an enduring belief in one's own dominant and superior qualities, and is organized around a set of dominance-related traits. These dominance traits are descriptive and characteristic to the self. To think of the self as special and unique, and possess these traits is critical to the sense of self. Thus, a dominance identity provides a unique self-schema through which narcissists evaluate themselves and others. People with a dominance identity are more likely to believe they have traits that align with their perceptions of prototypical leader traits (i.e., leader-like) and their own potential to attain leader positions. In addition to grandiose self-views, a dominance identity, by definition, also serves as a schema and prescribes scripts on how to view others in relation to the self, or me-versus-others. One of the self-defining qualities encompassed by a dominance identity is superiority. Through this self-schema, others are more likely to be seen as inferior to the self. The expectations of the role others play are in service to the grandiose self. Narcissists tend to overestimate their agentic competence and achievement, particularly in contexts that are identity relevant.

The identity-related self-schema helps shed light on why narcissism is related to positive self-views only in agentic domains and not in communal domains. Such a domain-specific self-exaggerating tendency can be interpreted as a means to sustain a sense of superiority, and project and maintain a dominance image. Additionally, an enhanced self-esteem serves as the signal of a grandiose self-affirmation. Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 2. *Dominance identity is positively related to narcissistic grandiose self-views.*

Dominance Identity and Narcissistic Self-Promotion

Narcissists are also preoccupied with the desire for "narcissistic supply" (Kernberg, 1975): to have their grandiose self-images validated and enhanced. Narcissists are known for communicating and affirming their grandiose self-views in ways that draw attention to themselves. They are constantly engaging in self-promotion and the pursuit of attention. Empirical evidence from research on narcissism among top executives paints a colorful picture of narcissistic CEOs' self-glorifying behaviors (e.g., Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007, 2011; Petrenko et al. 2016). These scholars speculated that a unique motivational process underlies narcissistic CEOs' self-promoting behavior. For instance, Petrenko et al. (2016) discussed the feedback loop of narcissistic CEOs' endeavors to secure "narcissistic supplies" (Kernberg, 1975). It often goes like this: narcissists have a strong need for image-reinforcement and attention (or "narcissistic supply"); they have a high tendency to exploit organizational actions in order to draw attention to themselves and promote their own grandiose self-image; they respond to praise with continuous self-promoting efforts; and in the end, the high profile and star status that result from public praise provides an avenue for protagonist maintenance. In other words, the narcissistic cycle of image-reinforcement and attention is a perpetual and reciprocal process.

These studies did not explicitly use the concept of identity-goals to label narcissistic motives for attention-seeking and self-promotion. Nonetheless, the feedback loop described in each closely aligns with the identity-motivated self-regulatory process. ICT (Burke, 1991) stipulates that people do not just gravitate toward identity-verifying opportunities and structures; they are also motivated to create situations that minimize disturbance from incongruence (i.e., "developing an opportunity structure") or locate the niche in which the self prefers to reside where identity-goals are routinely verified and satisfied (Swann, 1983, p.36). The primary ways to construct such opportunities include the display of identity cues (e.g., sign, symbols, appearances, communication languages, etc.), purposeful or selective affiliation (e.g., choosing people who can provide self-affirming feedback), and interpersonal prompts (e.g., interaction strategies for getting others to treat oneself in an identity-congruent manner) (Swann, 1983; see Burke & Stets, 2009 for a review).

Thus, narcissistic self-regulation serves to verify and enhance the meaning of a dominance identity. A dominance identity elicits a need to affirm, sustain, and enhance grandiose self-views (i.e., a sense of superiority, self-importance, vanity, and entitlement), coupled with lack of regard for others. To fulfill these dominance identity needs and concerns, narcissists are motivated to construct opportunity structures (Swann, 1983) and project and promote a dominate self-image. Typical strategies for doing so include displaying dominance cues (i.e., prominent photo placement in publications, exhibitionism in appearance and language, or charisma); selectively choosing affiliations with the social elite or those in positions of power (Chen et al., 2009), and associations with highly successful parties (Wurst et al., 2017). They also seek out and engage in exploitative self-promoting opportunities to serve their dominance identity needs. The dominance self-schema provides an approach-orientation (Johnson et al., 2012) and leads to the tendency to evaluate the world and social events in terms of their utility and benefits for fueling narcissistic supply. In short, narcissists are likely to capitalize on any opportunity to glorify themselves. Opportunities such as media coverage and prominent public image displays are especially attractive to narcissists because they hold high symbolic values for achieving dominance identity goals.

Taken together, the perpetual feedback loop of the dominance identity process demonstrates that narcissists not only engage in self-promotion, but also self-promote in a grandiose way and at the expense of others. Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 3. *Dominance identity is positively related to narcissistic self-promotion.*

Dominance Identity and Interpersonal Aggression

Individuals high in dominance attributes have been found to demonstrate a keen propensity to coerce, derogate, prejudice, and act aggressively towards others. The self-esteem approaches to narcissism assert that narcissistic aggression generally occurs when narcissistic self-esteem is threatened (Baumeister & Bushman, 2000; Campbell et al., 2004). Using an identity approach, we expand from the threatened ego perspective and propose two categories of narcissistic aggression: (a) instrumental aggression (Atkins & Stoff, 1993), which reflects a strategy to serve self-verification needs; and (b) hostile aggression (Atkins & Stoff, 1993), which involves a defensive strategy to protect threatened dominance identity.

From an identity control system perspective, grandiose self-views provide narcissists with a strong sense of dominance, power, superiority, and entitlement, and serve as the identity standard. This self-importance standard is coupled with a lack of regard for others. In others words, while agentic concerns are narcissists' primary goals, communal elements are not part of their identity meanings. As a result, the need for ego- satisfying attention is fulfilled by a self-focused aggressive strategy (Hart et al., 2019). For narcissists, aggression is considered a legitimate, appropriate, and effective strategy to convey their self-image of superiority and dominance to others (Kjærvik et al., 2021). Identity threat is not a necessary condition for the link between narcissism and aggression. In conclusion, we suggest that:

Proposition 4. *A high versus low dominance identity is positively related to narcissistic interpersonal aggression.*

Dominance Identity and Identity Threat

When a dominance identity is threatened, the utility value of aggression is magnified. When the identity-affirmation motivated quest of narcissists for attention and affirmation of their sense of superiority is thwarted, narcissists have a tendency to express anger, rage, and aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). Current literature often uses negative performance feedback and criticism to activate a sense of "self-esteem threat" which is considered to be an intervening cause of defensive aggression. However, this explanation cannot fully explain why negative performance feedback or criticism is threatening.

An identity-based self-regulation model uses the concept of identity threat instead of self-esteem threat. Identity threat has been broadly defined as any "overt action by another party that challenges, calls into question, or diminishes a person's sense of competence, dignity, or self-worth" (Aquino & Douglas, 2003, p.196). Criticism of performance from others contradicts the narcissist's self-belief in the qualities and attributes he or she identifies with (e.g., superiority, winner, competence). Negative feedback is thus considered a direct violation of the assumptions of their self-conceptions (Campbell et al., 2004) and the dominance identity core. As a result, negative evaluation creates a discrepancy between perceived self-in-situation meaning (others see me as less superior, able, and competent) and their dominance identity meaning (I am great, superior, intelligent, and capable). Discrepancy causes a disturbance to the dominant identity control system. Thus, criticism of performance constitutes an identity threat to the dominance identity. When a disturbance occurs, it is imperative for narcissists to take action to eliminate the threat and restore meaning congruence. Aggression against the source of the threat is considered to be an appropriate and readily available response (Campbell et al., 2004) to defend the dominance identity and its integrity.

Swann and Hill (1982) found that when people who identify themselves as dominant receive feedback challenging their dominant beliefs, they tend to behave in an even more dominant manner, assertively showcasing their desired social images of themselves to others and particularly to the source of the threat (e.g., performance evaluators) (Leary, 1995). They use compensatory self-verification as a defensive strategy, in an attempt to reestablish and preserve the dominate self-images. Studies on narcissism and performance feedback have also found that when threatened, narcissists demonstrate a stronger motivation to reestablish their self-image by discounting the credibility of, derogating, or punishing the threatening source (e.g., Stucke & Sporer, 2002; Twenge et al., 2001). Thus we advance:

Proposition 5. *Identity threat moderates the relationship between a dominance identity and interpersonal aggression, such that the relationship is stronger in the presence versus absence of an identity threat*.

To summarize the discussion so far, identity plays significant roles in self-regulation (Lord & Brown, 2001; Lord et al., 2010). An identity-based self-regulation model of narcissism suggests that dominance identity is an expression of a narcissistic personality and a motivational mechanism that underlies narcissists' intra- and interpersonal strategies. Dominance identity motives not only involve enhancing, verifying, and sustaining self-images, but also protection concerns. Thus, dominance identity motives produce both self-promoting and defensive strategies to minimize risks and remove identity threats. The protection or defensive strategies are activated when a disturbance is experienced within the dominance identity control system.

Proposition 6. *A dominance identity mediates the relationship between narcissism and its self-regulatory strategies.*

Dominance Identity and Leader Status

Given a higher concentration of narcissism among leaders, the role of status warrants further discussion. We explore the role of status from two perspectives: leader's status as an identity badge, and the convergence between leader's role-identity and personal identity.

Organizational identity studies suggest that job titles often serve the purpose of portraying an "identity badge," which signals and legitimizes one's status within a hierarchy (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Grant et

al., 2014). Organizational theory on power suggests that power promotes goal-oriented behaviors (De Cremer & van Dijk, 2005; Mooijman et al., 2015). In a similar vein, trait theories suggest that trait expressions are bounded by situational characteristics. People with more power tend to have more discretion over, and leeway in expressing their individual attributes and values. These arguments point to one conclusion: power lets you behave in a manner consistent with your privileged identity (Galinsky et al, 2011; Gan et al., 2018). The higher the rank, the more likely one will be able to express a dominance identity. Hence, we posit that the leader status will magnify the effects of a dominance identity.

In addition to personal identities, identity theory suggests that an individual also has role identities that are enacted to fulfill expectations for different social role(s) within social structures, such as teacher, lawyer, leader, and subordinate. Having a role identity means adopting and internalizing the meanings and expectations prescribed by the role (Stets & Burke, 2000). Individuals who take on leader roles assume and develop a leader identity. The key step of the leader identity construction process is convergence between personal and role identities (DeRue et al., 2009; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Galvin and colleagues (2015) proposed a unique type of identity convergence, the narcissistic organizational identification. For instance, in the case of CEOs, their organizational and personal identities may merge such that the organizational identity is subsumed by the CEO's personal identity. Galvin et al. (2015) labelled this as an individual-dominant identity. The CEO now sees the company as an extension or expression of his or her own identity and ideology. Following this logic and considering that narcissists have a dominance identity as part of their personal identity, we can expect that when narcissists occupy a leadership role, that leader role becomes a central element of narcissistic self-definition: "I am a leader." And more importantly, "I am personally central and indispensable to this position and role, and thus to the organization I am leading." This form of convergence of two identities results in a situation where the leader's position becomes a vehicle of self-expression and serves his or her personal identity goals. Driven by the belief that "What is good for me is good for those whom I lead," these individuals perceive organizations as serving their egotistical needs for power, status, and admiration (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1997) rather than the shared goals of the people they lead. The leader role provides opportunities to satisfy their desire to gain power and feed their grandiose needs and visions (Glad, 2002). The resultant proposition sheds light on why narcissists can be potentially destructive when adopting leader roles because of its dominance identity.

Proposition 7. *Leader status moderates the relationship between a dominance identity and grandiose self-views and narcissistic self-promotions, such that the relationships are stronger for individuals with high versus low leader status.*

The identity-based self-regulation model of narcissism proposed here provides a valuable lens to for uncovering the psychological mechanisms underpinning narcissistic intra- and interpersonal strategies. Our thinking complements the self-esteem regulatory model and provides a more comprehensive yet parsimonious conceptual framework.

DISCUSSION

The central goal of this paper is to identify the motivational mechanisms underlying a wide range of narcissistic cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes in a coherent way. We conceptualize a personal identity that is central to narcissism, a dominance identity. Following the trait-template of moral identity research, a dominance identity is defined as a self-conception organized around a set of dominance traits and is proposed as an intervening variable that defines narcissistic needs and motives and actions. This is the first model that identifies narcissism as involving a dominance-identity motivated self-regulatory system.

While the proposed model complements and expands on self-esteem self-regulatory models of narcissism, we see another two additional contributions. First, despite increasing research attention being devoted to investigating psychological motives for narcissism, most studies still rely on various proxies (e.g., education, social status) instead of direct psychological measures. This is particularly true within the

strategic leadership research domain. Part of the reason why is that the field lacks a ready-to-use theoretical framework that identifies a specific psychological motive for narcissism in a coherent fashion. Although we see new advances in CEO political ideology research, where more proximal operationalization of psychological orientations has emerged (e.g., Chin et al, 2013; Gupta & Wowak, 2017; Gupta et al., 2021) a conceptual model to guide such research is lacking. With the introduction of the construct of a dominance identity and our preliminary conceptual model, we offer a promising framework for guiding the development of more direct measures of a narcissistic psychological profile. The second contribution is that the importance of personal identity to narcissism has not garnished much research attention to date. As we have emphasized in this paper, personal identity plays a critical role in one's self-processes and can thus provide a useful venue for exploring the effects of individual differences at a more nuanced yet encompassing level, which goes beyond a focus on narcissism personality only. We hope that our model will generate more conversation regarding the importance of personality identity within organizational and leadership settings.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We also wish to point out some of the main limitations of the proposed identity self-regulation model of narcissism. The conceptualization of a dominance identity is anchored around self-defining dominance traits. This definition primarily reflects a single-faceted and overarching dimension. From a theoretical perspective, conceptualizing the dominance identity construct along a single dimension (i.e., dominance) has its limitations. While available empirical evidence supports the notion that a dominance identity is central feature of narcissism, it is also clear that narcissism is a multidimensional phenomenon. Despite ongoing debates about the specific number of the internal factors that characterize narcissism (Ackerman et al., 2010), recent literature reveals an increasing interest in a multidimensionality approach to narcissism (Reidy et al., 2008). The primary guiding assumption of this approach is that the internal dimensions of narcissism are related but distinct (Tamborski et al., 2012) and can be categorized into domains. Brown et al. (2009) consider grandiosity to be an intra-personal dimension that taps the narcissist's internal sense of self-importance; entitlement as an interpersonal domain that reflects the status of the self vis-à-vis others. As a result, the links between narcissism and its psychological and behavioral manifestations are thought to be facet specific. Thus, future theory and research should more fully reflect the complexity of narcissism.

Another limitation is related to self-esteem. Currently, the most dominant self-regulation model of narcissism (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) anchors on self-esteem as the mediating process. Self-esteem has been conceptualized as the fundamental motive that directs and drives behaviors. If so, what are the relationships between self-esteem and identity and the combined effects of their impact on narcissistic expressions? These types of research questions can certainly broaden our understanding of the phenomenon. Future research can expand the model to include self-esteem in the same model to better flesh out the dynamics between these two aspects of the narcissistic self-concept – self-esteem and identity.

Last, we look forward to further research interest in refining the construct of a dominance identity. More importantly, we hope that narcissistic personal identity can be operationalized and empirically tested. One possible approach to doing so is to model the resultant measurement development process after that used to develop measures of moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

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