

Beyond Ingroup Love: A Systematic Review of the Antecedents and Consequences of Collective Narcissism

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ABSTRACT

Collective narcissism, a form of group identification defined by an exaggerated belief in the ingroup's unrecognized greatness and a defensive need for external validation, is a significant area of social psychological inquiry. While research has grown since its formal conceptualization, a comprehensive synthesis is needed. This systematic review, adhering to PRISMA guidelines, synthesizes empirical findings from 24 studies identified via Scopus concerning the antecedents and consequences of collective narcissism. Findings reveal that collective narcissism is influenced by both individual-level factors—such as individual narcissism, low or unstable self-esteem, need for uniqueness, and Dark Triad-related personality traits—and contextual factors, including perceived intergroup threat, political orientation, lower levels of globalization, and culturally embedded historical narratives. In turn, this form of group identification consistently predicts a wide range of negative outcomes. These include intergroup hostility, prejudice, aggressive behaviors, support for populist and authoritarian political positions, conspiracy belief endorsement, and detrimental intragroup dynamics, such as objectification and reduced psychological well-being. The review underscores the importance of distinguishing collective narcissism from secure ingroup identification, highlighting its uniquely defensive and compensatory mechanisms. Implications for theory and practice are discussed, with recommendations for future longitudinal and experimental studies to clarify causal pathways and inform interventions. Overall, our synthesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how collective narcissism fuels intergroup conflict and undermines societal cohesion.

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BACKGROUND

Group identification lies at the heart of social psychology, as the ways individuals define themselves through their group memberships profoundly shape their perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. As Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued—and as Brewer (1999) later expanded—these processes influence everything from intragroup cooperation and altruism to intergroup prejudice and conflict. In today's complex social landscape, understanding the diverse forms of group attachment is critical both for theoretical advancement and for addressing pressing real-world issues, such as political polarization and social discord.

Within this rich field, collective narcissism has emerged as an especially intriguing, yet concerning, form of group identification. First formally conceptualized by Golec de Zavala et al. (de Zavala et al., 2009), collective narcissism is defined as an exaggerated belief in the unrecognized greatness and uniqueness of one's ingroup. This belief is uniquely fragile; it relies heavily on external validation and is accompanied by hypersensitivity when the ingroup's image is challenged. Drawing on earlier sociological and psychoanalytic theories—such as those advanced by Shapiro & Adorno (1986) and Fromm (1973)—this construct extends the concept of individual narcissism (characterized by an excessive need for admiration) into the collective realm.

The central features of collective narcissism involve a delicate blend of grandiosity and defensiveness. Those who display collective narcissism hold an inflated view of their group's status while remaining acutely vigilant for any perceived threats to its image. This defensiveness sharply distinguishes collective narcissism from more secure forms of ingroup identification, such as genuine patriotism or ingroup satisfaction (de Zavala et al., 2009; Roccas et al., 2006), which are characterized by stable, confident attachments that do not depend on external validation.

It is important, then, to carefully distinguish collective narcissism from related constructions to fully appreciate its unique character. While it shares conceptual ground with individual narcissism, collective narcissism specifically pertains to group-based beliefs rather than self-focused traits. Empirical work confirms that collective narcissism is a stronger predictor of intergroup hostility even when controlling for individual narcissism (de Zavala et al., 2009). Similarly, although collective narcissism is related to group-based ideologies, it differs from nationalism—which often emphasizes ingroup domination and superiority—and contrasts sharply with patriotism, which typically involves genuine, affectionate pride rather than defensive grandiosity. Moreover, constructs like social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism, while sometimes correlated with collective narcissism, do not capture the specific demand for external validation and the defensive posture characteristic of this phenomenon (Altemeyer, 1998; Pratto et al., 2000).

The consequences associated with collective narcissism are far-reaching. A growing body of research demonstrates that collective narcissism is linked with numerous detrimental outcomes. Individuals and groups

high in collective narcissism often interpret ambiguous actions from outgroups as disrespect or threat, leading to aggressive responses, intergroup hostility, prejudice, and discrimination. These dynamics extend into the socio-political arena, where collective narcissism has been associated with support for populist and authoritarian leaders who promise to restore the ingroup's glory by punishing perceived adversaries. At the intragroup level, the pursuit of an idealized group image can undermine members' well-being, fostering internal mistrust and even conspiratorial thinking.

The origins of collective narcissism are as complex as its consequences. On an individual level, factors such as low or unstable self-esteem, diminished personal control, and vulnerability to negative affect predispose individuals to adopt exaggerated ingroup identities (de Zavala et al., 2009). At the same time, contextual and group-level factors—including perceived intergroup threat, historical narratives emphasizing past glory or victimhood, cultural traditions of honor, economic inequality, and politically polarizing leadership—contribute significantly to the emergence and reinforcement of collective narcissistic beliefs. In this multifaceted interplay, psychological vulnerability and environmental cues converge to create fertile ground for a defensive, validation-seeking form of group identity.

The theoretical frameworks explaining collective narcissism draw from several rich traditions, including theories of threatened egotism (Baumeister et al., 1996) and social identity and self-categorization (Worley, 2021). These perspectives suggest that when an ingroup's prestige is challenged, individuals may engage in motivated reasoning to protect and even exaggerate their group's worth. In some cases, this process can interact with phenomena like identity fusion, driving groups toward extreme behaviors such as political violence or support for non-democratic practices (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

Given the diverse antecedents and profound consequences of collective narcissism—and with over fifteen years of empirical research since its formal introduction—there is a clear need to synthesize the often-disparate findings on this topic. As the field matures, a systematic review becomes essential for identifying robust patterns, resolving inconsistencies, and pinpointing underexplored areas. By adhering to rigorous methodologies such as those outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021), the present review seeks to synthesize current research on the antecedents and outcomes of collective narcissism.

In doing so, it will identify key individual and group-level predictors, examine the wide-ranging psychological, social, and political consequences, and highlight methodological gaps that future research should address. Ultimately, this review aspires to provide a more nuanced understanding of collective narcissism—a construct that not only enriches our theoretical grasp of group dynamics but also offers critical insights into some of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary society.

RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology for this systematic review was guided by the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021). We identified relevant articles by searching Scopus database using keywords: “collective narcissism OR group narcissism OR ingroup superiority”. Our search scope was limited to articles published between January 2010 (after the publication of Golec de Zavala et al.'s [2009] foundational paper) and January 2025. Each potential study was evaluated against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, we conducted a full-text review of all eligible studies and performed a qualitative synthesis on the final set of included publications.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Guided by the research objectives, we implemented specific inclusion and exclusion criteria and strictly followed them at every stage of the review process. Only studies meeting the inclusion criteria were carried forward; the rest were excluded. Using the PICO(S) framework (Methley et al., 2014), The five main inclusion criteria are:

1. Studies must be empirical quantitative reporting primary data relevant to collective narcissism and its antecedents or consequences.
2. Studies must be involving any human population where collective narcissism is measured.
3. Studies must explicitly measure Collective Narcissism using a published, validated scale (e.g., the Collective Narcissism Scale (CNS) or its validated adaptations/translations).
4. Studies must report empirical data on the relationship between collective narcissism and at least one relevant antecedent or consequence. Psychometric studies focused solely on validating CN measures are also included if they report relevant correlations.
5. Studies needed to report primary research findings, have undergone peer review for publication, and be available in English.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings from the 24 included studies were synthesized narratively, focusing on the primary objectives:

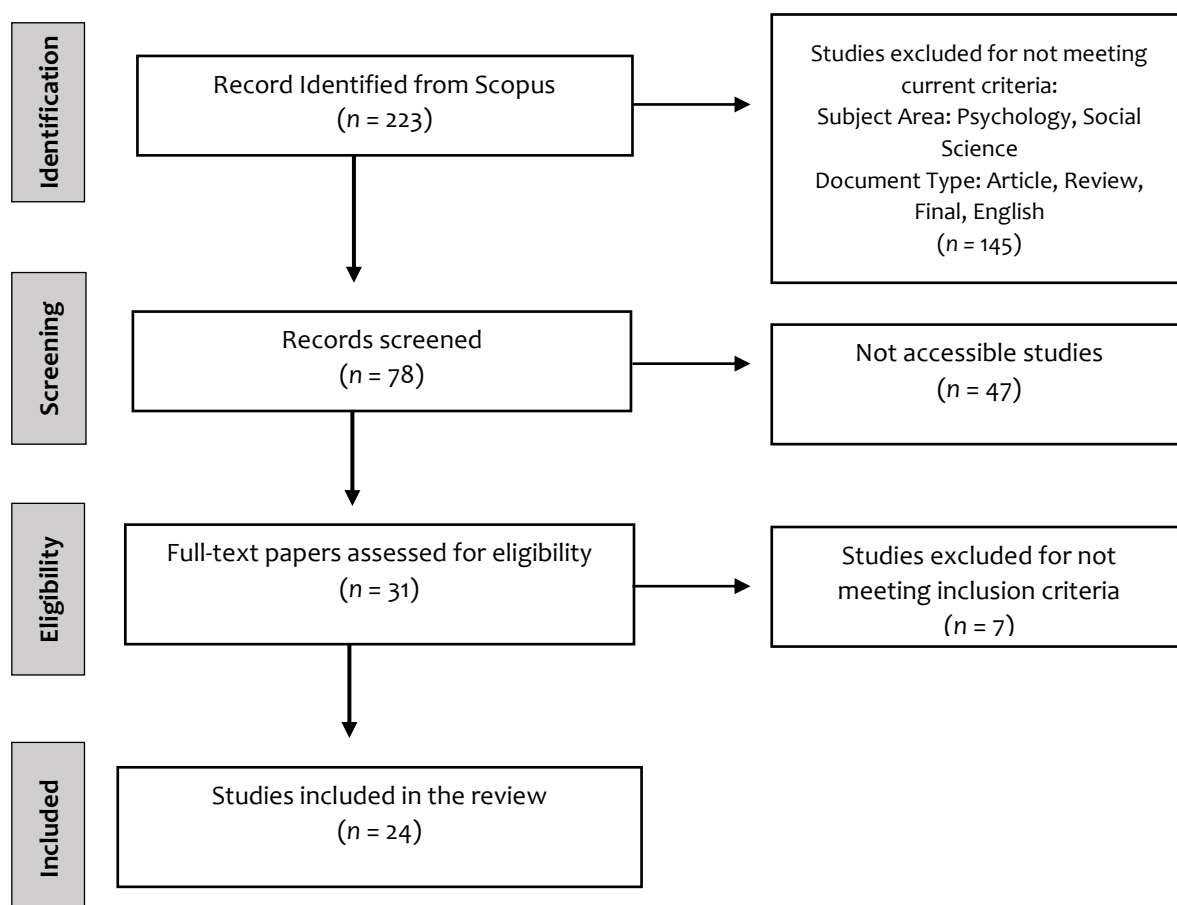


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart of the screening process.

identifying the antecedents and consequences of collective narcissism.

Antecedents of Collective Narcissism

While the primary focus of most included studies was on consequences, several investigated factors associated with higher levels of collective narcissism (see table 1):

1. *Individual-Level Factors*: Individual narcissism (both grandiose and vulnerable facets) showed positive associations with collective narcissism. Low self-esteem was also implicated, although the relationship might be complex and potentially obscured by overlap with in-group satisfaction. Need for uniqueness appeared relevant, particularly in interaction with individual narcissism. Personality traits associated with the Dark Triad in supervisors were linked to higher collective narcissism within their teams.

2. *Group/Contextual Factors*: Lower levels of globalization (economic, political, and social integration of a nation) were associated with higher average levels of national narcissism across 56 countries. Political orientation consistently emerged, with right-wing ideology generally predicting higher national narcissism across European contexts, although the strength varied between Western and Eastern Europe. Factors like reactionism and resentment were also linked. Perceived threat to the ingroup, although often studied as a mediator/moderator, likely functions as both an antecedent and consequence. Institutional trust potentially moderates the impact of conservatism (related to CN) on attitudes.

Table 1. Antecedents of Collective Narcissism

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Individual-Level Factors | Individual narcissism | Cosgrove & Murphy, (2023); de Zavala et al. (2009); Ük & Bahcekapili (2022) |
| | Low self-esteem | de Zavala et al. (2009) |
| | Need for uniqueness | Ük & Bahcekapili (2022) |
| | Personality traits associated with the Dark Triad in supervisors | Fodor et al. (2021) |
| Group/Contextual Factors | Lower levels of globalization (economic, political, and social integration of a nation) | Cichocka et al. (2023) |
| | Political orientation | Maglić et al. (2024); Sternisko et al. (2023) |
| | Reactionism and resentment | Capelos et al. (2024) |
| | Perceived threat to the ingroup | de Zavala et al. (2009, 2017); Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al. (2022) |
| | Institutional trust | Grežo et al. (2024) |

Consequences of Collective Narcissism

The included studies provided substantial evidence for a wide range of negative consequences associated with collective narcissism, often independent of related constructs like secure in-group identification/satisfaction, RWA, SDO, or individual narcissism. This finding is summarized in table 2.

1. *Intergroup Hostility and Prejudice*: Collective narcissism consistently predicted negative attitudes and hostility towards various outgroups. This included prejudice against refugees, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and general outgroup. This link was often mediated by factors like perceived threat or hostile attribution bias.
2. *Aggression and Support for Violence*: Collective narcissism was linked to support for military aggression, retaliatory intergroup hostility, tolerance of violence against women, intentions to engage in violent extremism and interpersonal violence, and support for hostile foreign policy actions, such as Putin's attacks.
3. *Political Attitudes and Behavior*: National narcissism predicted voting for Brexit, support for populist political positions, and potentially anti-democratic tendencies. It was also associated with less favorable attitudes towards supranational bodies like the European Union.
4. *Conspiracy Beliefs*: A strong and cross-nationally robust link emerged between national narcissism and belief in, and willingness to disseminate, conspiracy theories, particularly those related to COVID-19 and vaccinations.

This relationship was sometimes moderated by factors like education (exacerbating the effect) and cognitive reflection (reducing the effect).

5. *Reduced Prosociality and Solidarity*: National narcissism predicted lower solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic, contrasting with the positive effect of national in-group satisfaction. However, communal collective narcissism (focused on the group's friendliness/morality) was linked to greater willingness to help an outgroup (Italians during COVID-19), suggesting nuances based on the dimension of narcissism.
6. *Intragroup Consequences*: Collective narcissism was associated with negative intragroup dynamics, including objectification and instrumental treatment of fellow ingroup members and a readiness to sacrifice ingroup members to defend the group's image. This contrasts with the idea of CN being solely about "ingroup love."
7. *Sexism*: Collective narcissism across different identities (male, national, religious) predicted higher levels of hostile and benevolent sexism. This was sometimes mediated by factors like precarious manhood beliefs.
8. *Psychological Well-being and Emotional Profile*: Collective narcissism was associated with negative emotional profiles and lower psychological well-being compared to in-group satisfaction.
9. *Perception and Judgment*: Collective narcissism influenced perceptions of morality and group inclusion, particularly regarding individualizing moral foundations, and

moderated reactions to interventions like mindful-gratitude practice aimed at reducing prejudice.

Table 2. Consequences of Collective Narcissism

| | |
|--|--|
| Intergroup Hostility and Prejudice | de Zavala (2019); de Zavala et al. (2009, 2017); Dyduch-Hazar et al. (2019) |
| Aggression and Support for Violence | de Zavala et al. (2009, 2017); de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek (2021); Rottweiler et al. (2023); Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al. (2022) |
| Political Attitudes and Behavior | Golec de Zavala et al. (2017); Capelos et al. (2024); Maglić et al. (2024); Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al. (2022) |
| Conspiracy Beliefs | Bertin & Delouvée (2021); Cislak et al. (2021); Cosgrove & Murphy (2023); Sternisko et al. (2023); Ük & Bahcekapili (2022) |
| Reduced Prosociality and Solidarity | Federico et al. (2021); Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al. (2022) |
| Intragroup Consequences | Cichocka et al. (2022); Gronfeldt et al. (2023) |
| Sexism | de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek (2021); Lockhart et al. (2024) |
| Psychological Well-being and Emotional Profile | de Zavala (2019) |
| Perception and Judgment | Amit & Venzhik (2024); de Zavala (2024) |

DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review aimed to synthesize the empirical evidence concerning the antecedents and consequences of collective narcissism, a form of group identification characterized by an inflated belief in the ingroup's greatness coupled with a demand for external validation (de Zavala et al., 2009). The synthesis of 24 studies published since 2009 reveals a consistent and concerning pattern: collective narcissism is reliably associated with a wide array of negative intergroup and intragroup outcomes, while its roots appear linked to both individual differences and contextual factors.

Summary and Interpretation of Findings

Antecedents

The review identified several factors associated with higher levels of collective narcissism. At the individual level, traits related to individual narcissism (Cosgrove & Murphy, 2023; Ük & Bahcekapili, 2022) and potentially lower or unstable self-esteem (de Zavala et al., 2009) seem to predispose individuals towards this form of group identification, suggesting a compensatory function where personal insecurities are projected onto the group. Contextual factors also play a significant role. Notably, lower national integration into global networks (i.e., lower globalization) correlates with higher average national narcissism across diverse countries (Cichocka et al., 2023), perhaps reflecting feelings of exclusion or marginalization on

the world stage. Within societies, right-wing political orientation is a consistent correlate (Maglić et al., 2024; Sternisko et al., 2023), potentially because such ideologies often emphasize ingroup superiority and threat narratives that resonate with collective narcissistic concerns (Capelos et al., 2024). The finding that supervisor Dark Triad traits predict team-level collective narcissism (Fodor et al., 2021) further suggests that leadership styles can cultivate narcissistic group dynamics. These findings align with theories suggesting that collective narcissism can arise from both individual needs for self-enhancement and group-level dynamics involving status and threat (Cichocka, 2016; de Zavala et al., 2009).

Consequences

The most striking finding of this review is the breadth and consistency of negative outcomes linked to collective narcissism. Across various group identities (national, religious, gender) and cultural contexts, higher collective narcissism robustly predicts increased intergroup hostility, prejudice, and aggression (Brown & Marinthe, 2024; de Zavala et al., 2009, 2017; Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019; Lockhart et al., 2024; Rottweiler et al., 2023). This extends to support for real-world political violence and extremism (Brown & Marinthe, 2024; de Zavala et al., 2017; Rottweiler et al., 2024). The mechanism often appears to be a heightened sensitivity to perceived threat or insult directed at the ingroup (de Zavala et al., 2009, 2017), leading to retaliatory responses.

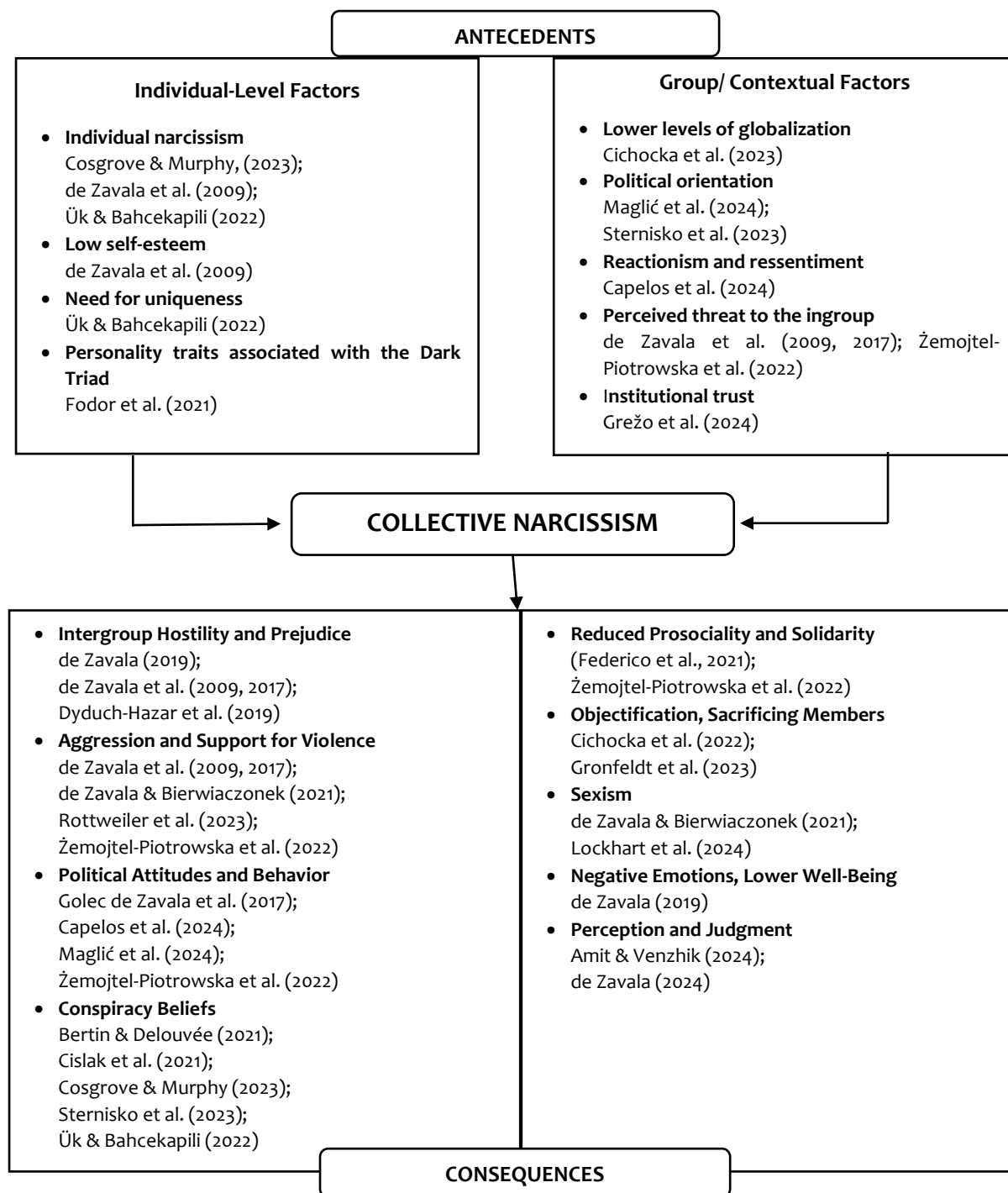


Figure 2. Antecedents and Consequences.

Furthermore, collective narcissism consistently predicts susceptibility to conspiracy theories, particularly during times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Bertin & Delouvée, 2021; Cislak et al., 2021; Cosgrove & Murphy, 2023; Sternisko et al., 2023; Ük & Bahcekapili, 2022). This likely serves a defensive function, allowing individuals to attribute negative events or the ingroup's perceived lack of recognition to the malevolent actions of external forces, thereby protecting the ingroup's idealized image (Sternisko et al., 2023).

Intriguingly, the negative consequences extend within the group itself. Collective narcissism is associated with

objectifying fellow ingroup members (Cichocka et al., 2022) and a willingness to sacrifice them to protect the group's reputation (Gronfeldt et al., 2023). This challenges the notion that collective narcissism is simply a form of intense "ingroup love," highlighting its fundamentally defensive and self-serving nature, focused on image maintenance above member welfare (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). This defensive posture also manifests as lower social solidarity (Federico et al., 2021) and poorer psychological well-being compared to more secure forms of group identification (de Zavala, 2019).

Nuances and Complexities

The review also highlighted important nuances. The distinction between collective narcissism and secure forms of ingroup identification (often termed in-group satisfaction) is critical. While often positively correlated, they predict divergent outcomes, with satisfaction linked to prosociality and well-being, and collective narcissism linked to hostility and distress (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019; Federico et al., 2021; de Zavala, 2019). Furthermore, the manifestation of collective narcissism can vary; for instance, communal collective narcissism (emphasizing the group's warmth/morality) can predict prosociality towards non-threatening outgroups, unlike agentic collective narcissism (Žemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2022). Contextual factors and individual differences moderate the expression of collective narcissism. For example, cognitive reflection can buffer against narcissistic conspiracy beliefs, whereas higher education might paradoxically enhance them (Cosgrove & Murphy, 2023). Interventions like mindful-gratitude practice show promise in weakening the link between collective narcissism and prejudice (de Zavala et al., 2024).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The synthesized findings strongly support the construct validity of collective narcissism as a distinct and consequential form of group identification (de Zavala et al., 2009). It offers a valuable lens for understanding phenomena ranging from political polarization and support for populist leaders (Capelos et al., 2024; de Zavala et al., 2017) to intergroup conflict, sexism (de Zavala & Bierwaczzonek, 2021; Lockhart et al., 2024), and the spread of misinformation (Sternisko et al., 2023). The consistent link with negative outcomes across diverse groups and contexts underscores its relevance as a social psychological construct with significant societal implications.

Practically, identifying factors that predict collective narcissism (e.g., lower globalization, potentially certain leadership styles) and factors that moderate their negative effects (e.g., cognitive reflection, specific interventions) offers potential avenues for mitigating its harmful consequences. Understanding that collective narcissism fuels threat perception and hostility can inform strategies for conflict resolution and prejudice reduction. The finding that it relates to susceptibility to conspiracy theories is particularly relevant in the current information environment, suggesting that interventions targeting critical thinking or promoting secure group identities might be beneficial (Cosgrove & Murphy, 2023; de Zavala et al., 2024).

Strengths and Limitations

This systematic review benefits significantly from its adherence to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), which promotes transparency, methodological rigor, and reproducibility in the review process. This structured approach provides a comprehensive synthesis of empirical research on the antecedents and consequences of collective narcissism published over the last 15 years. Furthermore, the inclusion of studies drawing from diverse cultural contexts

(e.g., US, UK, Poland, Turkey, multi-national datasets) and employing various methodologies (cross-sectional, longitudinal, experimental) strengthens the robustness and generalizability of the observed patterns, suggesting that the core dynamics of collective narcissism are not confined to specific populations or research designs. The convergence of findings across these varied approaches lends greater confidence to the conclusions drawn.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the conclusions drawn rely heavily on the methodological quality of the included primary studies. While the review process identified relevant empirical work, a formal, systematic quality appraisal or risk of bias assessment for each individual study was not conducted for this draft. Without such an appraisal, there is a risk that findings from studies with methodological weaknesses (e.g., poor sampling, unreliable measures) could unduly influence the overall synthesis. Second, a substantial proportion of the included studies utilized cross-sectional designs. While valuable for identifying associations, these designs inherently limit the ability to draw firm causal conclusions regarding the directionality of effects (e.g., does low self-esteem lead to collective narcissism, or vice versa, is there a reciprocal relationship?). Although the inclusion of some longitudinal and experimental studies (e.g., Cichocka et al., 2022; Federico et al., 2021; de Zavala et al., 2024) provides stronger evidence for causality in specific instances, more research employing these designs is essential to fully understand the developmental pathways and causal impacts of collective narcissism.

Third, heterogeneity exists within the included studies regarding the specific operationalization of collective narcissism (e.g., full scale vs. various short forms) and the nature of the ingroups examined (national, religious, gender, political, organizational). While the core findings appear consistent across these variations, this heterogeneity might obscure more subtle differences in how collective narcissism manifests or functions depending on the specific measure or group context. This variation makes direct comparison and quantitative synthesis more challenging. Fourth, as with any literature review relying primarily on published research, the potential for publication bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Studies reporting statistically significant findings are generally more likely to be published than those with null or non-significant results. Although efforts were made to identify relevant studies through multiple search strategies, an over-representation of significant findings in the available literature could lead to an overestimation of the strength or consistency of the reported associations.

Finally, the synthesis presented here is narrative. While providing a rich overview, a narrative synthesis involves subjective interpretation when integrating findings. A quantitative meta-analysis, where feasible for specific relationships with sufficient homogenous data, could offer more precise estimates of average effect sizes and allow for statistical exploration of heterogeneity across studies, providing a complementary perspective to the narrative summary.

Future Research Directions

Based on the synthesized evidence and identified limitations, several avenues for future research emerge:

1. **Causality and Mechanisms:** More longitudinal and experimental research is needed to establish causal relationships and further elucidate the psychological mechanisms (e.g., specific emotion regulation deficits, cognitive biases like hostile attribution) linking collective narcissism to its consequences.
2. **Antecedents:** Research should delve deeper into the developmental origins and contextual triggers of collective narcissism. How do societal changes, historical narratives, specific political rhetoric, or economic conditions foster their emergence? Longitudinal studies tracking individuals and groups over time would be particularly valuable.
3. **Cross-Cultural Variation:** While the review included studies from diverse contexts, further research is needed to explore cultural nuances in the expression and consequences of collective narcissism, particularly in non-Western, non-democratic societies. Does the link with political orientation hold universally (Maglić et al., 2024)? Are the consequences uniformly negative?
4. **Intragroup Dynamics:** The finding that collective narcissism harms intragroup relations (Cichocka et al., 2022; Gronfeldt et al., 2023) warrants further investigation. How does it affect group cohesion, decision-making, and long-term group functioning?
5. **Interventions:** Building on initial promising results (de Zavala et al., 2024), more research should focus on developing and rigorously testing interventions designed to reduce collective narcissism or mitigate its negative effects, perhaps by fostering secure group identification or enhancing critical thinking skills (Cosgrove & Murphy, 2023).
6. **Measurement:** Continued refinement and validation of collective narcissism measures, including its agentic and communal facets (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2022), across different group types and cultures is important.

CONCLUSION

Collective narcissism represents a significant, albeit often detrimental, way individuals relate to their social groups. This systematic review confirms its robust association with a wide range of negative outcomes, including intergroup hostility, prejudice, political aggression, conspiracy belief endorsement, and even negative intragroup dynamics. Rooted in a defensive need for ingroup validation, it stands in contrast to more secure forms of group identification. Understanding the antecedents, consequences, and underlying mechanisms of collective narcissism is crucial for addressing pressing societal challenges related to group conflict, political extremism, and the erosion of social trust. Future research focusing on causal pathways, contextual variability, and effective interventions holds significant promise for mitigating the "bad and the ugly" consequences of this potent form of group identification.

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