Narcissism Predicts Support for Hierarchy (At Least When Narcissists Think They Can Rise to the Top)

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Abstract

Five studies tested the relationship between narcissism and support for hierarchy. Narcissism was associated with endorsing group-based hierarchy, income inequality, and hierarchy in business (Studies 1a–1b) and with liking organizations with a hierarchical structure (Studies 2a–2b). Analyses suggested that more narcissistic participants' preference for a hierarchy may have been due at least partly to their current high standing in that hierarchy (Studies 1a–1b) or their expectation that they will rise in rank (Studies 2a–2b). When participants learned about an organization where it was possible or impossible to rise in rank, there was a positive relationship between narcissism and support for hierarchy if it was possible to rise in rank, whereas the same relationship was negative if it was not possible to rise in rank (Study 3). These studies provide evidence consistent with the idea that narcissistic individuals prefer hierarchies because they are or think they will be on the top.

Keywords

narcissism, social hierarchy, social rank, self-enhancement

Hierarchies are social systems in which there is "an implicit or explicit rank order of individuals or groups with respect to a valued social dimension" (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 354). They are common to most cultures, organizations, and groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and much research has investigated why hierarchies are so prevalent. One reason for their prevalence might be the benefits they provide at the individual and group levels. Hierarchical relationships are easier to learn and understand than relationships that are less hierarchical (Zitek & Tiedens, 2012), the structure of hierarchies helps satisfy people's need for control (Friesen, Kay, Eibach, & Galinsky, 2014), and groups with more hierarchical differentiation perform better on interdependent tasks (e.g., Halevy, Chou, Galinsky, & Murnighan, 2012). But hierarchies are neither beneficial in all situations (e.g., Bloom, 1999) nor do they benefit everyone equally. Hierarchies provide many more advantages for higher ranking people than for lower ranking people. Depending on the basis of the hierarchy, higher ranking members might have more power, status, dominance, and control, among other tangible and psychological benefits (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Consistent with this, research has shown that higher ranking group members support group-based hierarchy more than lower ranking group members do (Lee, Pratto, & Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, it is often the lower ranking members who try to flatten the hierarchy, such as in the Occupy Wall Street movement (Berrett, 2011), unless the lower ranking members believe that they will be able to move up in rank (Jaime-Castillo, 2008).

Thus, people who are either currently on the top of the hierarchy or who believe that they will rise to the top are more likely to favor hierarchical organization. It would follow that narcissists are a particular group of people who might support hierarchy. Narcissism is a personality characteristic involving exaggerated self-worth. Narcissists have very positive and inflated self-views, especially in agentic domains, and they are success oriented (Campbell & Foster, 2007). People who score high on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), the most commonly used measure of narcissism in the general population, tend to report some combination of entitlement, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, self-sufficiency, superiority, vanity, and a desire for authority.

We believe that narcissists are likely to support hierarchy because they either currently have high ranks or think they will eventually rise to high ranks. There is some evidence already that people who have higher ranks (e.g., more status and power) are more likely to be narcissistic. For example, men are more narcissistic than women (Grijalva et al., 2015), and people from

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a higher social class are more narcissistic than lower-class individuals (Piff, 2014). Furthermore, narcissism is related to some measures of rank in the workplace such as salary (Spurk, Keller, & Hirschi, 2015) and management level (Wille, De Fruyt, & De Clercq, 2013). Similarly, narcissists appear in many prominent leadership roles (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), and narcissism is related to leadership emergence in groups (Brunell et al., 2008; Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011). And it seems that even if narcissists do not already hold a high rank, they will be more likely than non-narcissists to believe they will rise in rank. Narcissists believe that they are better than others in various status-relevant domains (e.g., Bleske-Rechek, Remiker, & Baker, 2008; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002), so if they start a new job, they will expect to outperform others and therefore rise more quickly in rank.

Limited prior evidence suggests that narcissists support at least some kinds of hierarchies. Specifically, narcissism has been shown to be correlated with social dominance orientation (SDO), or the preference for group-based hierarchy (Carnahan & McFarland, 2007; Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009). The goals of this article are (1) to demonstrate that narcissism is related to a range of measures of support for hierarchy, not only SDO and—our more novel contribution—(2) to test a potential mechanism explaining narcissists' preference for hierarchy, namely, that they are currently high in rank or believe they will outperform others and attain a high rank. This research adds to the literatures on how personality relates to preference for social structure and why people like and perpetuate hierarchies. Furthermore, support for the hypothesized mechanism would have important implications for the types of individuals that organizations may attract when they emphasize their hierarchical structures and the likelihood of vertical mobility in those structures. In Studies 1a–1b, we test the hypothesis that narcissism is associated with hierarchy-relevant ideologies and preferences and that this association may be explained by narcissists' higher ranks. In Studies 2a–3, we test the hypothesis that narcissists prefer a hierarchically structured organization more than less narcissistic people and that this may be due to narcissists' belief that they will rise in the organization's hierarchy. In this article, we report all measures we included and the results from all of our planned analyses.

Study 1a

The goal of this first study was to determine whether more narcissistic people (hereafter *narcissists* for brevity, although few of our participants would qualify as pathological narcissists) would be more likely to endorse statements about the value, importance, and naturalness of hierarchy. We presented participants with measures of SDO (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), or the preference for group-based hierarchy, and economic system justification (ESJ; Jost & Thompson, 2000), or the tendency to justify and legitimize the unequal distribution of wealth. SDO and ESJ are important indicators of support for hierarchy and are associated with other hierarchy-maintaining attitudes and behaviors such as desiring to work in hierarchy-enhancing professions (Pratto et al., 1994), supporting policies that contribute to inequality (Pratto et al., 1994), and favoring the high-status group (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). To determine whether participants' support for group-based hierarchy and economic inequality may be due to membership in higher ranking groups already, we asked participants to report their gender and socioeconomic status (SES).

Method

Participants

Two hundred and one Mechanical Turk (MTurk) users (99 men, 102 women, $M_{age} = 35.5$) completed this 9-min study for 50 cents. We chose a sample size of 200 to ensure high power. This sample size (and all others in this article) was predetermined (although sometimes slightly more people ended up participating than our posted number).

Procedure

Participants first completed the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988). They answered 40 forced-choice questions by selecting which of two statements better described them. For example, they chose between "I will be a success" and "I am not too concerned about success." The total number of more narcissistic items selected was taken as a measure of narcissism. Next, they responded to the 16-item SDO Scale (Pratto et al., 1994), in which they reported their feelings about statements such as "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups" (1 = *very negative*, 7 = *very positive*). Then they filled out the 10-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) by indicating whether certain characteristics (sympathetic and warm) described them (1 = *strong disagreement*, 7 = *strong agreement*). This allowed us to examine extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience, personality characteristics that are associated with narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Then participants responded to a measure of ESJ (Jost & Thompson, 2000), which includes items such as "Equal distribution of resources is unnatural" (1 = *strong disagreement*, 7 = *strong agreement*).[1]

Finally, participants were asked to report demographics, including gender and self-perceived SES, represented by the rung on a 10-rung ladder that corresponds to how well off they are compared to others (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000).[2] We were interested in whether controlling for gender and SES would weaken the relationships between narcissism and SDO/ESJ because group inequality and income inequality might seem more acceptable and natural to people who are male and high SES, as these people benefit from being on top of these hierarchies.

Mixed into the ESJ Scale, we included an attention check that asked participants to enter a rating of seven for an item. In the subsequent analyses, we used data only from participants who correctly answered this question (94%), but the results were similar if we used everyone.[3]

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Cronbach's αs (Shown in Bold on the Diagonal) for Study 1a.

Measure	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Narcissism	11.1 (7.75)	**.90**									
2. Extroversion	3.21 (1.65)	.42*	**.79**								
3. Agreeableness	5.33 (1.28)	−.23*	.15*	**.57**							
4. Conscientiousness	5.40 (1.26)	.08	.13	.21*	**.63**						
5. Emotional stability	4.92 (1.44)	.16*	.22*	.24*	.41*	**.78**					
6. Openness to experience	5.05 (1.19)	.23*	.28*	.18*	.15*	.25*	**.43**				
7. Gender (m = 1, f = 0)	—	.22*	−.00	−.29*	−.09	.14	.01	—			
8. Perceived SES	4.47 (1.70)	.15*	.11	−.05	.15*	.24*	.03	.00	—		
9. SDO	2.36 (1.10)	.32*	−.02	−.37*	−.12	−.02	−.12	.27*	.24*	**.95**	
10. ESJ	3.34 (0.96)	.27*	.03	−.25*	.03	.15*	−.17*	.22*	.30*	.71*	**.88**

Note. N = 189. SES = socioeconomic status; SDO = social dominance orientation; ESJ = economic system justification.
*p < .05.

Table 2. Regression Coefficients for Models Predicting SDO From Narcissism Alone and Then Narcissism, Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0), and SES (Study 1a).

Predictor	b [95% CI]	β	t	p	b [95% CI]	β	t	p
Narcissism	.046 [.027, .065]	.324	4.68	.000	.035 [.016, .054]	.247	3.60	.000
Gender	—	—	—	—	.471 [.177, .765]	.215	3.16	.002
SES	—	—	—	—	.132 [.046, .218]	.204	3.04	.003

Note. N = 189. SDO = social dominance orientation; SES = socioeconomic status; CI = confidence interval.

Table 3. Regression Coefficients for Models Predicting ESJ From Narcissism Alone and Then Narcissism, Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0), and SES (Study 1a).

Predictor	b [95% CI]	β	t	p	b [95% CI]	β	t	p
Narcissism	.033 [.016, .050]	.268	3.80	.000	.023 [.007, .040]	.190	2.74	.007
Gender	—	—	—	—	.338 [.080, .597]	.177	2.58	.011
SES	—	—	—	—	.153 [.077, .228]	.271	4.00	.000

Note. N = 189. ESJ = economic system justification; SES = socioeconomic status; CI = confidence interval.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the measures. As predicted, narcissism was significantly correlated with SDO and ESJ, meaning that more narcissistic people were more likely to support group-based hierarchy and economic inequality. Also as predicted, narcissism was significantly correlated with gender and SES, meaning that more narcissistic people ranked higher in these hierarchies.[4] We then considered how people's current group memberships might explain the relationship between narcissism and support for hierarchy. As shown in Table 2, when SDO was predicted from narcissism, gender, and SES, the coefficients for all three predictors were significant, and the coefficient for narcissism dropped significantly from .046 when it was the sole predictor to .035 when gender and SES were included (95% confidence interval [CI] for the drop [.005, .020]).[5] Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, when ESJ was predicted from narcissism, gender, and SES, the coefficients for all three predictors were significant, and the coefficient for narcissism dropped significantly from .033 when it was the sole

predictor to .023 when gender and SES were included (95% CI for the drop [.004, .019]).

This study shows that narcissists endorse the naturalness and value of hierarchy. The relationships between narcissism and SDO and narcissism and ESJ weakened when gender and SES were added to the models, consistent with the idea that narcissists' support for hierarchy was due partly to their current higher ranks. Agreeableness was negatively correlated with SDO and ESJ, but all narcissism results held when controlling for agreeableness. Thus, while the associations between narcissism and SDO/ESJ might have been due in part to narcissists' lower agreeableness, agreeableness does not fully explain the associations (nor does any other Big 5 personality characteristic).

Study 1b

In Study 1b, our goal was to examine a different type of support for hierarchy—preferring a hierarchically organized business. We tested whether narcissists were more likely to report that

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Cronbach's αs (Shown in Bold on the Diagonal) for Study 1b.

Measure	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Narcissism	12.3 (8.20)	**.90**				
2. Rank in organization	3.30 (1.59)	.19*	—			
3. Gender (m = 1, f = 0)	—	.21*	.05	—		
4. Perceived SES	4.73 (1.80)	.12*	.35*	−.04	—	
5. Support for hierarchy in business	4.78 (0.94)	.14*	.16*	.04	.10	**.72**

Note. N = 301. The correlations with the rank variable involve 192 participants. SES = socioeconomic status.
*p < .05.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients for Models Predicting Support for Hierarchy in Business From Narcissism Alone and Then Narcissism and Current Perceived Rank (Study 1b).

Predictor	b [95% CI]	β	t	p	b [95% CI]	β	t	p
Narcissism	.019 [.003, .035]	.164	2.30	.023	.016 [.000, .032]	.139	1.92	.056
Rank	—	—	—	—	.083 [−.006, .171]	.134	1.85	.066

Note. N = 192. The results in this table are based on people who currently work in an organization. CI = confidence interval.

they approved of hierarchy in businesses, and if so, whether this may be due to their perceiving themselves as currently possessing higher rank in their organizations.

Method

Participants

Three hundred and one MTurk users (140 men, 159 women, 2 other, M_{age} = 33.2) completed this 4-min study for 40 cents.[6] We increased the sample size from Study 1 because we wanted to examine how current organizational rank related to support for hierarchy, and we knew that only about two thirds of MTurk participants currently worked in organizations.

Procedure

Participants first completed the NPI. Then they completed a scale designed by Friesen and colleagues (2014) to measure support for hierarchy in business. An example item is "In a business, it's important for one person to make final decisions" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants then reported demographics. Finally, participants indicated whether they currently worked in an organization as an employee or a volunteer. If they did, they rated their position in the organization's hierarchy from 1= *at the very bottom (I take directions from others and don't manage anyone)* to 7 = *at the very top (I don't take directions from anyone and I manage others)*.

Results and Discussion

Table 4 displays descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the measures. As predicted, there was a significant, positive correlation between narcissism and support for hierarchy in business. Furthermore, for people who currently worked in an organization (64%), narcissism and current perceived rank in the hierarchy were positively correlated, as expected based

on past research (Wille et al., 2013). As shown in Table 5, when support for hierarchy was predicted by both current perceived rank and narcissism, the coefficient for narcissism was reduced from .019 to .016 (95% CI for the drop [−.0001, .0085], 90% CI [.0003, .0076]). Thus, this study shows that narcissists support hierarchy in business, and there is some (albeit marginal) evidence that this may be due to their current higher organizational rank.

Study 2a

Studies 1a and 1b showed that narcissists were more likely to endorse hierarchy-related ideologies and preferences across several measures and that this may be due to their current high ranks (or at least, perceived high ranks). The goals of Study 2a were to test whether narcissists would support a hierarchy that they did not yet have a high rank in and to test whether their support for this hierarchy would be related to their belief that they would rise in it. We asked participants to complete a test of academic skills and then rate how they thought they performed compared to others and how likely they would be to rise in rank in a hierarchy that is based on the test. Past research suggests that narcissists often overrate their skills, abilities, and performances (Campbell et al., 2002; Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994; John & Robins, 1994), so we predicted that narcissists would believe themselves to be more likely to rise in the hierarchy and that this belief would be related to their support for hierarchy.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and three MTurk users (119 men, 82 women, 1 other, 1 unreported, M_{age} = 35.4) completed this 9-min study for 50 cents.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Cronbach's αs (Shown in Bold on the Diagonal) for Study 2a.

Measure	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Narcissism	12.7 (8.67)	**.91**						
2. True performance	5.73 (1.77)	−.14*	—					
3. Guessed performance	6.17 (1.89)	.10	.55*	—				
4. Gender (m = 1, f = 0)	—	.13	−.08	.12	—			
5. Perceived SES	4.77 (1.84)	.29*	.10	.18*	−.07	—		
6. Perceived likelihood of rising	4.46 (1.12)	.36*	.38	.64*	.11	.40*	**.82**	
7. Support for hierarchy	4.14 (1.26)	.22*	.08	.26*	.13	.08	.40*	**.76**

Note. N = 203. SES = socioeconomic status.
*p < .05.

Table 7. Regression Coefficients for Models Predicting Support for Hierarchy From Narcissism Alone and Then Narcissism and Perceived Likelihood of Rising in Rank (Study 2a).

Predictor	b [95% CI]	β	t	p	b [95% CI]	β	t	p
Narcissism	.032 [.012, .051]	.218	3.17	.002	.013 [−.007, .033]	.088	1.27	.207
Likelihood of rising	—	—	—	—	.411 [.257, .564]	.366	5.29	.000

Note. N = 203. CI = confidence interval.

Procedure

Participants first completed the NPI. Then they were told they would be completing a short test of academic skills. They had unlimited time to answer nine challenging SAT items (three sentence completion, three improving sentences, and three mathematics) obtained from a *Washington Post* article (N. Anderson, 2014). When they were finished, they guessed how many questions they had gotten correct and rated how they thought they performed in comparison to others (1 = *much worse than most other people*, 7 = *much better than most other people*). Then they were asked to imagine how quickly they would rise in rank compared to others as an employee in an organization, if promotions were based on performance on this test (1 = *much slower than most other people*, 7 = *much faster than most other people*). We took the mean of the latter 2 items as a measure of perceived likelihood of rising in rank.

Next, participants read that there were many different ranks of employees in the organization, varying widely in status and power. Participants rated how much they liked this aspect of the organization's structure and how much they would want to be a part of this organization where people are ranked based on their performance on the test (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The mean of these 2 items was taken as a measure of support for hierarchy. Finally, participants reported demographics.

Results and Discussion

Table 6 displays descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the measures. As predicted, narcissism, perceived likelihood of rising in rank, and support for hierarchy were all significantly correlated with each other. Furthermore, as shown in Table 7, when support for hierarchy was predicted from both narcissism and perceived likelihood of rising in rank, narcissism was not

significant but perceived likelihood of rising in rank was. The coefficient for narcissism dropped from .032 to .013 when perceived likelihood of rising was added to the model, a significant difference (95% CI for the drop [.011, .030]). Although our cross-sectional correlational design cannot provide strong evidence of causality, this pattern of results is consistent with our hypothesis that narcissists support hierarchy because they believe they are likely to rise in rank. Interestingly, narcissists' belief in their likelihood of rising might be misguided, as they did not perform better than others on the test of academic skills. As shown in Table 6, narcissism was negatively correlated with actual performance on the SAT items.

Study 2b

The goal of Study 2b was to replicate the results of Study 2a with different measures. We had participants imagine that they had started in an entry-level position at a company. They answered questions about their ability to rise in rank and their preference for a hierarchical structure. We predicted that narcissists would like a hierarchical structure and would expect to outperform others and rise in rank.

Method

Participants

Two hundred MTurk users (94 men, 105 women, 1 other, M_{age} = 33.6) completed this 4-min study for 40 cents.[7]

Procedure

Participants first completed the NPI. Then they were asked to imagine that they recently started working in an entry-level position at a new company. They rated how likely they would

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Cronbach's αs (Shown in Bold on the Diagonal) for Study 2b.

Measure	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Narcissism	12.4 (8.68)	**.92**				
2. Gender (m = 1, f = 0)	—	.24*	—			
3. Perceived SES	4.75 (1.66)	.18*	−.02	—		
4. Perceived likelihood of rising	4.84 (1.23)	.42*	.21*	.28*	**.81**	
5. Support for hierarchy	4.20 (0.95)	.23*	.26*	.12	.44*	**.72**

Note. N = 200. SES = socioeconomic status.
*p < .05.

Table 9. Regression Coefficients for Models Predicting Support for Hierarchy From Narcissism Alone and Then Narcissism and Perceived Likelihood of Rising in Rank (Study 2b).

Predictor	b [95% CI]	β	t	p	b [95% CI]	β	t	p
Narcissism	.025 [.010, .040]	.229	3.32	.001	.006 [−.009, .021]	.055	0.78	.436
Likelihood of rising	—	—	—	—	.320 [.212, .427]	.414	5.87	.000

Note. N = 200. CI = confidence interval.

be to perform better than other employees and to rise quickly in rank (1 = *not at all likely*, 7 = *very likely*). We took the mean of these 2 items as a measure of perceived likelihood of rising in rank. Participants then rated how much they would like the structure of the company (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) if it had each of six characteristics of hierarchy: Some people had much more power than others, there were many possible different ranks that employees could have, all employees had a similar amount of influence over company decisions (reversed), some people directed others, some people got paid much more than others, and there were no bosses (reversed). We took the mean of these 6 ratings as our measure of support for hierarchy. Finally, participants reported demographics.

Results and Discussion

As predicted, narcissism, perceived likelihood of rising in rank, and support for hierarchy were all significantly correlated with each other (see Table 8 for intercorrelations and descriptive statistics). Furthermore, as shown in Table 9, when support for hierarchy was predicted from both narcissism and perceived likelihood of rising in rank, narcissism was not significant but perceived likelihood of rising in rank was. The coefficient for narcissism dropped from .025 to .006 when perceived likelihood of rising was added to the model, a significant difference (95% CI for the drop [.011, .030]). As in the previous study, our cross-sectional correlational design cannot provide strong evidence of causality, but this pattern of results is consistent with our hypothesis that narcissists want a hierarchically structured organization, even when they start in an entry-level position, because they believe they are likely to rise in rank.

Study 3

Studies 2a and 2b provided evidence that perceived likelihood of rising in rank may explain the relationship between

narcissism and support for hierarchy. In Study 3, we used a different method to test our hypothesis that narcissistic individuals support hierarchy because they believe they will rise in rank. Specifically, we manipulated the possibility that a person could rise in a particular hierarchy. If narcissists support hierarchy solely because they think they will end up on top (vs. some other reason such as liking the order it provides), then they should not like a hierarchy where it is impossible to rise. Therefore, we predicted that the relationship between narcissism and support for hierarchy would hold only when people thought it was possible to rise in rank.

Method

Participants

Four hundred and two MTurk users (212 men, 189 women, 1 other, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.7$) completed this 5-min study for 40 cents. We doubled the sample size from our standard 200 because we had two conditions and thus two narcissism–hierarchy relationships to test.

Procedure

Participants first completed the NPI. Then they read the following:

> Imagine that you have been recruited to work at a new organization. You would start in a mid-level position, and it is a good job. You would get paid pretty well and be able to do interesting work. The organization has a hierarchy where the people in the highest ranks get paid more, are more respected by others, and have more power and influence over the company decisions than the people in the lower ranks.

In the *can-rise* condition, participants then read, "If you perform well, you might be able to rise to the top of the hierarchy

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Cronbach's αs (Shown in Bold on the Diagonal) for Study 3.

Measure	M (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Narcissism	12.4 (8.52)	**.91**			
2. Gender (m = 1, f = 0)	—	.27*	—		
3. Perceived SES	4.77 (1.69)	.28*	.02	—	
4. Support for hierarchy	4.25 (1.55)	.03	−.00	.09	**.86**

Note. N = 368. This correlation matrix includes both conditions, so there is no overall correlation between narcissism and support for hierarchy. SES = socio-economic status.
*p < .05.

Table 11. Regression Coefficients for a Model Predicting Support for Hierarchy From Narcissism, Condition (1 = *Can Rise*, −1 = *Cannot Rise*), and Their Interaction, and the Simple Slopes (Study 3).

Predictor	b [95% CI]	β	t	p
Narcissism	.004 [−.012, .020]	.022	0.50	.618
Condition	.375 [.133, .616]	.242	3.05	.002
Narcissism × Condition interaction	.030 [.014, .046]	.295	3.71	.000
Simple slope for can-rise condition	.034 [.011, .058]	.190	2.94	.004
Simple slope for cannot-rise condition	−.026 [−.049, −.004]	−.145	−2.31	.022

Note. N = 368. CI = confidence interval.

eventually because some of the highest ranking people will be retiring soon.'' In the *cannot-rise* condition, participants instead read, ''Even if you perform well, you won't be able to rise to the top of the hierarchy because none of the highest ranking people will be leaving the organization any time soon.'' Next, all participants answered three yes/no questions to ensure they read the scenario carefully, including an attention check asking whether they could rise or not. Then they rated how much they liked the organization's structure and how much they wanted to take the job (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The mean of these 2 ratings was used as our measure of support for hierarchy. Finally, participants reported demographics. In our analyses, we included data only from participants who correctly answered the attention check question (92%),[8] but the results were similar if we used everyone.[9]

Results and Discussion

Table 10 displays descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for measures in this study across conditions. A regression analysis examining support for hierarchy as predicted by condition, narcissism, and their interaction revealed a significant main effect of condition, no main effect of narcissism, and a significant interaction (see Table 11). A simple slopes analysis showed that in the can-rise condition, there was a positive relationship between narcissism and support for hierarchy. However, in the cannot-rise condition, there was a negative relationship between narcissism and support for hierarchy. Thus, narcissists

support a hierarchy more when it is possible to rise in the hierarchy. When they cannot rise in the hierarchy, they actually support it less than non-narcissistic people do. In other words, as narcissism increases, the degree to which people favor the organization where it is possible to rise (vs. impossible to rise) increases.

Dimensions of Narcissism

A prior factor analysis revealed three dimensions of narcissism: leadership/authority, grandiose exhibitionism, and entitlement/exploitativeness (Ackerman et al., 2011). Leadership/authority is associated with adaptive tendencies, and the other two are associated with maladaptive tendencies. We disaggregate our results into these dimensions in the Supplemental Analyses. Each dimension was correlated with at least some measures of support for hierarchy, but the leadership/authority dimension produced the results most consistent with our hypotheses. This provides extra evidence that the desire for high ranks is what drives the effects we document. Given that all three dimensions correlated with some of our key measures, we are not able to say conclusively whether favoring a hierarchy due to current or future high ranks is adaptive or maladaptive.

General Discussion

In five studies, narcissism was positively correlated with support for hierarchy. Specifically, narcissists were more likely to score high on measures of SDO and ESJ (Study 1a) and like businesses or organizations that were structured hierarchically (Studies 1b–3). It appeared that their support for hierarchy was due at least partly to either their current high ranks (Studies 1a–1b) or their belief that they would soon attain a high rank (Studies 2a–3).

One important question is the veridicality of narcissists' perception that they are likely to rise in a hierarchy. Narcissists do hold high ranks in society (e.g., Piff, 2014), but it seems they are probably overestimating their ability to rise (see Study 2a). Past research has shown that narcissism is related to leadership emergence in groups, and this seems to be due to narcissists' extroversion, authoritativeness, and confidence (e.g., Brunell et al., 2008; Nevicka et al., 2011). Although having confidence in one's skills and abilities and behaving in ways that exude competence can lead a person to attain high ranks in groups (C. Anderson & Kilduff, 2009), in the long-run, actual abilities and contributions to the group matter (Bendersky & Shah, 2013), and narcissists might not have any more real ability. Narcissists did not perform better on the test of academic skills in Study 2a, and other research has revealed that highly narcissistic people are no more skilled than others in characteristics such as creativity (Goncalo, Flynn, & Kim, 2010), leadership ability (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015), and intelligence (Gabriel et al., 1994).

Regardless of whether narcissists will actually rise in rank faster than other people, their belief in their ability to rise is related to their support for hierarchy. When narcissists are

directly told that they will not be able to rise in a hierarchy, they support this hierarchy less than non-narcissistic people do. This demonstrates that narcissists do not just support hierarchy because they like the order it might provide; instead, they like the idea of being on the top. Of course, people are often not given such explicit information about their likelihood of rising in real-world settings, and therefore, narcissists will likely support most hierarchies and contribute to their perpetuation.

A few key limitations of our studies are worth noting. First, we did not adduce direct evidence that narcissism causes people to attain high ranks or believe they are likely to do so, which in turn causes people to support hierarchy. Second, we do not know the degree to which our results are specific to narcissism; future research should compare the effects of narcissism to those of related constructs, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, and agency. We suspect that people who believe their skills provide value to the group would want a high rank (see C. Anderson, Willer, Kilduff, & Brown, 2012) and therefore support hierarchy, but narcissists are probably more likely to believe they have valuable skills to begin with. Third, the results of Study 2a provided only a very limited test of whether narcissists overestimate their likelihood of rising in hierarchies. Future research could track the emergence of hierarchy in groups to bolster the case that more narcissistic individuals overestimate their likelihood of attaining high rank, particularly over longer time periods, during which actual abilities and complex interpersonal dynamics may begin to matter more than a veneer of confidence and authoritativeness.

In conclusion, narcissists support a variety of hierarchies, and this seems to be due to the advantages narcissists accrue from the high ranks that they currently possess or think they will eventually possess. This research is consistent with other studies that show that people who already rank highly in a hierarchy support it (Lee et al., 2011) and provides important information about how the perceived likelihood of rising in a hierarchy relates to hierarchy support (see also Jaime-Castillo, 2008). Finally, this research suggests that the image organizations present to prospective employees could affect the personalities they attract. A hierarchical organization, especially one that advertises the possibility of upward mobility in the hierarchy, might end up with a disproportionate number of applications from narcissists, even for an entry-level position, because narcissists have an inflated view of their abilities—and hence their likelihood of rising to the top of the hierarchy.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. We also asked participants to rate the importance of the 10 value types from the Schwartz Value Survey (1994). Narcissism was correlated with power and achievement, values considered hierarchy related in other research (Van Berkel, Crandall, Eidelman, & Blanchar, 2015). The results are described in the Supplemental Analyses.

2. The other demographics we asked participants to report in our studies were race/ethnicity, age, political views, and education, but we focus on gender and socioeconomic status (SES) throughout the article because these demographics have been shown to correlate with narcissism and support for hierarchy in other research. We sometimes asked about annual personal and household income, which we originally wanted to analyze, but many participants skipped these questions or provided answers that might not have been on the correct scale, so we do not consider these items further.

3. The relationship between narcissism and SES was not significant, $r(199) = .12$, $p = .096$, when all data were analyzed. All other results were the same with or without the exclusions.

4. White individuals were not significantly higher in narcissism in any of our studies, consistent with past research (Zeigler-Hill & Wallace, 2011). Thus, race does not follow the same pattern as gender and SES.

5. In this article, we used bias-corrected nonparametric bootstrap confidence intervals with 10,000 iterations to test the significance of the difference between the total effect and direct effect (see Hayes, 2013).

6. An additional participant took the survey but did not complete the entire Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) and was therefore excluded from the analyses.

7. An additional participant took the survey but did not complete the entire NPI and was therefore excluded from the analyses.

8. There was a correlation between narcissism and getting the attention check item wrong in the cannot-rise condition, $r(199) = .145$, $p = .040$, but not in the can-rise condition, $r(199) = .035$, $p = .621$. This suggests that narcissists might also be more likely to delude themselves into thinking that they can rise in rank even when it is not possible.

9. The simple slope in the cannot-rise condition was not significant ($b = -.017$, $p = .136$) when all data were analyzed. All other results were the same with or without the exclusions.

Supplemental Material

The online data supplements are available at http://spp.sagepub.com/supplemental

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