

## ABSTRACT

### The Relationship of Pathological Narcissism to Empathic Functioning

by

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This study examined the relationship of pathological (grandiose and vulnerable) expressions of narcissism to empathic functioning by comparing performance-based and self-report assessments of empathy. Current research suggests that narcissism is related to more impairments in affective than cognitive empathy, and that narcissistic individuals over-report their empathic capabilities overall on self-report measures because empathy is a socially-desirable trait, and they may wish to appear more empathic in order to manage the positive impression of others. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in an undergraduate college sample of eighty-nine participants using a cross-sectional study design. It was hypothesized that self-reported pathological (grandiose and vulnerable) narcissism would be uniquely associated with better cognitive and poorer affective empathy on two performance-based measures of empathy rather than to one self-report assessment of empathy when controlling for social desirability.

Results: Better cognitive empathy on one performance-based task of empathy was uniquely related to vulnerable narcissism rather than to poorer self-reported cognitive empathy when controlling for social desirability. There were aspects to the results that were contrary to expectations. First, poorer (as opposed to better) self-reported cognitive empathy was associated with vulnerable narcissism, and this association was explained

by lower rather than higher social desirability. Second, while better cognitive empathy on one performance-based task of empathy was uniquely related to vulnerable narcissism as predicted, this relationship was represented only by the negative stimuli score (for negative emotional faces only) of the performance-based task rather than to its global score. Post hoc analyses determined that psychopathological (e.g. depression symptoms, general psychiatric symptoms, and borderline personality disorder features) and demographic (e.g. gender) scores did not account for the association between vulnerable narcissism and better cognitive empathy for negative stimuli only on a performance-based task of empathy.