

## RESEARCH REPORT

# How Do Leaders React When Treated Unfairly? Leader Narcissism and Self-Interested Behavior in Response to Unfair Treatment

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In this article we employ a trait activation framework to examine how unfairness perceptions influence narcissistic leaders' self-interested behavior, and the downstream implications of these effects for employees' pro-social and voice behaviors. Specifically, we propose that narcissistic leaders are particularly likely to engage in self-interested behavior when they perceive that their organizations treat them unfairly, and that this self-interested behavior in turn decreases followers' pro-social behavior and voice. Data from a multisource, time-lagged survey of 211 team leaders and 1,205 subordinates provided support for the hypothesized model. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* narcissism, unfairness, self-interested behavior, pro-social behavior, voice

Research at the intersection of narcissism and leadership has painted a decidedly mixed picture of its effects. On the bright side, narcissism appears to instill leaders with the confidence and exuberance needed to help them acquire power and make bold decisions in the face of uncertainty. Narcissists tend to emerge as leaders in new groups (Brunell et al., 2008) and excel in job interviews (Paulhus, Westlake, Calvez, & Harms, 2013). As CEOs, narcissists are more likely than their peers to leverage past knowledge in making strategic decisions (Zhu & Chen, 2015) and to acquire competing firms (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; see also Wang, Holmes, Oh, & Zhu, 2016). On the negative side, narcissism is linked to overconfidence and a failure to learn from past mistakes (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). Narcissists tend to aggress against people who offend them (Jones & Paulhus, 2010) and are more likely than their peers to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005).

Given the “bright side / dark side” duality of leader narcissism (Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Watts et al., 2013), scholars have called for more nuanced perspectives on its effects. Drawing from paradox theory, Owens, Wallace, and Waldman (2015) demonstrated that the negative effects of leader narcissism on follower outcomes dissipate among leaders who are also humble. In a series of lab experiments, Finkel, Campbell, Buffardi, Kumashiro, and Rusbul (2009) demonstrated that the self-focused tendencies of narcissists can be tempered and even reversed in contexts that encourage a more communal mindset. Others have focused on how environmental factors, such as media attention, determine the impact of narcissism on how leaders ultimately behave (Gerstner, König, Enders, & Hambrick, 2013).

Building on these recent streams of research, we examine how narcissism shapes leaders' self-interested behaviors through the lens of trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003). According to trait activation theory, an individual's personality does not manifest itself equally across all situations. Rather, personality traits' behavioral effects depend in part upon the situation in which the individual is embedded. With respect to narcissism, we argue that a narcissistic personality will cause a leader to act self-interestedly when the leader perceives that he or she has been treated unfairly by the organization. Looking downstream, we also argue that leaders' self-interested behaviors will influence followers' pro-social and voice behaviors.

By testing these ideas in a time-lagged multisource study of leader-follower dyads, we make several interrelated contributions. First, we contribute to the leadership literature by expanding scholars' understanding of how narcissism influences leader behavior. Although the construct of narcissism is conceptually sim-

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ilar among employees and leaders, we argue that the behavioral effects of narcissism for leaders, who are comparatively unconstrained by their environments when embedded in the leadership role, are unique. Relatedly, we contribute to research at the intersection of leadership and trait activation theory, identifying unfairness perceptions as one key factor in determining narcissism's positive versus negative effects on leaders' self-interested behavior. Third, we contribute to the pro-social behavior and voice literatures by demonstrating that when organizations treat their leaders unfairly, they risk undermining team effectiveness. A summary of our model is presented in Figure 1.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### Leader Narcissism and Self-Interested Behavior

Narcissism refers to the extent to which an individual "has an inflated sense of self and is preoccupied with having that self-view continually reinforced" (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007, p. 353). In their unflagging efforts to maintain a positive self-view, narcissists tend to seek others' attention and approval, pursue opportunities to demonstrate their superiority over others, and defend themselves against situations wherein their positive sense of self might be threatened (Deluga, 1997; Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; Lubit, 2002; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Ackerman et al. (2010) and Ackerman, Donnellan, and Robbins (2012) built on earlier research (Emmons, 1984, 1987) by delineating narcissism into three inter-related subdimensions: leadership/authority, grandiose exhibitionism, and entitlement/exploitativeness. The leadership/authority dimension focuses on individuals' perceptions of themselves as natural leaders, with characteristics that include assertiveness and a high sense of self-efficacy in the leadership domain. The grandiose exhibitionism dimension reflects tendencies toward self-absorption, as well as general feelings of superiority over others. The entitlement/exploitativeness dimension lastly refers to a sense of deservingness in interpersonal contexts, and a willingness to manipulate others for personal gain.

In this research we focus on the role of narcissism in leaders' self-interested behaviors. As scholars have noted (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Maner & Mead, 2010), leadership presents individuals in power with a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, leaders are expected to utilize their power for the greater good—to protect and enhance the welfare of the groups they lead. On the other hand, power can be a corrupting force, and leaders often use their

positions of power to pursue their own self-interests while ignoring or even harming the group's collective interests (DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceranic, 2012; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003).

Despite some recent findings suggesting a negative relationship between narcissism and unselfish behavior (e.g., Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012), the direct implications of narcissism for leaders' self-interested behavior are ambiguous (Deluga, 1997; Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010). On the one hand, narcissistic leaders might be expected to act in a self-interested way in an effort to attain what they feel entitled to. At the same time, self-interested behavior is partially antithetical to narcissists' desires to be admired by others, which might be better served through pro-social acts (Back et al., 2013). Thus, rather than asking *if* narcissism has a positive or negative effect on leader self-interested behavior, we turn to trait activation theory to ask *when* such effects might be expected to emerge, and when they might not.

### A Trait Activation Approach

According to trait activation theory, the effects of personality traits on behavior hinge upon the environment's trait relevance. Thus, the personality trait of extraversion is only likely to influence behavior in contexts that allow for extraverted behavior (e.g., parties) and proactive personality is only likely to influence behavior in contexts that allow for proactivity (e.g., real estate; Crant, 1995). The trait activation perspective was popularized by Tett and Burnett (2003) and is rooted in a lineage of interactionist perspectives on personality, from the work of personality theorists in the early twentieth century (e.g., Murray, 1938) to the cognitive-affective system theory of personality formalized several decades later (Mischel & Shoda, 1998).

Trait-relevant cues exist at the task, social, and organizational levels (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Task-level cues involve day-to-day work activities, social-level cues involve interpersonal interactions, and organizational-level cues arise from the organization's culture and climate. Here, we focus on the social-level cue of unfairness perceptions. Broadly defined, unfairness perceptions refer to an individual's beliefs at a given point in time that he or she is being treated unfairly, and emerge at the intersection of the individual's objective experiences and subjective interpretation of those experiences (German, Fortin, & Read, 2016). Meta-analyses have confirmed the importance of unfairness perceptions in the

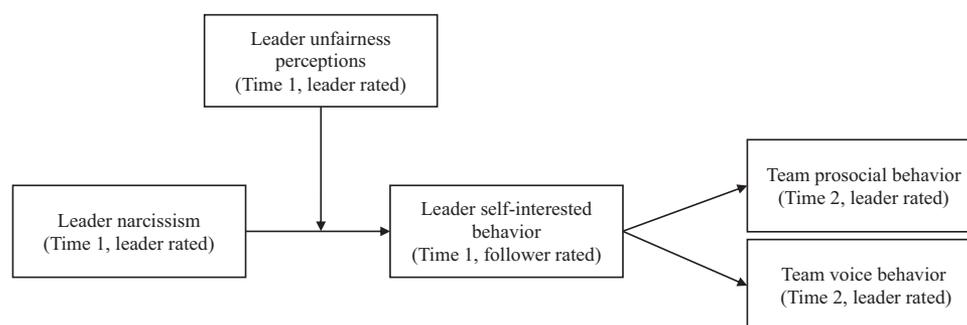


Figure 1. The hypothesized model.

workplace. When employees perceive that they are treated fairly, they tend to be much more satisfied with their work lives than when they are treated unfairly (Colquitt, Long, Rodell, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2015).

Rather than adopting a dimensional approach we focus on leaders' overall justice perceptions, which scholars have argued are more proximal to many workplace behaviors than specific justice dimensions (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Greenberg, 2001; Shapiro, 2001). Examples of situations that might cause leaders to feel as if they are treated unfairly are numerous. Leaders might develop overall perceptions of being treated unfairly when they are (a) passed over for senior leadership positions in favor of less qualified candidates, (b) denied exciting new projects that they are qualified to take on, or (c) treated rudely or with disrespect by a more senior manager.

Unfairness is deeply threatening to self-esteem. When individuals feel that they are being treated unfairly, they develop negative perceptions of their role in the group—in other words, they develop a negative perception of their social and reputational selves (Sedikides & Green, 2000). Several studies attest to this effect. In both lab and field studies, De Cremer and Sedikides (2008) demonstrated that when people are treated unfairly, their self-esteem suffers. Wiesenfeld, Brockner, and Thibault (2000) demonstrated a similar effect among managers (see also De Cremer, van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Mullenders, & Stinglhamber, 2005).

We argue that leaders' injustice perceptions will activate the behavioral effects of leader narcissism on self-interested behavior due primarily to their desire for self-enhancement. As previously discussed, narcissists have an overriding desire to view themselves in a positive light, and expect others to acknowledge their superiority. The leadership/authority dimension of narcissism highlights narcissists' concern with being respected as leaders, the grandiose exhibitionism dimension highlights the importance narcissists assign to showing off and being complemented, and the entitlement/exploitativeness dimension highlights the importance narcissists assign to getting what they perceive as owed to them (Ackerman et al., 2010).

According to the notion of threatened egoism, narcissists will do whatever is necessary to denigrate people who threaten this positive sense of self (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000). For example, narcissists are more likely than their peers to respond to insulting comments in a laboratory setting by subjecting their offenders to a painful loud noise (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). A recent meta-analysis confirmed the robustness of the link between narcissism and vengeful responses to interpersonal provocation (Rasmussen, 2016), with additional research demonstrating that these effects extend to innocent third parties (Martinez, Zeichner, Reidy, & Miller, 2008). Consistent with these views, Chen et al. (2013) found that in the workplace, narcissists respond to incivility by disengaging from their work and withdrawing from their relationship and obligations (see also, Hepper, Gramzow, & Sedikides, 2010).

Whereas unfairness perceptions seem to spur narcissists toward self-interested behavior, research suggests that these effects can be attenuated and even reversed when narcissists perceive that they are treated with care and respect. Specifically, when perceiving fair treatment by their organizations, research suggests that narcissists might attempt self-enhancement through more pro-social means. For example, in an effort to garner others' admiration,

narcissists often seek to please the people around them (Bogart, Benetsch, & Pavlovic, 2004; Jonason & Webster, 2012) and to demonstrate moral behavior (Zuo, Wang, Xu, Wang, & Zhao, 2016). They also respond to others with more intense, positive emotions when they receive positive feedback (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). In one series of studies, Sandstrom and Herlan (2007) found that narcissistic children exhibit less aggression toward classmates who provide them with positive feedback. As suggested by Kauten and Barry (2016), narcissists appear to use pro-social behavior "as a social strategy . . . to garner social rewards or admiration from others" (p. 37).

*Hypothesis 1:* Leader unfairness perceptions will moderate the relationship between leader narcissism and leader self-interested behavior, such that there will be a positive relationship between leader narcissism and leader self-interested behavior when leader unfairness perceptions are high, and a negative relationship when leader unfairness perceptions are low.

### Implications for Follower Pro-Social Behavior and Voice

Beyond the direct implications of leaders' unfairness perceptions and narcissism for their self-interested behavior, it is important to consider the downstream implications of leaders' actions for their followers' behavior. Here, we focus on followers' pro-social and voice behaviors. Pro-social behavior refers to any behavior that indirectly supports the organization (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). It is often (but not always) discretionary, and thus less likely to be directly rewarded than in-role behavior. Examples of pro-social behavior including staying late to help a colleague on an assignment and helping newcomers adjust to the organization (Grant & Berg, 2011).

We theorize that leader self-interested behavior negatively impacts team pro-social and voice behaviors through social learning, social exchange, and followers' identities. First, a link between leader self-interested behavior and team pro-social behavior is consistent with the tenets of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Briefly summarized, social learning theory recognizes that leadership is fundamentally a process of social influence (Yukl, 2002), and that one of the principle ways leaders exert influence is through modeling. Simply put, followers look to their leaders' behaviors for clues about what is expected of them. In this way, followers learn to act ethically from ethical leaders (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Fehr, Yam, & Dang, 2015) and to abuse their colleagues from abusive leaders (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012). Self-interested behavior teaches followers that pro-social behavior is not the norm, and encourages them to avoid pro-sociality in favor of more self-interested action.

Along similar lines, social exchange theory posits that leaders and followers develop rules of exchange which guide their interactions (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Among the realm of possible rules of exchange, the reciprocity principle has been clearly established across a range of contexts. In high-quality relationships, the reciprocity principle suggests that leaders and followers will build trust and commitment over time through reciprocated pro-social acts. In contrast, when a leader acts in a

self-interested way, the reciprocity principle suggests that the follower will respond in kind by withholding pro-social behavior and the benefits it is likely to confer.

In a parallel line of research, scholars have also demonstrated that leaders exert influence on their teams by altering their followers' identities (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Lord & Brown, 2004; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). Most relevant to the current research, Lord and Brown (2004) specifically argued that effective leaders shift followers' identities from a self-based focus to a more collective focus, in turn priming them to work toward the group's best interests.

Whereas pro-social behavior refers to any behavior that indirectly supports the organization, voice refers to employees' efforts to speak up about organizational processes and decisions, with the goal of enacting constructive change (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Although pro-social and voice behaviors are related to each other, they are distinct. For example, meta-analyses have indicated that the two phenomena are correlated at .49 (Chamberlin, Newton, & Lepine, 2016). At the same time, there are reasons to believe that leaders' self-interested behaviors will inhibit voice in the same way they inhibit pro-social behavior. Although voice often involves challenging the status quo, it is also typically enacted with the best interests of the organization and leadership in mind. For example, voice is most likely to be enacted among employees who feel satisfied with their jobs, supported by their organizations, and supported by their leaders (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Thus, leader self-interested behavior can be expected to inhibit follower voice through social learning, social exchange and shifts in follower identity.

*Hypothesis 2:* The indirect effects of leader narcissism on (a) team pro-social behavior and (b) team voice via leader self-interested behavior will be moderated by leader unfairness perceptions, such that leader narcissism will have negative indirect effects on team pro-social behavior and voice when leader unfairness perceptions are high, and positive indirect effects when leader unfairness perceptions are low.

## Method

### Participants and Procedures

To test our hypotheses, we collected data from leaders and followers in a high-tech manufacturing company based in southern China. All procedures were conducted in compliance with the APA ethics code and approved by the first two authors' department. With support from the organization's top leadership, members of the author team and the organization's human resources department distributed paper surveys to the organization's leaders as well as their subordinates. The author team informed participants of the goals of the study and emphasized that all of their responses would be kept confidential. All surveys were returned directly to the research team.

The survey was organized into two phases, conducted three weeks apart. During phase one, team leaders reported their perceptions of the extent to which the organization treats them unfairly, as well as their dispositional levels of narcissism. Followers in turn rated their leaders' self-interested behaviors. At phase two, leaders rated their followers' voice and pro-social behaviors. In phase one, surveys were distributed to all leaders and followers

within the organization, for a total of 258 leader surveys and 1458 follower surveys. Of these, 230 leader surveys (89.15%) and 1322 follower surveys (90.67%) were returned. A total of 211 leaders completed the phase two survey, for a final leader response rate of 81.78% and a total of 1,205 matched leader-follower dyads. The mean team size was 5.71.

Leaders in the final sample were predominantly male (90.50%) and an average of 35.34 years old. Leaders also averaged 14.75 years of formal education and 7.30 years of tenure at their firms. In total, 54.44% of subordinates were male. Subordinates were 30.71 years old on average, with an average of 14.46 years of formal education and 3.42 years with the organization.

### Measures

We followed Brislin's (1986) translation and back-translation procedure to create the Chinese version of our measures. First, the original English items were translated into Mandarin by a bilingual research assistant. Then, a separate research assistant translated the items back into English. The research team collaborated to resolve discrepancies between the original and back-translated versions of the scales, after which the Mandarin survey was finalized.

**Leader unfairness perceptions.** Scholars including Mischel and Shoda (1995) have emphasized the role of individuals' perceptions of the situational context in their foundational work on person-situation interactionism. Thus, we utilized a leader-rated 6-item measure of fairness perceptions (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Sample items include "Overall, I'm treated fairly by my organization" and "In general, the treatment I receive around here is fair" (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Leader narcissism.** Leader narcissism was measured with the 16-item version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). The scale uses a forced choice format, asking participants to choose between narcissistic statements (e.g., "I am more capable than other people") and their less narcissistic alternatives (e.g., "There is a lot that I can learn from other people"). Narcissistic responses were coded with a "1", and alternative responses were coded with a "0." Thus, higher scores indicate a higher level of trait narcissism. The reliability coefficient for the scale in this sample was .71.

**Leader self-interested behavior.** Leader self-interested behavior was measured by aggregating subordinates' ratings of their leaders via Rus, van Knippenberg, and Wisse's (2010) nine-item scale. Sample items include "My leader uses his leadership position to obtain benefits for himself" and "My leader pursues his personal interests, even if those interests do not serve our group's interests" (1 = *Not at all*; 5 = *Always*;  $\alpha = .92$ ). To assess the appropriateness of aggregating this construct to the team level, we examined  $r_{wg}$ , ICC (1), and ICC(2). Results indicated support for aggregating the construct, with all indices in the recommended range ( $r_{wg} = .84$ ; ICC [1] = .32; ICC [2] = .73; Bliese, 2000; Glick, 1985; LeBreton & Senter, 2008).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We conducted a supplementary study of 55 leader-follower dyads in three Chinese private companies to examine the correlation between leader-reported self-interested behavior and follower-rated leader self-interested behavior. The bivariate correlation between leaders and followers was  $r = .31, p < .01$ .

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations Among Variables*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Leader gender	.91	.29	(—)								
2. Leader age	35.34	7.71	.04	(—)							
3. Leader education	14.75	3.51	-.13	.04	(—)						
4. Leader organizational tenure	7.30	9.98	.07	.12	-.38**	(—)					
5. Leader narcissism	.70	.15	.22**	-.06	-.19**	.17*	(.71)				
6. Leader unfairness perceptions	2.24	.80	-.17*	.25**	-.12	-.06	-.07	(.96)			
7. Leader self-interested behavior	2.57	.40	-.09	-.21**	-.11	.03	-.07	.35**	(.92)		
8. Team prosocial behavior	4.60	.44	.06	-.03	.39**	-.20**	-.01	-.25**	-.49**	(.95)	
9. Team voice behavior	4.29	.35	.01	-.12	.23**	-.08	.01	-.45**	-.54**	.66**	(.83)

Note.  $N = 211$ . Reliability coefficients appear on the diagonal in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Team pro-social behavior.** Follower pro-social behavior was measured via nine items from Posdakoff and MacKenzie's (1994) scale (cf. Raineri, Paille, & Morin, 2013). For this scale, leaders were asked to rate each subordinate independently, after which the team average was computed as a measure of the team's overall level of pro-social behavior. Sample items include "This subordinate attends functions that are not required but help the organization's image" and "This subordinate acts as a "peacemaker" when others in the organization have disagreements" (1 = *Totally Disagree*; 7 = *Totally Agree*;  $\alpha = .95$ ). Aggregation statistics were again within the recommended range ( $r_{wg} = .87$ ; ICC [1] = .29; ICC [2] = .70).

**Team voice behavior.** Follower voice behavior was measured via Van Dyne and LePine's (1998) 6-item scale. As with the pro-social behavior scale, leaders were asked to rate each subordinate independently, and the average level of team voice behavior was subsequently computed. Sample items include "This employee speaks up in this group with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures" and "this employee speaks up and encourages others in this group to get involved in issues that affect the group" (1 = *Totally Disagree*; 7 = *Totally Agree*;  $\alpha = .83$ ). Aggregation statistics again supported the decision to measure voice behavior at the team level ( $r_{wg} = .86$ ; ICC [1] = .30; ICC [2] = .71).

## Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1. All analyses for hypotheses testing were conducted controlling for leader age, gender, education, and tenure, and all variables were mean centered (Aiken & West, 1991).<sup>2</sup> First, we tested Hypothesis 1 by examining the interactive effects of leader narcissism and unfairness perceptions on leaders' self-interested behaviors. As shown in Model 1 of Table 2, results indicated support for the predicted effect, with the interaction term accounting for an additional 7% of variance in leaders' self-interested behavior ( $B = 1.11$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The interaction was plotted in Figure 2a. Simple slopes tests indicated that leader narcissism was positively related to self-interested behavior when leader perceived unfairness was high ( $B = .61$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ), unrelated to self-interested behavior when perceived unfairness was at mean levels ( $B = -.28$ ,  $SE = .17$ , *ns*), and negatively related to self-interested behavior when perceived unfairness was low ( $B = -1.18$ ,  $SE = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis 2a proposed a conditional indirect effect of leader narcissism on team pro-social behavior via leader self-interested behavior, moderated by leader unfairness perceptions. We utilized the methods of Hayes (2013) to test for conditional indirect effects. This method involves a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples) to compute indirect effects because traditional methods (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986) in testing mediation are generally low in power (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). As shown in Table 3, the results supported our hypothesis. The indirect effect of leader narcissism on team pro-social behavior was significant and negative when leader unfairness perceptions were high (*indirect effect* =  $-.33$ ,  $SE = .15$ , CI  $[-.67, -.04]$ ), not significant when leader unfairness perceptions were at mean levels (*indirect effect* =  $.15$ ,  $SE = .09$ , CI  $[-.02, .35]$ ), and significant and positive when leader unfairness perceptions were low (*indirect effect* =  $.63$ ,  $SE = .14$ , CI  $[.39, .93]$ ). The index of moderated mediation was likewise significant, again indicating a meaningful role of unfairness perceptions in the effects of leader narcissism (*indirect effect* =  $-.59$ ,  $SE = .14$ , CI  $[-.90, -.34]$ ).

Hypothesis 2b proposed a conditional indirect effect of leader narcissism on team voice via leader self-interested behavior, again moderated by leader unfairness perceptions. Results supported our hypothesis. The indirect effect of leader narcissism on team voice behavior was significant and negative when leader unfairness perceptions were high (*indirect effect* =  $-.37$ ,  $SE = .19$ , CI  $[-.80, -.04]$ ), not significant when leader unfairness perceptions were at mean levels (*indirect effect* =  $.17$ ,  $SE = .11$ , CI  $[-.04, .38]$ ), and positive when leader unfairness perceptions were low (*indirect effect* =  $.72$ ,  $SE = .16$ , CI  $[.41, 1.02]$ ). Once again, the index of moderated mediation lent further support to our findings (*indirect effect* =  $-.68$ ,  $SE = .17$ , CI  $[-1.02, -.36]$ ).

## Post Hoc Analyses

For exploratory purposes, we performed a series of post hoc analyses to examine the effects of narcissism at the dimensional level, using Ackerman et al.'s (2010, 2012) three-dimensional approach. OLS results showed that when interaction effects were run with each of these three subdimensions simultaneously, only the interaction effect between the leadership/authority dimension

<sup>2</sup> To ensure that our results were not unduly affected by these control variables, we reran all of our analyses without including them in the model. The pattern of results was identical to the analyses presented here.

Table 2  
*Estimated Coefficients of the Moderated Mediation Model*

Predictors	Leader self-interested behavior			Team pro-social behavior			Team voice behavior		
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$
<b>Control variables</b>									
Constant	3.28**	.17		5.57**	.27		6.03**	.20	
Leader gender	-.12	.09	-.09	.10	.08	.07	-.01	.06	-.01
Leader age	-.01**	.00	-.24**	-.01*	.00	-.14*	-.01**	.00	-.27**
Leader education	-.01	.01	-.11	.04**	.01	.33**	.02**	.01	.18**
Leader organizational tenure	.00	.00	.07	-.00	.00	-.05	.00	.00	.04
<b>Main predictors</b>									
Leader narcissism	-.28	.17	-.10	.04	.17	.01	-.04	.13	-.02
Leader unfairness perceptions	.19**	.03	.39**						
Leader Narcissism $\times$ Leader Unfairness perceptions									
Leader self-interested behavior	1.11**	.25	.30**						
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.30		-.53**	.06	-.48**	-.61**	.05	-.68**
					.39			.51	

Note. *N* = 211.

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01.

and leader unfairness perceptions was significant ( $B = 1.24$ ,  $SE = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see Figure 2b). We also found that the leadership/authority dimension interacted with leader unfairness perceptions to affect team pro-social behavior and voice via leader self-

interested behavior. When leader unfairness perceptions were high, the indirect effects were negative for team pro-social behavior (*indirect effect* =  $-.86$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $CI [-1.34, -.43]$ ) and team voice behavior (*indirect effect* =  $-.80$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $CI [-1.17, -.44]$ ). When leader unfairness perceptions were at the mean level, the indirect effects were negative for team pro-social behavior (*indirect effect* =  $-.23$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $CI [-.47, -.04]$ ) and team voice behavior (*indirect effect* =  $-.21$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $CI [-.41, -.03]$ ); when leader unfairness perceptions were low, the indirect effects were positive for team pro-social behavior (*indirect effect* =  $.40$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $CI [.13, .72]$ ) and team voice behavior (*indirect effect* =  $.37$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $CI [.14, .66]$ ).<sup>3</sup>

## Discussion

To better understand the implications of narcissism among leaders, scholars have increasingly called for nuanced perspectives that identify the contextual determinants of narcissism's effects. In this paper, we built on trait activation theory and the self-enhancement literature to explore the conditions under which narcissism facilitates self-oriented leader behaviors, as well as the consequences of these effects for leaders' employees. Using data from a sample of 211 leaders and their employees, we demonstrated that unfairness perceptions moderate the effects of narcissism on leaders' self-interested behavior, which in turn influences followers' pro-social and voice behaviors. In a series of post hoc analyses, we also demonstrated that these effects are driven by the leadership/authority dimension of narcissism, suggesting that individuals' perceptions of themselves as natural leaders are particularly indicative of how they ultimately behave when in a leader role.

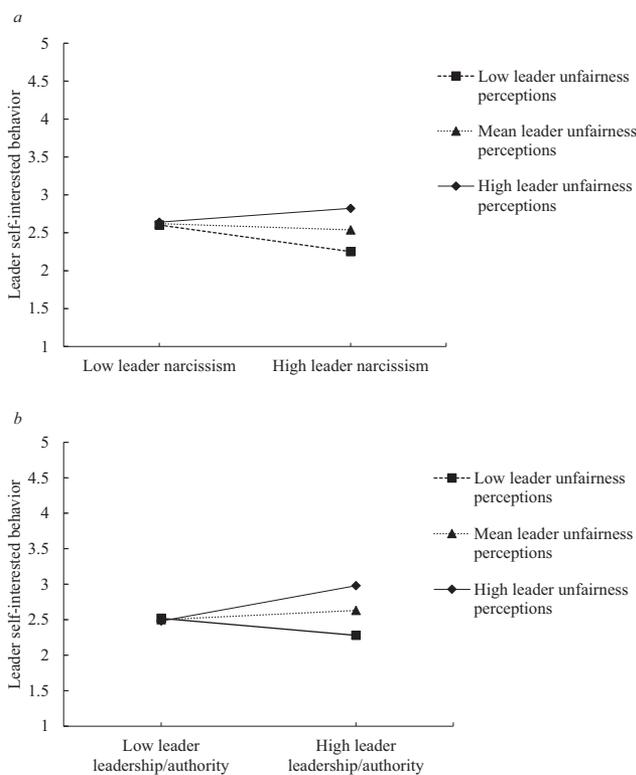


Figure 2. (a). The interaction of leader narcissism and leader unfairness perceptions on leader self-interested behavior. (b). The interaction of the leadership/authority narcissism dimension and leader unfairness perceptions on leader self-interested behavior.

<sup>3</sup> Following an anonymous reviewer's helpful recommendation, we also examined the curvilinear relationship between narcissism and leader self-interested behavior above and beyond the linear term and control variables. No curvilinear effect was detected ( $B$  for narcissism<sup>2</sup> =  $-.82$ ,  $SE = 1.02$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

Table 3  
*Bootstrapping Results for Test of Conditional Indirect Effects and Index of Moderated Mediation*

Dependent variable	Level of moderator	Effect size	Bootstrapped SE	Bootstrapped 95% CI
Team prosocial behavior	-1 SD	.63*	.14	[-.39, .93]
	Mean	.15	.09	[-.02, .35]
	+1 SD	-.33*	.15	[-.67, -.04]
	Index of moderated mediation	-.59*	.14	[-.90, -.34]
Team voice behavior	-1 SD	.72*	.16	[.41, 1.02]
	Mean	.17	.11	[-.04, .38]
	+1 SD	-.37*	.19	[-.80, -.04]
	Index of moderated mediation	-.68*	.17	[-1.02, -.36]

Note.  $N = 211$ . CI = confidence interval. Results are based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples.

\*  $p < .05$ .

### Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Our paper has several notable theoretical and practical implications. First, we contribute to the leadership literature by deepening scholars' understanding of when and why narcissism influences leaders' and followers' behavior. As previously discussed, research on the impact of narcissism on leader behavior has been mixed, leading to calls for a more nuanced perspective (Owens et al., 2015). We demonstrate that the effects of narcissism hinge upon how leaders feel they are treated by the organization. When leaders perceive that they are treated unfairly, they tend to lash out in a manner consistent with the notion of threatened egoism. On the other hand, when leaders feel that they are treated fairly, they appear to act in a less self-interested manner, and as a result are more effective at eliciting pro-social and voice behaviors from their followers.

Second, we contribute to the fairness literature by deepening scholars' understanding of its impact among leaders. One of the most important principles in organizational psychology is that employees should be treated fairly, with fairness perceptions determining a host of positive outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2013). Our results suggest that it is particularly important to ensure that narcissistic leaders are treated fairly, and that fair treatment might not only diminish narcissism's negative effects, but even lead to uniquely positive effects as well.

Third, we contribute to trait activation theory by providing further evidence of its utility in explaining leader behavior. A number of papers have begun to demonstrate the utility of trait activation theory in explaining employee behavior (Greenbaum, Hill, Mawritz, & Quade, 2017; Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012). We found that the effects of leader narcissism are likewise dependent on trait activation. Looking forward, we encourage future research to further explore the role of the situation in unlocking the behavioral effects of leader individual differences.

From a practical perspective, we shed light on how organizations might mitigate the proself tendencies of narcissistic leaders. From Enron and WorldCom to the financial crisis of 2008, prominent examples of leaders acting in their own self-interest at the expense of their employees and organizations are not difficult to come by (Jennings, 2014). In one of the most highly publicized examples, Dennis Kozlowski, CEO of Tyco was sentenced to an 8-year prison sentence for spending company money on items such

as a \$15,000 umbrella stand (Stevens, 2008). In these and other instances, the interests of leaders' employees and other stakeholders are directly compromised by their focus on their own personal gain (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013). Organizations might pursue several avenues in avoiding these problems. On the one hand, they might avoid selecting narcissistic leaders. However, narcissism is strongly associated with leader emergence (Brunell et al., 2008), and preventing narcissists from emerging as leaders might prove difficult. A more promising route, therefore, might be for organizations to build organizational cultures and climates that emphasize fair treatment throughout the organization.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its strengths, a number of limitations should be noted. First, our research focused on overall narcissism. However, adopting Ackerman et al.'s (2010, 2012) three-dimensional narcissism structure, we conducted a post hoc analysis and found that the leadership/authority dimension is most responsible for our effects. This finding is consistent with leader identity research, and the notion that situational cues tend to make some dimensions of the self particularly salient (Lord & Brown, 2004). More than the other dimensions of narcissism, the leadership/authority dimension relates to self-perception in the realm of leadership. Thus, it may be that the leadership/authority dimension of narcissism is particularly salient to individuals in leadership roles, with correspondingly strong effects on behavior. We encourage future leadership research to explore this dimension of narcissism in greater depth.

Relatedly, although we focused on narcissism's conditional effects in our model, our post hoc dimensional analyses revealed a main, negative effect of grandiose exhibitionism on leader self-interested behavior. This finding suggests that individuals who emphasize the grandiose exhibitionism dimension of narcissism might view a reduction in self-interested behavior as an effective means of garnering others' attention and admiration, a finding which is deserving of further research (Maxwell, Donnellan, Hopwood, & Ackerman, 2011).

Second, we note that our study was conducted in a single organization embedded in a single cultural context, and that further research is needed to assess our findings' generalizability. For example, past research has demonstrated that power and hierarchy

are highly salient contextual forces in China, with deep roots in Confucian values (Chen, Eberly, Chiang, Farh, & Cheng, 2014; Hofstede, 1980). Therefore, the leadership/authority dimension of narcissism might be particularly relevant to the Chinese context, whereas other dimensions of narcissism might be more relevant in other contexts. As another example, past research has shown that individualism/collectivism moderates narcissism's effects, highlighting the need to explore narcissism's differential effects across multiple dimensions of organizational and national culture (Grijalva & Newman, 2015).

Finally, it is important to note that the implications of leader self-interested behavior are not universally negative. As noted by Pfeffer (2015), leaders' own career success represents an important but understudied variable in organizational behavior research. Although self-interested behaviors might be damaging to organizations, they are also likely to have some positive effects for leaders. Given the many incentives leaders have for engaging in self-interested behavior, we urge future research to continue to explore the phenomenon's effects, and the dynamic tensions between self-interested and other-oriented behavior in general (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009).

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