What motivates narcissistic individuals to lead? The role of identity across cultures

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reviewed the manuscript, and wrote some of the methods parts.

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Abstract

Narcissists are assumed to be highly motivated to lead, but little is known about the underlying reasons or boundary conditions of this motivation. We examine the mediating role of individual level of identity, arguing that this process differs between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Across two empirical studies, we found a positive relationship between narcissism and affective motivation to lead (MTL) in both the United Kingdom (UK) and China. In Study 1, an indirect effect emerged between narcissism and MTL via individual level identity in the UK but not in China. Study 2 employed a manipulation of mediator design. Although we found no mediation effect of individual level of identity in the UK sample, in China, there was initial evidence pointing to the role of collective level of identity as a mediator. With these studies, we add to the understanding of narcissism as an antecedent of MTL, and how these processes may differ between cultures. Our research opens up new avenues for the cross-cultural study of narcissism and leadership.

Keywords: Culture, Leadership, Identity, Motivation to Lead, Narcissism

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Introduction

Organizations world-wide are looking to select and promote employees who are motivated to take over leadership positions. Mascia et al. (2015) acknowledge the role of motivation to lead (MTL) to identify potential leaders as well as the necessity to select the right individuals for organizational leadership. Historically grounded in the literature of leadership motive patterns (McClelland, 1975; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982), the MTL construct was introduced by Chan and Drasgow (2001) to explain why some individuals are more attracted to pursue leadership roles than others. MTL has been defined as an individual difference variable that relates to a person's "decision to assume leadership training, roles, and responsibilities, and that affect his or her intensity of effort at leading and persistence as a leader" (Chan & Drasgow, 2001, p. 482).

Identity captures "the central, distinctive, and more or less enduring qualities of an actor" (Ashforth, 2016, p. 361). Identities give people in organizations a sense of 'who they are', how they fit in, and the opportunity to define their identities in relation to 'fellow actors' (Ashforth, 2016; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). That is, identities not only include how individuals see themselves, but also their relationships with others (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). They facilitate processes of constructing the self both as an individual and as a member of a group or collective (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). How interpersonal relationships help define the self is captured by the concept of three distinct self-views or 'levels' of identity, that is, individual (also: personal), interpersonal, and collective (also: group; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Relational identities capture how we see ourselves as similar to or different from our social environment (Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). The extent to which we compare ourselves to others, define ourselves as different from others, and are primarily driven by self-interest, independence, and autonomy is captured in the individual level of identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 2005; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, 2008). Whilst individuals strive to construe a relatively enduring sense of the self (i.e., self-continuity; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), research

shows that identity levels can be contextually and situationally cued (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Gardner et al., 2002), and are thus open to change and development.

Identity levels are relevant to both leader development (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Hammond et al., 2017; Leung & Sy, 2018), and leaders' relationships with others (e.g., leader-member exchange; Chang & Johnson, 2010). Affective MTL is described as one way for individuals "to fully internalize the leader role into their sense of self and use leadership as a way to define themselves relative to others" (Badura et al., 2020, p. 333). We thus argue here that individuals who experience their identity as being independent from others (i.e., a high individual level of identity) are more likely to want to stand out and assume leadership positions, therefore positively predicting their affective MTL, particularly in a Western context. We set out to test this assumption from the perspective of relational identity theory (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 2005; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) to explain why narcissism positively predicts affective MTL, and further expand current theory by scrutinizing to what extent these relationships hold across cultures (i.e., individualistic and collectivistic dimensions; Oyserman et al., 2002).

In the study of MTL, narcissism is particularly relevant as: (a) it relates to inflated self-views (e.g., intelligence, attractiveness; Gabriel et al., 1994), which are also likely to be linked to the individual level of identity, the sense of seeing oneself as unique and different from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 2005; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), (b) it relates to self-promotion (e.g., Emmons, 1984) and the likelihood to be positively evaluated in the context of job interviews, at least in Western contexts (Paulhus et al., 2013), and (c) individuals with high levels of narcissism are more likely to emerge as leaders than their less narcissistic counterparts (Grijalva et al., 2015; Nevicka et al., 2011). A recent study using a student sample, showed that narcissism is related to MTL (Prundeanu et al., 2021). We argue that their identity is one reason why individuals' narcissism relates to their affective MTL, that is, narcissists aspire to lead because they strive to view themselves as being unique and derive their self-worth from being better than others (i.e., a high individual level of identity). However, research on narcissism in the workplace has mainly been conducted in a Western context, meaning that we know much less about how narcissists operate in

organizations elsewhere. We posit that the relationship between narcissism and wanting to lead is not necessarily different between cultures. However, results of the cross-cultural relevance of narcissism remain contradictory (see Fatfouta et al., 2021 vs. Foster et al., 2003). Our assumption chimes with Chan and Drasgow (2001) who found no differences in personality antecedents of MTL when comparing Singapore and the US and argue that narcissism is likely to be a relevant antecedent of MTL across cultures. Yet, we assume that the underlying reasons why narcissists want to lead differ between cultures. Particularly, we argue that individual level of identity with its focus on standing out is a more relevant mediator in an individualistic compared to a collectivistic context, meaning that the indirect effect will be stronger in the UK than in China.

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

In conclusion, we advance theory by contributing to the understanding of leadership from a psychological perspective by investigating how narcissists' identity, in particular their motivation to be unique and better than others (i.e., individual levels of identity), are linked to their striving towards leadership and how this process differs between cultural contexts (Foster et al., 2003; Oyserman et al., 2002). We integrate narcissism with identity theory to explain narcissistic employees' affective MTL across cultures. Our results can support organizations in understanding what drives their employees to lead and facilitate relevant approaches to leadership selection and development across different cultural settings.

Affective MTL

MTL comprises affective, non-calculative, and social-normative dimensions (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Affective MTL relates to the enjoyment of or intrinsic preference for leading. Non-calculative MTL refers to the costs and benefits of leading; individuals are motivated to lead despite anticipating potential costs or minimal personal benefits. Social-normative MTL means individuals lead out of a sense of duty or responsibility (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Recent meta-analytical evidence concludes the conceptual difference between these three dimensions (Badura et al., 2020). There is little doubt about the relevance of the concept of MTL for leaders and leader emergence and this is specifically the case for affective MTL (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Stiehl et al., 2015). In addition to the better

predictive potential of affective MTL, this dimension is particularly relevant for our study as it uniquely reflects antecedents in the agentic domain, including narcissism (Badura et al., 2020).

Narcissism and levels of identity

We follow Campbell et al.'s (2011) definition of narcissism as "a relatively stable individual difference consisting of grandiosity, self-love and inflated self-views" (p. 269), which is normally distributed in society (Hermann et al., 2018). Definitions of narcissism comprise how individuals describe themselves and how they see themselves in relationships with others (Campbell et al., 2011). Narcissism has the potential to predict identities in social relationships because it predisposes how individuals define themselves through relationships (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). The narcissistic self entails elements of being special or unique, and different from others. These attributes are part of the individual level of identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sedikides et al., 2011). Levels of identity can be independent or interdependent (e.g., Gardner et al., 2002). The latter includes relational identity (a person to another person) and collective identity (a person to a group; e.g., Gardner et al., 2002). In our study, we focus particularly on individual or independent levels of identity. While relational and collective levels of identity are also relevant for leadership (e.g., Lord & Hall, 2005), we were interested in investigating why narcissistic individuals are affectively motivated to lead, for which an independent self seems more relevant.

In the context of leadership, an individual level of identity emphasizes the idea of uniqueness and being different from others (Lord & Hall, 2005), such as in terms of personal attributes (Sedikides et al., 2011). The individual level of identity takes priority over the other levels when opportunities for self-enhancement arise (e.g., leading a group; Sedikides et al., 2011), making it particularly relevant in the context of narcissism and MTL.

Several authors argue that the individual level of identity is positively related to self-interest (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Johnson et al., 2012; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). For narcissists, the individual level of identity should be strong, as self-centeredness is a core element of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2011), and narcissistic leaders are known to focus on their own interests over those of others

(Braun, 2017). We consequently argue that individuals high in narcissism are more likely to be characterized by an individual level of identity than their less narcissistic counterparts.

Hypothesis 1: Narcissism is positively related to the individual level of identity.

Level of identity and MTL

Individual level of identity is positively related to status and achievement but not affiliation motivation (Brutus & Greguras, 2008), and to the importance of personal goals (Van Horen et al., 2008). How individuals see themselves on leadership relevant characteristics is related to their MTL (Schyns et al., 2020). These authors argue that one's identity is positively related to the belief in being capable to lead (leadership self-efficacy) which has strong, positive ties with MTL (e.g., Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Similarly, Lord and Hall (2005) argue that identity serves as a source of motivational and directional drivers for leaders. For example, individuals high in individual level of identity find the status and power of leadership positions particularly appealing (Johnson et al., 2012). According to self-verification research (Swann, 1983), individuals are motivated to behave consistent with their self-views. Leadership is one means by which individuals high in individual level of identity can self-verify the idea of uniqueness and being different from others (Lord & Hall, 2005). We argue that individuals with a high individual level of identity are motivated to lead as they seek ways to confirm their uniqueness in order to distinguish themselves from others.

Hypothesis 2: Individual level of identity is positively related to affective MTL.

Meta-analytic evidence supports that narcissism is positively related to MTL (Badura et al., 2020). Resulting from our Hypotheses 1 and 2, we predict that an individual level of identity is one reason why narcissists want to lead. Taking on leadership is an expression of independence and uniqueness, can bolster the individual's self-esteem through comparison to others , and evidences the independence and autonomy of the target individual (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). According Chan and Drasgow (2001) competition and achievement relates to affective MTL. Considering the agentic nature of narcissism, affective MTL should be driven by individual level identity. In that sense, narcissists use leadership as an affirmation of the self. Consequently, we posit:

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between narcissism and affective MTL is positively

mediated by individual level of identity.

Culture as a moderator

Previous work investigating MTL across contexts found very few differences in terms of its

antecedents. Chan and Drasgow (2001) found the same pattern of significant versus non-significant

relating to personality, cultural values, and leadership self-efficacy as antecedents across

Singaporean and US samples . Later research contended that cultural values such as dimensions of

individualism and collectivism relate to MTL because they shape how individuals view and engage in

leadership (e.g., Wendt et al., 2009). We build on and expand this work by using a different

personality antecedent (narcissism) and studying the underlying mechanisms that link it to MTL in

two countries, the UK and China, that differ in terms of individualism/collectivism (Hofstede &

Hofestede, 2005). In addition, China is the second biggest economy in the world according to its GDP

and the UK is the 6th biggest worldwide and the second biggest in Europe after Germany. Using a UK

allows for the use of the original instrument for our variables of study, hence we decided to collect

data from the second biggest European economy.

According to Foster and colleagues (2003), narcissism is more prevalent in individualistic than

in collectivistic cultures, although contrary evidence has been obtained more recently (Fatfouta et al.,

2021). Previous studies (Chan & Drasgow, 2001) as well as the inherent aspect of leadership in the

concept of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988) lead us to assume that neither the levels of narcissism

nor the direct relationship between narcissism and affective MTL will differ between cultures. We

argue, though, that culture shapes the reasons why individuals are motivated to lead (i.e., the

mediating processes between narcissism and affective MTL). Individuals from Western cultures are

assumed to hold more independent self-views, while individuals from Eastern cultures are assumed

to hold more interdependent self-views (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999).

Cullen et al. (2015) argued that self-enhancement is regarded as negative in collective

cultures and as linked to possible derailment. We assume that seeing oneself as unique and different

from others (i.e., individual level of identity) is culturally less acceptable and less relevant in the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL in China. Hence, we argue that culture moderates the mediated relationship between narcissism and MTL, so that the link between individual level of identity and affective MTL is lower for the Chinese than the UK sample.

Hypothesis 4: Culture moderates the mediated relationship between narcissism and affective MTL, so that in a collectivistic country, such as China, the positive indirect relationship between narcissism and affective MTL via individual levels of identity is weaker than that in an individualistic country, such as UK.

Overview of Studies

We conducted two studies with data from employees in the UK and China. Study 1 tested the assumption that the mediating role of individual level of identity in the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL would differ between countries in a field study. In Study 2, we examined our research model using an experimental manipulation of the mediator design (Pirlott & McKinnon, 2016) with levels of identity as the manipulated mediator. Research has shown that levels of identity are changeable by priming. Gardner et al. (1999) investigated how culturally inconsistent priming of levels of identity affected self-construal and values. Using US and Hong Kong Chinese samples, they argue that interdependent selves are inconsistent with individualistic countries and independent selves are inconsistent with collectivistic countries. Using different priming methods (e.g., stories, word search task), they showed that self-construal as well as values can be changed by priming culturally inconsistent levels of identity. We also included relevant control variables (self-enhancement and external self-affirmation) in Study 2.

Study 1

Method

Samples and Design

We collected samples from the UK and China. The data for the UK sample were collected via a panel provider (Respondi) at one point in time. The sample size was *N* = 279. Thirty-eight participants were excluded based on quality checks (such as attention check items, short response

times, and zero standard deviations on several instruments), leaving *N* = 241 for the final analyses.

The data for the Chinese sample was collected at two points in time from a range of organizations.

The questionnaire was sent to 350 participants and a total of 293 individuals answered the survey at

Time 1 (T1). We collected demographic variables, narcissism, and levels of identity at T1. About 2

weeks later, at Time 2 (T2) we measured affective MTL. The final matched sample size was *N* = 150.

Of the participants N = 199 were male and N = 192 female. In terms of age, in the UK 30.3% of the

participants were 55-64 years old, 49% of the participants were 35-54 years old, 17% of the

participants were 25-34 years old, and only 3.7% of the participants were under 24 years old. The

average age of the Chinese participants was 31 years old (*SD* = 4.88). In the UK, almost two-thirds

had 10 years or more work experience (66.4%). In China, the average work experience was 6.79 years

(*SD* = 5.29). Overall, the UK sample included slightly more men and had more work experience.

According to theory (Lord & Hall, 2004), this might mean that the UK sample is higher on collective

levels of identity than a younger sample would be, leading to less marked differences between the

samples. We hence calculated the differences in collective level of identity and found that they were

nonetheless significant and in the expected direction (M_{UK} = 2.72, *SD* = 0.95; M_{China} = 3.74, *SD* = 0.56; *t*

= -12.03, *p* < .001).

Instruments

Narcissism. We used the 16-item version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin

& Terry, 1988; Chinese translation by Zhou et al., 2009). The NPI consists of combinations of two

statements per item, out of which participants choose the narcissistic option (1) or the non-

narcissistic option (0). Reliability for the NPI 16 was *α* = .76 for the UK and *α* = .57 for China (overall *α*

= .71). In line with previous studies, we examined the factor structure and measurement invariance

by comparing configural and scalar solutions (Fatfouta et al., 2021; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2019).

The results suggested an adequate fit for the one-factor model for both the UK and China, although

cross-loadings between item 2 ("I think I am a special person") and item 10 ("I am an extraordinary

person") must be noted for the data from China. While configural invariance was acceptable, some

issues emerged with respect to the comparison of configural and scalar invariance (see OSM section I for details).

MTL. We used Felfe et al.'s (2012; translated and back-translated for the Chinese sample) affective MTL dimension (9 items; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The reliability was α = .94 for the UK and α = .88 for Chinese (overall α = .93).

Individual level of identity. We used the individual level of identity sub-scale from Selenta and Lord's (2005; translated and backtranslated for the Chinese sample) Levels of Self-Concept Scale. The answer scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This scale has been widely used in organizational research (e.g., Johnson & Chang, 2006; Floyd et al., 2022). One item ("I enjoy the time that I have to myself") had to be deleted due to low negative factor loadings in both samples (UK: $ß$ = -.130, p = 0.027; China: $ß$ = -.082, p = 0.035). The reliability for the remaining eight items was $α$ = .86 for the UK and α = .83 for Chinese (overall α = .85).

Collective level of identity. We controlled for the collective level of identity (5 items; $α$ = .90 UK and $α$ = .89 China, overall α = .92) measured with the sub-scale from Selenta and Lord's (2005; translated and backtranslated for the Chinese sample) Levels of Self-Concept Scale. The answer scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. While the Selenta and Lord instrument also contains items relating to relational identity, we did not include those as relational identity was not relevant to our argument here. Table 1 shows the correlations for Study 1. The correlations per country can be found in OSM section II.

-- Insert Table 1 here --

Results

We tested the theoretical model, using individual level of identity as mediator and country as a moderator with PROCESS model 14 (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), controlling for collective level of identity.

The direct effect of narcissism on affective MTL was B =.99 (95% CI: .61 to 1.36). Narcissism was positively related to individual level of identity (B = 1.06; [95% CI: .70 to 1.42]), supporting H1. Individual level of identity was positively related to affective MTL (B = 1.04; [95% CI: .76 to 1.31]),

supporting H2. The interaction between individual level of identity and country on affective MTL was significant (B = -.44 [95% CI: -.64 to -.24]). The indirect effect for individual level of identity was significant for the UK but not for the Chinese sample (UK: B= .63 [95% CI: .40 to .89]; China B= .17 [95% CI: -.01 to .36]), supporting H3 for the UK sample and H4, that is, the moderating effect of country. The index of moderated mediation was significant (-.47 [95% CI: -.75 to -.23]).

We also calculated the model without collective level of identity as control variable. Here, the indirect effect for individual level of identity was significant both for the UK and the Chinese sample (UK: B = 1.05 [95% CI: .76 to 1.36]; China B = .33 [95% CI: .06 to .62]). The index of moderated mediation was significant (-.71 [95% CI: -1.07 to -.39]), showing that the effect is significantly lower in China compared to the UK.

We also ran several robustness checks, including inversed the independent variable and mediator relationship, using country as a control variable and conducting separate analyses per country (see OSM section III). The interaction between narcissism and country on affective MTL was not significant in the inversed model, supporting the validity of our findings. In the other models, the results remained comparable to the moderated mediation results.

Study 2

With the follow-up study, we wanted, first to improve the design to be more confident that the results can be interpreted in a causal manner. We employed an experiment with a manipulation-of-mediator design and three parallel conditions of the mediator (i.e., high individual level of identity, high collective level of identity, free variation of level of identity; Pirlott & McKinnon, 2016). Previous research has shown that levels of identity can be primed to induce independent or interdependent self-construal (e.g., Gardner et al., 2002; Johnson & Lord, 2010; Johnson et al., 2012), even when they are culturally inconsistent (Gardner et al., 1999). Second, we controlled for self-enhancement and external self-affirmation. Prior to conducting this experimental study, we registered the design on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/hm8gc/?view_only=161c480319114fb9a83a13902ff1b319). We outline our exact expectations for the experimental study below.

In the experimental condition *individual level of identity*, we manipulated the mediator to encourage that individuals saw themselves as unique and different from others. The logic of manipulating the mediator is that the encouragement conditions block the variation of the mediator, whereas the control condition allows the mediator to vary freely. Mean differences in the outcome, affective MTL, should corresponded with conditions of the mediator, that is, in the high individual level of identity condition (encouragement individual) affective MTL should be higher than in the free variation (control) condition, at least in the UK. We also included a high collective level of identity condition (encouragement collective). We did so as in Study 1 including collective identity changed the results for the data collected in China. Including a collective identity condition allows us to explore this finding further. In essence, this condition blocks collective level of identity as a potential alternative mediator in a collectivist culture. Variance here is also constrained, and the mean differences in the outcome, affective MTL, should corresponded with conditions of the mediator, that is, in the high collective level of identity condition (encouragement collective) affective MTL should be higher than in the free variation (control) condition, at least in China.

In addition to testing our assumptions via an analysis of variance (ANOVA), we also used condition as a moderator. In the high individual level condition, where the effect of the mediator is blocked, that the positive relationships between narcissism and affective MTL should be small or non-significant as participants should experience a high individual level of identity based on the manipulation (i.e., limited variation), particularly in the UK. However, in the free variation condition (control condition), the effect of narcissism on MTL should occur as the mediator is not blocked. In the high collective level of identity condition, the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL should also be low, again due to the restriction of variation, particularly in China. Finally, in the free variation condition, we expect that culture will influence the moderation so that the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL is positive in both cultures but lower in China than in the UK.

Method

Samples. As in Study 1, we drew one sample from the UK and one from China with online panels (respondi in the UK and credamo in China). The sample size for the UK for T1 was *N* = 989. We

excluded *N* = 248 based on quality checks (2 attention checks, flatliners, low duration), leaving *N* = 741 who were invited for T2. The sample size for T2 was *N* = 497. After matching the samples and further attention checks at T2, we excluded 103 participants (attention check, flatliners, low duration; age or gender change from T1 to T2). A further *N* = 36 did not pass the manipulation check, leaving a final *N* = 358. The sample size for Chinas was *N* = 330 at T1. For the merged data T1-T2, our sample size was *N* = 249. We deleted 8 participants who did not have work experience. A further *N* 13 did not pass the manipulation check, leaving a final *N* of 228. Hence, our combined sample size (UK and China) was *N* = 586 (*N* = 310 male, *N* = 275 female). Three hundred worked full time and 286 worked part time. The mean age was *M* = 39 years old (*SD* = 11.56). The majority had leadership experience (*N* = 420). Participants were randomly allocated to the high individual level of identity condition (*N* = 192; UK: 114, China: 78), the high collective level of identity condition (*N* = 170; UK: 96, China: 74), or the control condition (free variation; *N* = 224; UK: 148, China: 76). As in Study 1, the UK sample included slightly more men and had more work experience.

Experimental design

We followed a manipulation-of-mediator approach suggested by Pirlott and McKinnon (2016). As we would not assume that levels of identity vary strongly without an intervention across a short period of time, an experimental design is the most suitable approach to test causality. Our manipulation of the level of identity followed a previously used design (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). In condition 1, the participants were asked to write down tasks that they enjoyed doing on their own (high individual level of identity). In the control condition, participants were asked to describe where they were, and the environment around them. As such no manipulation took place, allowing levels of identity to vary freely. In the final condition, participants were asked to write down tasks that they enjoyed doing with others (high collective level of identity). That is, we used an encouragement / free variation design (Pirlott & McKinnon, 2016), where two manipulations serve to encourage an increase in individual / collective levels of identity.

Instruments

We used the same instruments as in the previous study to assess *narcissism* (NPI: 16 items; overall α = .84; α = .78 and α = .85 in the UK and China, respectively) and affective *MTL* (9 items; overall α = .94; α = .94 and α = .92 in the UK and China, respectively). We assessed *individual* (8 items; overall α = .86; α = .82 and α = .89 in the UK and China, respectively) and *collective level of identity* (5 items; overall α = .85; α = .73 and α = .86 in the UK and China, respectively) after the level of identity manipulations as a manipulation check. We slightly adapted the items and the instructions to reflect a state level rather than a trait level of identity, asking participants to indicate how they feel right now. As before, we examined the factor structure and measurement invariance of the NPI. The results suggested an adequate fit for the one-factor model for both the UK and China. Measurement invariance for both configural and scalar invariance was acceptable (see OSM section IV).

Control variables. We assessed self-enhancement and external self-affirmation as control variables to test whether the link between narcissism and affective MTL was driven by narcissists' motivation to self-enhance or receive positive affirmation of the self from others (i.e., sub-scale positivity embracement; Hepper et al., 2010). We slightly adapted the items to better reflect the work context of our study. The scale ranges from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 6 (very characteristic of me). The reliability was overall α = .74, α = .82 in China and α = .53 in the UK (5 items). We used the external self-concept subscale of the Motivation Sources Inventory (Barbuto & Scholl, 1998) to assess external self-affirmation. The reliability was overall α = .89, α = .70 and α = .70 (6 items) in the UK and China, respectively. Table 2 shows the correlations for Study 2. The correlations per country can be found in OSM section V. We conducted a pre-study to examine the feasibility to empirically separate levels of identity, self-enhancement, and external self-affirmation. A full description can be found in OSM section VI.

-- Insert Table 2 here --

Results

Manipulation check

An ANOVA confirmed the expected differences between conditions in terms of individual level of identity (F (2, 583) = 11.99; p < .001; f = 0.18; $M_{Individual}$ = 3.70, $M_{collecitve}$ = 3.32, and $M_{control}$ = 3.49). The difference between the high individual level of identity and the high collective level of identity conditions was significant at p < .001 (f = 0.18). We also examined the differences between the groups in terms of collective level of identity and found the expected differences (F (2, 583) = 7.83; p < .001; f = 0.15; $M_{Individual}$ = 3.34, $M_{collecitve}$ = 3.67, and $M_{control}$ = 3.38). The difference between the high individual level of identity and the high collective level of identity conditions was significant at p < .001 (f = 0.14) as was the one between collective level of identity and the control condition (p < .005; f = 0.13). We further examined our manipulation using an approach used by Gardner et al. (1999), relating to culture inconsistent priming, which supported the validity of our approach (see OSM section VII).

Hypotheses testing

We conducted an ANOVA to examine in how far our conditions differed in terms of affective MTL. Contrary to our expectations, we found no differences between in conditions in terms of MTL (F (2, 583) = 0.97; p = .38; f = 0.06). The means were $M_{individual}$ = 3.46, $M_{collective}$ = 3.50, and $M_{control}$ = 3.43. This initially contradicts our assumptions. The results remained essentially the same when conducting the ANOVA separately per country.

We subsequently ran the moderated moderation (Process Model 3) using country as a moderator and condition as a multicategorical moderator of country on the relationship between narcissism and MTL controlling for collective levels of identity, self-enhancement, and external self-affirmation. The direct effect of narcissism on MTL was B = 2.13 (CI: .53 to 3.72). Neither country (B = .50; CI: -.86 to 1.87) nor the interaction between narcissism and country (B = -.39; CI: -1.98 to .61) were significant, which chimes with our assumption that narcissism remains a predictor of MTL across countries. Of the remaining interactions, only country x condition 1 (B = 1.90; CI: .04 to 3.76) and the three-way interaction between narcissism x country x condition 1 (B = -1.49; CI: -2.83 to -.13) were significant. Probing the interaction, we can see (Table 3) that in the UK sample, the effect of narcissism on affective MTL is significant in all conditions and the confidence intervals overlap, which

is contrary to our expectation that the effect would be highest in the control condition and lowest in

the individual level of identity condition in the UK. Thus, we found no support for the mediation of

individual level of identity in the UK. In China, the effect is only significant in the individual level of

identity condition but not in the control condition nor in the collective level of identity condition. In

China, the confidence intervals between the blocked mediator condition (individual level of identity)

and the control condition overlap, which is in line with expectations as we did not expect individual

level of identity to mediate the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL in the Chinese

sample. In the control condition (free variation), the confidence intervals for the relationship

between narcissism and affective MTL do not overlap between the UK and China, showing that in this

condition, the relationship is significantly lower in China than in the UK. In China, the relationship

between narcissism and affective MTL is lowest in the collective level of identity condition, in line

with our expectations. While the confidence interval for the collective level of identity condition and

the control condition (free variation) overlap, this could hint at a mediation effect of collective level

of identity, which is not the case in the UK. We also ran further robustness checks, using country as a

control variable and conducting separate analyses per country (see OSM section VIII). The results

remain comparable to the moderated mediation results.

-- Insert Table 3 here--

Discussion

The aim of the studies presented here was to shed light on the relationship between

narcissism and MTL and the mechanism underlying their relationship from an identity perspective

across two cultures. We sought to advance the understanding of narcissism in leadership from the

perspective of identity theory (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). First, we found

across two studies that narcissism was positively related to MTL both in the UK and in China

(although the relationship was lower in China than the UK in Study 2). This result supports the notion

that narcissists like leading and are intrinsically motivated to strive for leadership positions (Nevicka

et al., 2011), independent of their cultural background. Thus, our results add to understanding why

narcissists are often found in leadership positions and extend the MTL literature by incorporating an

often negatively regarded trait as an antecedent of MTL (Bandura et al., 2020), not only in individualistic, but also in collectivistic cultural contexts.

We were also interested in finding why narcissists are motivated to lead. We focused on level of identity as a mediator, arguing that narcissists will want to lead based on their identity as being different from others (i.e., using leadership as an opportunity to demonstrate that they are unique and special; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Hall, 2005). For the UK sample in Study 1 and the pre-study to Study 2, conditional on the model assumption narcissism ➔ individual identity ➔ MTL, our statistical tests show that individual identity can account for a significant portion of variance, however, other models cannot be excluded (Fiedler et al., 2018).

When comparing the indirect effects for the Chinese sample to the UK sample, we found, as expected, that the indirect effect of individual level of identity was lower in China than in the UK and it disappeared altogether in our Chinese sample after controlling for collective identity in Study 1, highlighting that the process between narcissism and affective MTL differs between individualistic and collectivist cultures. This led us to include an examination of collective level of identity as a potential mediator in Study 2 in addition to individual level of identity.

In Study 2, we manipulated levels of identity to replicate in an experimental design in how far levels of identity serve as mediators of the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL in China and the UK. Our results did not support individual level of identity as a mediator in the UK. However, we found differences in the direct relationship between narcissism and MTL in the free variation condition between the UK and China, meaning that narcissism was a more relevant predictor of MTL in the UK than in China. In China, when we blocked collective level of identity, the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL was lowest, though not significantly lower than in the free variation condition. This might hint at collective level of identity as a potential mediator in the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL in China.

We propose two possible explanation for our Study 2 results. First, despite the manipulation check indicating differences in individual and collective levels of identity, our manipulation was probably not strong enough to affect MTL. Previous studies priming levels of identity have

successfully used story telling (e.g., Gardner et al., 2002) or word search tasks (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999). However, participants were often students. In a working context, stronger manipulations may be needed for sustainable identity development. Lord and Hall (2005) argue that levels of identity of leaders change with their experience; new leaders have an individual level of identity that shifts to a collective level of identity as they gain experience. Future research could examine if this shift also affects MTL and maybe even different types of MTL. More experienced leaders might be more normatively motivated to lead due to increases in their collective level of identity. Lord and Hall (2005) mention task, emotional, and skill training as well as mentoring as means to develop identity levels. Future research should conduct intervention studies based on skill training and mentoring to examine if a longer-term change in levels of identity ultimately relates to MTL.

Alternatively, it is possible that both individual and collective level of identity are relevant in predicting MTL. This finding is corroborated by evidence to suggest that some forms of collectivism (i.e., horizontal, but not vertical) relate positively to affective MTL (Badura et al., 2020). Possibly, collective identity also appeals to narcissists if they regard the group as a part of the narcissistic self. This might be particularly the case for China but more research is needed here to further investigate this possibility. Future research could disentangle the role of collective identity in Western contexts. An interesting path to pursue would be to investigate narcissistic identification with a group (Galvin et al., 2015) or collective narcissism (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2021) and how it relates to MTL in different cultures.

Overall, the current results underline our assumption that the relationship between narcissism and affective MTL exists in both cultural contexts but may work differently. While Study 1 supported our assumption that individual level of identity is a relevant mediator in the UK, results did not replicate in Study 2 and casts doubt on individual level of identity as a mediator in the UK. For China, Study 2 showed some possibility that collective level of identity is a mediator. We assumed individual level of identity to be less relevant as a mediator in China (which we found) but did not assume that collective identity would instead mediate the relationship between narcissism and MTL. We reckon that uniqueness is a negative attribute in collective cultures, in which similarity and being

part of the collective is valued. We also note that our UK samples were slightly more prototypical for

leaders as they included more men and had more work experience than the Chinese samples.

Further research is needed to dig deeper into possible effects of collective level of identity.

Practical Implications

Individuals high on MTL are likely to volunteer for leadership positions and training.

Organizations who are looking to fill leadership positions are likely to be confronted with narcissists

who are keen to apply and that seems to be the case across cultures. However, narcissists are likely

to be problematic leaders as narcissism positively predicts behaviors associated with unethical

leadership (Blair et al., 2017), and can undermine employees' energy and voice at work (Carnevale et

al., 2018).

While our results relating to the mediating effect of levels of identity are mixed, it is

important to note that individual level of identity is related to abusive supervision (Johnson et al.,

2012) and leader self-serving behavior (Wisse & Rus, 2012). Thus, also individuals high in individual

level of identity are likely to be problematic in leadership positions. While novice leaders are prone

to be high in individual levels of identity (Lord & Hall, 2005), organizations should focus on

developing leaders to move from individual to relational to collective levels of identity to improve

leadership.

Future research should look into the role of mentoring for narcissistic leaders. Particularly

focusing on identity levels in terms of leader development could be a promising approach (Lord &

Hall, 2005). Previous work suggests that levels of identity are at least in part dynamic (Johnson et al.,

2012) and that leadership identities can be trained (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019). Training could

emphasize the relevance of communal characteristics in terms of promotion to leadership positions

and hold leaders accountable toward their teams and organizations (Carnevale et al., 2018).

Limitations and Future Research

Our research is not without limitations. We first note a few deviations from our pre-

registration (Study 2). First, our samples in the UK and China were smaller than originally aspired due

to resource constraints. Second, we envisaged using narcissistic identification as an additional control

variable and for exploratory analyses. However, the instrument had a very low reliability in the

Chinese sample and we decided not to use it in our analyses. We indicated that we would use Model

4 and Model 14 of the process macro. These models imply mediation. However, due to our

moderation-of-mediator design, mediation is expressed as moderation, so we analyzed our

experimental data using Model 3, which is appropriate for this type of design.

While we combined field and experimental research, limitations remain. For Study 2,

questions remain regarding how effective our manipulation of levels of identity was. For example, we

did not assess baseline levels of identity in our samples to examine if UK and Chinese participants

differed a-priori in terms of their identities. While previous research implies that Western cultures

are more independent and Eastern cultures more interdependent in their self-construal (e.g.,

Gardner et al., 1999), we did not test this assumption a-priori. Future research could use different

manipulations to examine in how far our results are due to the way we manipulated levels of identity

and include baseline assessments of identity. In terms of levels of identity, we focused on individual

and collective level of identity, though arguably, relational levels of the self are equally relevant for

leadership (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). We did not include relational levels of identity here as we did

not think they would differ between cultures; nevertheless, future research should include all levels

of identity to examine in how far they impact MTL across cultures.

Another issue is the use of the NPI to assess narcissism. First, we used a one-factor solution

which is in line with previous research (Grijalva et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2021; Steffens & Haslam, 2020)

and allows for our results to be compared to other studies. Our result on configural and scalar

invariance show some differences between the studies. In Study 1, the chi2 difference between

configural and scalar models suggested issues with measurement invariance while the RSMEA

difference did not. However, we acknowledge limitations in relation to the sample size for the first

study. We agree with Fischer et al. (2022, prepublication) that measurement invariance is a degree

rather than a yes/no decision and our results show at least some evidence for measurement

invariance in Study 1. In Study 2, the configural and scalar model fitted well and the CFI difference (-

.005) and RMSEA difference (.001) results supported the invariance assumption. However, the nature of our data did not allow examining metric invariance.

Our results offer implications for the critical assessment of the NPI and the role of measurement invariance in cross-cultural research. Future research should at least use the Likert-version of the NPI, which would allow for a more profound testing of measurement invariance, including metric invariance (but see Robitzsch & Luedtke, 2022, prepublication for a critical discussion on metric invariance). Future research should also consider measurement invariance versus equivalence (Fischer et al., 2022) to ensure that items mean the same across cultures. Considering that at least in Study 1, invariance results were ambiguous and the differences between measurement invariance versus equivalence, we cannot rule out a different understanding of the NPI-16 items across cultures. Another option for future research would be to use more recently introduced assessments such as the narcissistic admiration and rivalry questionnaire (Back et al., 2013), which has been more extensively tested across cultures.

While we focused here on individual and collective levels of identity as explaining the relationship between narcissism and MTL, other differences relating to culture would be interesting to explore. For example, the UK and China also differ in terms of power distance (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Power distance could also explain why narcissists are motivated to lead. Likely, individuals high in narcissism who perceive more power distance should be more interested in leading as it comes with more 'perks', thus providing the status they crave. Further studies could also use more differentiated cultural dimensions. Results of prior studies show that horizontal collectivism and vertical/horizontal individualism, but not vertical collectivism, were positively related to affective MTL (Badura et al., 2020). The relationship with vertical individualism was stronger than the other two relationships. Thus, linking individual level culture with MTL via levels of identity might yield interesting further results.

In light of current developments in the narcissism literature to differentiate between communion and agency (Gebauer et al., 2012), we also recommend testing different sub-types of narcissism and their relationships with affective MTL, especially to shed further light on the

relationship between narcissism and MTL in China. Here the question would be if the mediation of

collective level of identity is still related to agentic aspects or if communal aspects of narcissism are

primarily relevant in a more collectivistic context. This would hint at narcissism to be possibly less

detrimental in the workplace in collectivistic cultures.

While narcissism is a personality trait and hence should be relatively stable over time, levels

of identity and MTL might change. Future research could investigate whether a longer-term change

(e.g., identity training) would be more impactful than momentary activation. Individual and collective

identities may be so deeply rooted that short-term effects are less relevant than their longer-term

development, thus applying short vs long-term temporal theorizing in the leadership domain to

dynamic views of identity and MTL.

Conclusion

Our research supports the notion that narcissism is a trait facilitating that individuals lead

because they enjoy being in charge of others both in China and the UK. At the same time, testing the

underlying mechanism from the identity realm, we found some support that these mechanisms differ

between the UK and China. We hope to inspire future research of narcissism and identities in cross-

cultural settings to illuminate the many facets of identities for leaders in these contexts.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations, Study 1 (merged data)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Narcissism	1.23	0.18				
2. Motivation to lead	3.03	0.81	.46**			
3. Individual identity	3.20	0.68	.40**	.58**		
4. Collective identity	3.11	0.96	.37**	.49**	.42**	
5. Country	1.38	0.49	.26**	0.23	.06	.52**

Note: N = 391. ** *p* < .01

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations, Study 2 (merged data)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Narcissism	1.34	0.25						
2. Motivation to lead	3.44	0.94	.50**					
3. Individual identity	3.51	0.76	.27**	.43**				
4. Collective identity	3.45	0.88	.33**	.42**	.33**			
5. Self-enhancement	3.80	0.91	.39**	.41**	.45**	.29**		
6. External self-concept	3.87	1.33	.44**	.41**	.47**	.63**	.44**	
7. Country	1.39	0.49	.45**	.36**	.35**	.60**	.28**	.44**

Note: N = 586. ** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05

Table 3: Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderators (Condition and Country), Study 2

Country	Condition	B	SE	t	p	Lower CI	Upper CI
UK	High	1.74	.37	4.75	.00	1.03	2.46
UK	Low	2.02	.36	5.63	.00	1.31	2.72
UK	Control	1.99	.31	6.33	.00	1.37	2.61
China	High	1.35	.35	3.83	.00	.66	2.05
China	Low	.14	.31	.46	.65	-.47	.76
China	Control	.62	.37	1.67	.10	-.11	1.36

```
┌─────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────┐
│                 │         │                 │         │   Affective     │
│   Narcissism    │ ──────▶ │ Individual identity │ ───▶ │ Motivation to Lead │
│                 │         │                 │         │                 │
└─────────────────┘         └─────────────────┘         └─────────────────┘
                                         ▲
                                  ┌─────────────────┐
                                  │                 │
                                  │ Culture (UK/China) │
                                  │                 │
                                  └─────────────────┘
```
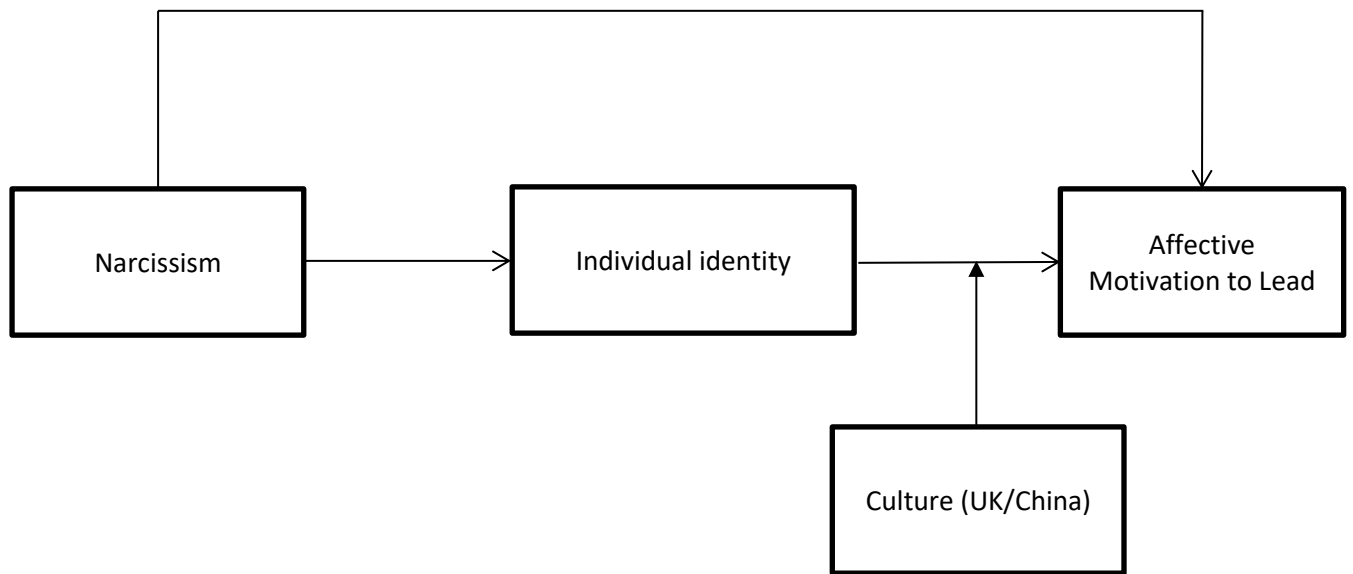
Figure 1: Overview of the research model