ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Connecting the dots between narcissism and fame appeal: the role of imaginary audience fantasies

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BACKGROUND
Although prior research has found a significant association between narcissistic tendencies and fame interest, details regarding the particular nature of this relationship remain to be elucidated. The present online survey study (N = 355) replicates and extends prior research examining the links between two subtypes of narcissism and fame appeal. Specifically, we distinguish between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, as predictors of Visibility, Status, and Prosocial domains of fame appeal. Further, we examine the potential mediating role of imaginary audience fantasies.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE
Participants were drawn from a student sample (74% female-identifying) aged 18 to 25 who completed an online survey for course credit.

RESULTS
Both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism predicted the Visibility appeal of fame, but only vulnerable narcissism predicted the Status appeal of fame. An inverse relationship emerged between grandiose narcissism and Prosocial appeal. Importantly, the frequency of imaginary audience fantasies mediated between both forms of narcissism and the Visibility and Prosocial appeals of fame.

CONCLUSIONS
For those with grandiose or vulnerable narcissistic tendencies, whose self-image incorporates fantasies of being noticed and admired, celebrity and fame may be particularly appealing.

KEY WORDS
narcissism; fame; celebrity; imaginary audience fantasies

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BACKGROUND

As has been argued and examined previously (e.g., Twenge & Campbell, 2009), access to fame and celebrity culture in American society may contribute to a kind of *cultural narcissism.* As with most sociocultural phenomena, however, the appeal of fame and celebrity culture can also be conceptualized as a matter of individual difference, motivated by relevant psychological tendencies and needs. The present study was designed to replicate and add nuance to the existing research focused on the links between narcissistic tendencies and fame appeal (Greenwood et al., 2013, 2018; Maltby, 2010; Southard & Zigler-Hill, 2016).

The prototypical form of narcissism tends to be the grandiose variety, defined broadly by self-aggrandizing perspectives and behaviors, coupled with low empathy for others. Although grandiose narcissism can be assessed via the DSM definition of narcissistic personality disorder, reflecting high impairment in social and professional life, the present study is focused on sub-clinical narcissism, measured by scales such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979). The NPI was designed to capture "normative" levels of narcissism and was validated using student samples. Although those scoring high on the NPI may not experience interference in daily functioning, they may be sensitive to current cultural norms of fame and competition.

Fame and celebrity seem to be an obvious aspirational fit for those whose self-perception already casts them in a starring role vis-a-vis their peers. Indeed, prior research has found that increased endorsement of a single-item narcissism measure (SINS; Konrath et al., 2014) predicts increased appeal of fame-based Visibility (e.g., "Being recognized in public") and Status (e.g., "Having the ability to travel in first class and stay at exclusive resorts"), more frequent fame fantasizing, and increased belief in the likelihood of future fame (Greenwood et al., 2013). Similar findings, using slightly different measures, show that grandiose narcissism predicts increased interest in a celebrity lifestyle and belief in "perceived suitability" for fame (Maltby, 2010; Southard & Ziegler-Hill, 2016). Underscoring these relationships, Bushman (2018) has argued that "Although narcissists may have the desire to seek many types of attention, the temptation of widespread fame is likely to attract them the most" (p. 236).

It is important to note that although some work finds that narcissistic tendencies are higher among famous compared to non-famous individuals (e.g., Young & Pinsky, 2006), not everyone who becomes famous is motivated by a need for public admiration. In fact, anecdotally, many celebrities have reported the public-facing aspect of fame to be the most aversive (Sander, 2020). Our focus, and the focus of much of the research on this topic, is instead on the narcissistic tendencies of *non-famous* individuals who might desire fame or fantasize about becoming famous.

Not all narcissists are purely grandiose, either. Vulnerable narcissism has been characterized by a heightened self-focus and need for positive recognition, coupled with unstable self-views and a high degree of interpersonal sensitivity (e.g., "My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or by the slighting remarks of others," Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale, MCNS; Cheek et al., 2013). For example, while both forms of narcissism have been found to share perceived entitlement, vulnerable narcissists exhibit higher anxiety and lower self-esteem than their grandiose counterparts (Miller et al., 2012). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that although vulnerable narcissists report elevated fantasizing about fame (Greenwood et al., 2018), they are less likely to believe that they could actually be famous one day (Southard & Ziegler-Hill, 2016). Further, vulnerable narcissism has been found to predict Maltby's (2010) fame interest subscale of vulnerability (e.g., "I want to be famous because it would help me overcome issues I have about myself," Southard & Ziegler-Hill, 2016). Finally, vulnerable narcissism, like grandiose narcissism, has been positively associated with the Visibility appeal of fame, but is more pointedly associated with the Status appeal of fame (Greenwood et al., 2018). The latter may be due in part to the tendency for vulnerable narcissists to view wealth as a way to offset insecurity (Ng et al., 2011).

Being famous can also facilitate altruistic tendencies and behaviors. Researchers have conceptualized a prosocial dimension of fame appeal, such as "being able to use your fame for important causes" (Greenwood et al., 2013). However, whereas some research finds no relationship between the two (Greenwood et al., 2013, 2018; Maltby, 2010), Southard and Ziegler-Hill (2016) found that grandiose but not vulnerable narcissism predicted altruistic fame interest. On the one hand, it makes sense that those with grandiose narcissistic tendencies would not be interested in *other*-oriented aspects of fame; on the other hand, to the extent that prosocial fame is an opportunity for ego-relevant public recognition, it may hold some allure. Indeed, research has found that narcissists are more likely to engage in performative forms of altruism and less likely to have altruistic motives for volunteering (Konrath et al., 2016). The present study seeks to replicate and clarify previous research examining the links between these two forms of narcissism and specific domains of fame appeal.

A construct that seems to form a conceptual bridge between narcissism and fame appeal is the New Imaginary Audience Scale (NIAS; Lapsley et al., 1989). It was designed to capture a form of adolescent egocentrism characterized primarily by fantasies of positive public regard (being admired or heroic), with a few negative fantasies in the mix as well (being re-

jected). The NIAS has been shown to be positively associated with narcissistic tendencies in adolescents (Lapsley et al., 1989) as well as depression (Goossens et al., 2002). In younger populations, the NIAS may reflect a defensive coping response meant to shore up feelings of superiority and/or deflect feelings of depression. Fame appeal may be a natural outgrowth of such fantasies, which may function to confer additional ego-based benefits for those with grandiose or vulnerable narcissism.

To our knowledge, Greenwood et al. (2018) were the first to examine the NIAS as a predictor of fame appeal. They found that it was positively correlated with each subscale of fame (Visibility, Status, and Prosocial) and was predictive of fame appeal in the aggregate, along with grandiose narcissism, and over and above the contribution of vulnerable narcissism. This suggests that the NIAS might also function as a mediator between the latter form of narcissism and fame appeal, and may also explain at least one pathway between grandiose narcissism and fame appeal. Fantasizing about imaginary audiences can be conceptualized as a kind of cognitive rehearsal of public attention (for better and worse) that might help explain the relationship between a more stable trait-like construct such as narcissism and a more domain specific affinity such as fame appeal. The present study will examine this possibility.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study is a partial replication and extension of prior work examining the nuances of the relationships among both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, imaginary audience fantasies, fame appeal subscales, as well as frequency of fame fantasizing and the perceived realism of becoming famous one day. We anticipate that both forms of narcissism will predict the Visibility appeal of fame, and that vulnerable narcissism will additionally predict the Status appeal (Greenwood et al., 2018). Because the relationship between grandiose narcissism and Status was inconsistent in prior work, we leave open the question of whether a positive relationship would emerge in our current sample. Similarly, due to the inconsistent findings regarding narcissism and the Prosocial appeal of fame, we ask whether it will be predicted by grandiose and/or vulnerable narcissism.

We also predict, in keeping with prior work (Maltby, 2010; Southard & Ziegler-Hill, 2016), that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism will predict frequency of fame fantasizing, but only grandiose narcissism, with its attendant overconfidence, will predict perceptions that becoming famous is a realistic future outcome.

Lastly, we predict that imaginary audience fantasies will mediate between both forms of narcissism

and the Visibility appeal of fame. However, because only a small number of the NIAS items are specifically relevant to wealth and privilege (e.g., "Being admired because of the car you have or want to have"), we leave open the question of whether such fantasies will mediate between narcissism and Status. Finally, because the relationships between narcissism and prosocial fame appeal are inconsistent, and because, as with Status, only a couple of the NIAS items are relevant to altruistic behavior (e.g., "Saving someone's life"), we also leave the question of whether imaginary audience fantasies mediate between narcissism and prosocial appeal open.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE[1]

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were drawn from the psychology participant pool of a large northeastern university who received 1 credit for their participation. Because the constructs of interest for this study are relevant to generational sensibilities and differences, we opted to restrict the age range to 18 to 25 (M = 19.5 years, SD = 1.7 years), and we excluded 6 participants who reported being "extremely distracted" while taking the survey (on a scale of 1-5), and those who took more than 3 hours to complete the survey. The final sample consisted of 355 students (74% identified as female, 25% identified as male, and 1% preferred not to answer or checked "neither"). The sample was fairly diverse: 34% identified as Latino/a or Hispanic, 33% identified as White, 19% identified as Black or African American, 6% identified as Asian or Asian American, 4% identified as Biracial or Multiracial, and the remaining participants identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Other, or preferred not to answer.

MEASURES

Narcissism. Grandiose narcissism was assessed using Ames et al.'s (2006) 16-item version of the Narcissism Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988). The format is forced-choice, and a sample pair of items pits "I don't mind following orders" vs. "I like having authority over people" and scores are calculated by assigning all narcissistic responses a 1 (vs. a 0) and averaging across all items (α = .68).

Vulnerable narcissism was measured via the Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale (MCNS; Cheek et al., 2013). This 23-item Likert-type scale includes items such as "I tend to feel humiliated when criticized" (α = .87). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*).

Fame appeal. The 18-item Fame Appeal Scale (FAS; Greenwood et al., 2013) was utilized to assess how appealing three different aspects of fame would be – Visibility (e.g., "Being recognized in public"), Status (e.g., "Having VIP access to the best restaurants") and Prosocial (e.g., "Being a role model to others"). Because the scale was last used, to our knowledge, over 5 years ago, we ran a new factor analysis (PCA, Varimax rotation), to determine whether any significant changes occurred. Only one minor shift emerged: "Being financially secure", which previously had a relatively low loading on the Status appeal factor, now loaded highly on the Prosocial factor (.71). This item is conceptually relevant to "being financially able to support family and friends", which is also included in this factor. We use regression scores to represent each of the fame appeal subscales, following Greenwood et al. (2013).

New Imaginary Audience Scale (NIAS). This 42-item scale (Lapsley et al., 1989) asks participants to identify how often they daydream or fantasize about a series of public scenarios, the majority of which are positive (e.g., "Being admired for how smart you are") but some of which are negative (e.g., "Being rejected by a boyfriend or girlfriend") or antisocial (e.g., "Getting back at an enemy"). To more clearly differentiate the NIAS from the fame appeal items, we excluded three items that were confounded with fame fantasizing (e.g., "imagining what everyone will think if you become famous"). For the 39-item version, $\alpha = .92$.

Fame fantasizing and fame realism. Finally, we included two single items utilized in prior research (Greenwood et al., 2018): how often participants fantasized about becoming famous (1-4, *never* to *often*), and how much participants believe fame is a real-istic future outcome (1-7, *not at all realistic* to *very realistic*).

PROCEDURE

This survey was conducted online via Qualtrics. Measures were presented in the following order: Fame Fantasizing, Fame Realism, Fame Appeal Scale, New Imaginary Audience Scale, Maladaptive Narcissism Scale, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (interspersed with other constructs not germane to the present study).

RESULTS

PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

Similar to Ames et al. (2006), we found that males scored marginally higher on NPI than females ($p < .09$). Males also scored significantly higher on fame fantasizing, $t(346) = 2.57$, $p = .011$ ($M = 2.80 > M = 2.51$) and fame realism than females, $t(346) = 2.82$, $p = .005$ ($M = 3.14 > M = 2.17$). Females scored significantly higher on the Status factor of fame appeal than males, $t(346) = -3.71$, $p < .001$ (corrected for unequal variances). We thus control for gender in all analyses.

Means and intercorrelations for study variables are shown in Table 1. To highlight the most significant correlations (at $p \leq .001$), grandiose narcissism was positively associated with fame fantasy, fame realism, and the Visibility appeal of fame, whereas vulnerable narcissism was positively associated with both fame and imaginary audience fantasies.

Table 1

Means and intercorrelations among study variables

	M (SD)	NPI	MCNS	NIAS	Visibility	Status	Prosocial	Fame Fantasy	Fame Realism
NPI	0.27 (0.18)	–							
MCNS	2.93 (0.61)	−.05	–						
NIAS	2.51 (0.49)	.12*	.41***	–					
Visibility	3.58 (1.36)	.31***	.13*	.37***	–				
Status	5.26 (1.50)	−.03	.13*	.14**	–	–			
Prosocial	6.10 (1.10)	−.18**	.08	.21***	–	–	–		
Fame Fantasy	2.59 (0.93)	.27***	.20***	.36***	.50***	.08	.17**	–	
Fame Realism	2.73 (1.60)	.36***	.04	.17***	.49***	−.13**	−.02	.52***	–

Note. NPI – Narcissistic Personality Inventory; MCNS – Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale; NIAS – New Imaginary Audience Scale. Visibility, Status, and Prosocial are the fame appeal factor scores (orthogonal due to Varimax rotation); NPI was coded on a 0 to 1 scale. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

PREDICTING FAME APPEAL FROM NARCISSISTIC TENDENCIES

To test the predictions that both types of narcissism (NPI and MCNS) would predict the Visibility appeal of fame, that vulnerable narcissism would predict Status appeal, and to clarify the relationships between both types of narcissism and Prosocial fame appeal, we ran 3 regression analyses. For each model, we entered gender and the two forms of narcissism as predictors of each of the three fame appeal subscales respectively. As shown in Table 2, both NPI and MCNS significantly predicted Visibility, but only MCNS predicted Status, along with gender (female). The Prosocial appeal of fame was negatively predicted by NPI and was not significantly predicted by MCNS.

Further, to assess whether frequency of fantasizing about fame and perceptions of fame realism differentiated between subtypes of narcissism, after accounting for gender, we ran another regression, also shown in Table 2. Gender (male) was a significant predictor of both fame fantasy and fame realism, as reflected in earlier analyses. And, although both NPI and MCNS predicted fame fantasy, only NPI predicted fame realism, in keeping with prior work.

MEDIATIONAL ANALYSES

To test the prediction that frequency of imaginary audience fantasies (using the New Imaginary Audience Scale, NIAS) would mediate between narcissism subtypes and fame appeal, we ran six media-

Table 2

Regressions predicting fame variables from narcissism measures

Predictors	Fame Visibility			Fame Status			Fame Prosocial			Fame Fantasy			Fame Realism		
	B	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β
Gender	.03	.12	.01	.49	.12	.21***	.14	.12	.06	−.24	.11	−.11*	−.44	.19	−.12*
NPI	1.75	.28	.31***	−.06	.29	−.01	−.96	.30	−.17**	1.33	.26	.26***	3.14	.46	.34***
MCNS	.26	.08	.16**	.23	.09	.14**	.13	.09	.08	.35	.08	.23***	.16	.14	.06
Overall *F*	15.42***			7.66***			4.89**			17.08***			18.96***		

Note. NPI – Narcissistic Personality Inventory, MCNS – Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale. Gender is coded such that male = 1 and female = 2. *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001.

Table 3

Imaginary audience fantasies as a mediator between narcissism and fame appeal

Predictor (Narcissism)	Outcome (FAS)	Predictor to mediator (*a*)	Mediator to outcome (*b*)	Indirect effect (*ab*)	Lower CI	Upper CI	Direct effect (*c*)	Total effect
NPI	Visibility	.40** (.13)	.68*** (.11)	.27 (.10)	.094	.496	1.47*** (.27)	1.75*** (.28)
MCNS	Visibility	.35*** (.04)	.68*** (.11)	.24 (.05)	.151	.338	.02 (.09)	.26** (.08)
NPI	Status	.40** (.13)	.17 (.12)	.07 (.30)	−.031	.186	−.13 (.29)	−.06 (.29)
MCNS	Status	.35*** (.04)	.17 (.12)	.06 (.04)	−.023	.146	.17 (.10)	.23** (.07)
NPI	Prosocial	.40** (.13)	.51*** (.12)	.20 (.09)	.063	.401	−1.16*** (.30)	−.96** (.30)
MCNS	Prosocial	.35*** (.04)	.51*** (.12)	.18 (.05)	.086	.279	−.05 (.09)	.13 (.09)

Note. Imaginary Audience Fantasies is the mediator in each model. Each mediation analysis included gender and the alternate narcissism construct as covariates. NPI – Narcissistic Personality Inventory; MCNS – Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale; FAS – Fame Appeal Scale. Indirect effects are significant when the bootstrapped confidence interval does not include zero. **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001.

tional analyses (utilizing the process macro; Hayes, 2022). The first three included MCNS as the predictor, with Visibility, Status, and Prosocial factor scores as criterion variables, covarying gender and NPI, and the next three included NPI as the predictor with the three fame factors as criterion variables, covarying gender and MCNS.

The results showed that NIAS mediated the relationship between NPI and the Visibility appeal of fame (effect = .27, CI = .09-.50), although the direct effect remained significant as well (effect = 1.47, $p < .001$). NIAS also mediated the association between MCNS and the Visibility appeal of fame (effect = .24, CI = .15-.34), and in this case, the direct effect was nonsignificant once NIAS was included in the model.

NIAS did not significantly mediate the relationship between NPI and the Status appeal of fame, nor were the direct or total effects significant. NIAS also did not significantly mediate between MCNS and Status, nor was the direct effect significant; however, the total effect of MCNS on Status was significant. The latter suggests that the combined effect of the predictor and mediator variables was significant even if neither construct in itself was significantly predictive.

NIAS positively mediated the relationship between NPI and Prosocial appeal of fame (effect = .20, CI = .06-.40), although the direct (and total) effect remained significant and negative (effects = −1.16, $p < .001$). This suggests partial mediation that serves to mitigate the negative direct effect. NIAS also mediated the relationship between MCNS and the Prosocial appeal of fame (effect = .18, CI = .09-.28); however, in this case, the direct and total effects were nonsignificant. The latter can occur when the direct effect is close to zero, which indeed it was (effect = −.05, $p = .621$). See Table 3, as well as Figures S1 and S2 in Supplementary materials.

DISCUSSION

The present study builds on previous work examining the links between narcissism and fame appeal (Greenwood et al., 2013, 2018; Maltby, 2010; Southard & Zeigler-Hill, 2016). Whereas prior work by Greenwood et al. (2018) assessed aggregate fame appeal scores, and examined imaginary audience fantasies as a predictor of fame appeal alongside narcissism, we differentiate the subscales of fame appeal (Visibility, Status, and Prosocial appeals) and conceptualize imaginary audience fantasies as a mediator between narcissism and fame appeal.

The results were largely consistent with prior work by Greenwood et al. (2018); both forms of narcissism predicted the Visibility appeal of fame as well as frequency of fame fantasizing. The fantasy of being visible in the media spotlight may feel compel-

ling as both a manifestation of one's perceived worth (grandiosity) and as a means of overcoming insecurity (vulnerability). Being seen and valued may also be considered a fundamental human need, as William James proposed over 130 years ago. Thus, the needs and motivations of individuals with narcissistic tendencies may not be *qualitatively* different from their less narcissistic counterparts, but rather may be more salient and/or extreme. For grandiose narcissists, however, being famous is a realistic future self, whereas for vulnerable narcissists it remains an alluring hypothetical.

In keeping with some prior research, only vulnerable narcissism predicted the Status appeal of fame. To the extent that status signaling amplifies access to wealth and status, it may hold more appeal for vulnerable narcissists as compensation for their unstable self-image.

We also found an *inverse* relationship between grandiose narcissism and Prosocial appeal, which is inconsistent with some prior work (Southard & Zigler-Hill, 2016). Although narcissists may reap the ego-based benefits of helping others if their behavior is recognized as such (Konrath et al., 2016), it also makes sense that individuals who are self-focused and ego-driven would be less actively drawn to the aspect of fame that involves generosity or empathy. Relatedly, two of the four items measuring Prosocial fame appeal stress the idea of helping "family/friends" which may have emphasized an affiliation motive for helping rather than a self-aggrandizing one.

Importantly, the results revealed that frequency of imaginary audience fantasies – which capture various scenarios of public attention – significantly mediated between both forms of narcissism and the Visibility and Prosocial appeals of fame. For vulnerable narcissism, the direct effects on Visibility became nonsignificant once imaginary audience fantasies were included in the analyses (i.e., indicating full mediation), whereas for grandiose narcissism, the direct effects on Visibility and Prosocial appeals (negative) remained significant even with significant mediation (i.e., indicating partial mediation). This suggests that imaginary audience fantasies may more robustly explain the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and fame appeal. It is possible that the more negative fantasies captured by the NIAS – embarrassment, revenge, pity – are more relevant to the psychological profile of vulnerable narcissists, who may view fame as a way to turn the volume up on their more grandiose tendencies. Indeed, post-hoc analyses of these negatively-framed items reveal a positive association with vulnerable narcissism ($r = .39$, $p < .001$) but not grandiose narcissism.

Gender (female) significantly predicted increased interest in the Status appeal of fame in the mediational analyses over and above narcissism and imaginary audience fantasies. This may be at least partly

explained by ongoing power dynamics in American culture in which men continue to enjoy more automatically ascribed status and resources than women, who may have to rely on more performative or aesthetic means to achieve high socioeconomic standing. Indeed, one item included on the Status factor of fame appeal is "having an expensive and fashionable wardrobe," which was more appealing to the women in the sample when considered on its own; $t(246) = -4.31$, $p < .001$ ($M = 5.41 > 4.41$). Women's attractiveness is more intimately linked to their social value; in line with this cultural norm, female celebrities experience much higher reward and scrutiny for their appearance than their male counterparts do.

LIMITATIONS

Correlational analyses do not enable causal conclusions, so we cannot say whether fame appeal contributes to and/or reflects narcissistic tendencies and its associated imaginary audience fantasies. Most likely, these are mutually reinforcing phenomena – constellations of the same broader, culturally mediated framework of self-focused attitudes and motivations. More work is needed to explicate the interactive push and pull of temperament and sociocultural environment over time. For example, it is possible that narcissistic individuals will show greater affinity for fame when they are feeling threatened as a means of reasserting their prowess (in the case of grandiose narcissism) or reassuring themselves of their value (in the case of vulnerable narcissism). Experimental and longitudinal/experience sampling approaches would be well suited to answering these questions.

Our sample was also limited in a number of ways that reduce generalizability. First, although ethnically diverse (only a third of the sample identified as White), participants were predominantly female and drawn from a large Northeastern university. College students represent a typical convenience sample, but they are also a demographic for whom narcissism, imaginary audience fantasies, and fame aspirations may be both developmentally and socioculturally salient (Konrath et al., 2011). Emerging adults are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, which may increase the tendency for increased self-focus as well as fantasies of fame. Along these same lines, the majority of users of social media such as TikTok are under 30 (Eddy, 2024) – a media environment in which images of celebrity are ubiquitous. Finally, the most recent study utilizing the Fame Appeal Scale was also conducted on a college sample (Greenwood et al., 2018), which makes our findings more relevant and comparable to prior work. That said, future research should examine life stage as well as educational differences, as they pertain to narcissistic ten-

dencies and fame appeal. Understanding how those with non-binary gender identities engage with fame appeal, as well as those with intersectional identities, are important considerations for future research.

Finally, although the present study contributed granularity to this area of research by examining two forms of narcissism, there are more nuances to consider in future. Given our interest in non-clinical manifestations of narcissism, one distinction to explore further is the difference between adaptive and maladaptive narcissism. For example, there is some evidence that the NPI can be subdivided into Leadership/Authority, Grandiosity/Exhibitionism, and Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscales, in which the first is associated with better outcomes and increased self-control, and the latter two are more toxic and problematic (Ackerman et al., 2011). Other work shows that grandiose narcissism predicts greater subjective well-being, via the mediating role of higher self-esteem (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2014). It would be valuable to understand how affinity for fame intersects with these components of grandiose narcissism. Nevertheless, even if fame aspirations are a symptom of "healthy narcissism," it might still be worth unpacking what that means – healthy for whom? Feeling subjectively good about one's life and one's self does not necessarily mean behaving in ways that benefit the community at large. As Jonason et al. (2012) have noted, those high in dark triad traits (including narcissism), may "impose serious costs on society" (p. 197) via callousness and manipulation. For example, narcissistic political leaders may be charismatic, but they may also be more motivated to act on their own image and interests and less on behalf of public good.

CONCLUSIONS

For those with grandiose or vulnerable narcissistic tendencies, who spend a lot of time imagining being noticed and admired, the distinctions between "on-stage" and "offstage" life may be particularly blurry. Correspondingly, the spotlight that accompanies celebrity and fame may be of particular interest to those whose aspirations and identities are fundamentally performative. Further, imaginary audience fantasies may be a critical bridge between these constructs, and warrant further investigation. For grandiose narcissists, such fantasies may actually feel productive, moving them towards a goal they believe they can accomplish. It would be of value therefore to understand whether such fantasies might ultimately frustrate such individuals when they realize that fame is not in easy reach. Vulnerable narcissists appear to stay safely in the realm of fantasizing without believing fame is a realistic life outcome. This may feel like a way to circumvent or address insecurity, but it may

also create unrealistic expectations for success and happiness when real life inevitably falls short of such fantasies. More work in this area of research would help illuminate the emotional health implications of fame aspirations.

Endnote

1 This study was not pre-registered. It did pass through the IRB at Montclair State University (IRB-FY21-22-2573).

Supplementary materials are available on the journal's website.

Disclosures

This research received no external funding.
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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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