

**DO NARCISSISTS PLAY SOLO?
DIFFERENCES IN SELF-EFFICACY AND NARCISSISM
AMONG BAND AND SOLO MUSICIANS**

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The following study focuses on individual differences between musicians who play solo (performing individually or as leaders), and musicians performing as part of a chamber ensemble, band, choir, orchestra, etc. We predicted that soloists would be higher on grandiose narcissism and self-efficacy. The results showed that soloists ($n = 59$) not only were higher on narcissism, but also had higher self-efficacy scores than musicians who perform in ensembles ($n = 65$). However, soloist and band players are not different in narcissism and self-efficacy when the other trait is controlled, which indicates that common features of both traits differentiate solo and band musicians. Results raise further questions on what factors affect the development of a musician's career path.

Keywords: self-efficacy; musicians; narcissism; musical profession.

In the musical profession, to become a soloist of a band, a musician must attract the attention of the conductor, listeners or other band players with commitment, technique, education, achievements, or personality. In other words, artists must somehow distinguish themselves from the other band members. Any tendency of a musician to collaborate in a band or work as a soloist may be related to the different characteristics of the artists and the

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experiences that accompanied them in music education and professional practice. Moreover, the choice of profession is related to personality, preferences, and styles of adaptation to social and professional environments (Holland, 1996; Törnroos et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems that individuals who follow different musical career paths (solo versus band players) may differ in terms of individual characteristics. As part of this study, we want to answer the question of whether solo musicians differ from ensemble musicians in narcissism and self-efficacy.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in narcissism, both among scientists and the public (Miller et al., 2011, 2021). In its most prototypical form, narcissism is associated with a sense of privilege, arrogance, dominance, callousness and aggression (Miller et al., 2021). However, thanks to numerous studies, we know that narcissism is not a uniform construct, because it has many facets, some of which seem contradictory (Miller et al., 2021; Rogoza et al., 2019). Currently, narcissism is widely studied on two distinct dimensions: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism (Cain et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2021; Wink, 1991). The latest research, confirming three-factor model of narcissism (e.g., Crowe et al., 2019), indicate that grandiose narcissism consists of two facets: antagonistic and agentic. The latter is relatively adaptive and associated with assertiveness, leadership and high self-esteem (Miller et al., 2021).

Previous research has shown that narcissistic people select situations that afford them status (Grapsas et al., 2020). In the current study, our focus is on agentic narcissism, as this facet appears to be the most conducive to professional development. Agentic narcissism is associated with traits that are potentially linked to choosing a solo career path, such as extraversion, dominance, entitlement, high self-esteem, sociability, and perceived likability (Miller et al., 2011, 2021). The antagonistic facet involves characteristics like arrogance, callousness, and cynicism (Miller et al., 2021), which may also be conducive to choosing a solo career path, but in the long run they are less likely to foster a sense of self-efficacy compared to the agentic facet.

Narcissistic individuals, particularly those with a high degree of agentic narcissism, tend to be proactive and driven by rewards (Miller et al., 2021). They are more inclined to adopt career strategies such as strategic positioning, exerting influence, and presenting themselves positively, all of which are deemed crucial for achieving success in one's professional life (King, 2004; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006). However, there are studies showing that the

relationship between narcissism and career success is mediated by occupational self-efficacy beliefs (Hirschi & Jaensch, 2015).

Self-efficacy, defined as a person's belief about the extent to which this person is able to perform a task in a particular situation, is the most important predictor of musical achievement (McPherson & McCormick, 2006). A higher sense of self-efficacy may not only increase motivation to act, but also be associated with achieving better results or effects (Bandura, 1997; Juczyński, 2000). Moreover, self-efficacy is linked to other self-perception of ability, as well as motivation and aspirations (Hallam, 2005). The key theorem of Bandura (1997) regarding the role of self-efficacy beliefs in human functioning is that "the level of people's motivation, affective states and actions is based more on what they believe in than on what is objectively true" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). For this reason, how people behave can often be better predicted by the beliefs they have about their abilities than by what they are capable of achieving. Self-efficacy is considered one of the key factors of positive career development, it refers to opinions about oneself suggesting that one is able to cope with tasks and challenges at work (Rigotti et al., 2008). Considering the above, both agentic narcissism and the sense of self-efficacy may be important for career development (Hirschi & Jaensch, 2015), potentially also for the development of a musician's career and choice of his professional path.

Although many musicians can perform difficult and spectacular solo parts contained in classical compositions, only a few of them make a living as soloists. Most soloists from an early age actively develop their careers, perform in concerts and competition arenas throughout the period of music education and later. Participation in competitions is usually reserved for students with the highest achievements and results in exams. Achieving a high place in a competition can pave the way for a long and successful solo career, plenty of performance opportunities, or the start of a concert tour. Resigning from a stable position as an orchestra member, soloist perform in front of audiences with orchestras that benefit from the reputation and attractiveness of the soloist. Soloists, therefore, not only have outstanding technical skills and a diverse repertoire, but their experience and personality must also be important in achieving success, or even more important than technical ability alone. It can be also seen that the soloist's work is focused on new achievements and mastery, taking into account the specificity of the artist's profession (focused on development, competition, numerous performances).

Based on this assumption, we assume that in the case of musicians, the choice of a solo or band path is associated with the intensity of agentic narcissism and self-efficacy beliefs. However, to the best of our knowledge, to date there has been no research examining these traits in musicians; our study aims to fill this gap. Since many great musicians do not work in prominent positions despite their technical skills, the results of the current study may confirm the assumptions that in professional development not only skills are of key importance, but personality factors, which differentiate successful specialists from those with a common career path.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were professional musicians ($N = 124$), including soloists ($n = 59$) and musicians playing and singing in chamber ensembles or orchestras ($n = 65$). Participants in the grouping chose the specifics of their occupation and indicated whether they work as soloists or in chamber ensembles or orchestra. Those included in the soloist group were those who reported that they work either as soloists (performing an individual part at the head of the stage, performing, for example, with orchestral accompaniment) or as instrumental section leaders (playing solo parts), or so-called concertmasters. Musicians playing in groups have varied musical activities. Some of them perform in chamber ensembles, some in orchestras, some in choirs, some in frivolous groups, and so on. They present classical music as well as popular music such as jazz, pop, dance music, and sacred music. Participants in the study included string, wind, percussion, and keyboard instrumentalists, as well as vocalists. However, all participants have had experience of artistic education in state schools and academies. The majority (52.6%) of them lived in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants. The musicians who participated in the study were between 18 and 66 years old. Although solo and band musicians differed in age ($p = .002$), neither the narcissism scores nor the general self-efficacy scale (GSES) correlated with age. For this reason, age was no longer controlled for. The compared groups did not differ in terms of gender distribution. A detailed description of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants' Demographics and Other Characteristics

	Soloists	Band musicians
	<i>n</i> = 59	<i>n</i> = 65
Gender		
Male	13 (22%)	13 (20%)
Female	25 (42%)	33 (51%)
Other	21 (36%)	19 (29%)
Age (<i>M/SD</i>)	28.62 / 8.08	34.78 / 12.10
Instruments		
Piano	10	2
Accordion	2	1
Flute	15	11
Clarinet	2	4
Guitar	3	2
Percussion instruments	3	0
Double bass	1	2
Oboe	1	0
Organ	1	0
Violin	5	11
Cello	6	21
Vocal	10	5
Viola	0	2
French horn	0	3
Tuba	0	1

Materials

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) questionnaire by Raskin and Hall (1979) in Polish adaptation (Bazińska & Drat-Ruszczak, 2000) was used to measure agentic narcissism. It consists of 34 items with a 5-point response scale. The NPI in Polish version is suggested as a measure of agentic facet of narcissism (e.g., Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2014). Alpha reliability for the whole NPI in our study was very high, $\alpha = .93$.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) in Juczyński's (2000) Polish adaptation was used to evaluate participants'

self-efficacy and ways of coping in difficult situations. It contains 10 items (e.g., “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough”). Participants answer with a 4-point Likert scale (from 1 = *Not at all* to 4 = *Exactly true*). In this study, the alpha reliability of the scale was high, $\alpha = .85$.

Procedure

The described study was a cross-sectional. It was carried out online with the use of the LimeSurvey online research tool. The link to the study was sent to the musicians and distributed using social media. The questionnaires were presented in randomized order and the study was part of a bigger project involving other measures. The study procedure was approved by the authors' university ethical board and was in accordance with APA Ethical Principles.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and results of difference tests are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviation and Results of Difference Tests Between Soloists and Band Players in Self-Efficacy and Agentic Narcissism Scales

	Soloists		Band		<i>t</i> (1,122)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
GSES	3.14	0.42	2.97	0.50	2.12	.035
NPI	3.23	0.72	2.90	0.59	2.33	.022

The distribution of all variables was normal (all Shapiro–Wilk's statistics were not significant, and *p* ranged between .076 and .893). Agentic narcissism was positively related to self-efficacy, $r = .53$, $p < .001$. Further, the *t*-tests analysis confirmed the hypothesis. People performing solo were characterized by a greater self-efficacy and agentic narcissism than band musicians. To test whether the soloists were more narcissistic because they have higher self-efficacy, we also compared the strength of association between

agentic narcissism and self-efficacy in solo and band players. The results showed that those relationships were both significant, in solo artists $r = .51$, $p < .001$, and in band performers, $r = .54$, $p < .001$, and had similar strength, $z = -.14$, $p = .882$. Thus, higher narcissism in solo players was not due to more overlap between this trait and self-efficacy comparing to band performers. However, to see if the differences in agentic narcissism among solo and band musicians remain significant after controlling for self-efficacy we conducted one more analysis. We regressed agentic narcissism on self-efficacy (and the other way round) and next compared soloist and band musicians on standardized residuals of agentic narcissism and self-efficacy controlling for the common variance with the other variable (self-efficacy in case of narcissism being a predicted variable and narcissism in case of self-efficacy being a predicted variable). Results revealed that soloists and band members did not differ in agentic narcissism when self-efficacy was controlled for, $t(122) = 0.52$, $p = .604$. The same was true for self-efficacy, $t(122) = 1.52$, $p = .131$. These results indicate that agentic narcissism and self-efficacy are so closely related that neither one of them alone predicts the musician's career path.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to find out whether band players and soloists differ in terms of agentic narcissism and self-efficacy. The results of the analysis showed that soloists not only have a higher sense of narcissism, but also higher scores on self-efficacy scale. Moreover, the study indicated that higher agentic narcissism in solo players is due to higher self-efficacy compared to band performers. When self-efficacy was controlled for, the difference in agentic narcissism between soloists and band players was no longer significant. However, also the difference in self-efficacy was no longer significant when its common variance with narcissism was eliminated. Thus, being high on the agentic facet of narcissism means also being high on self-efficacy and both variables characterize solo musicians better than band musicians. In general, these results are in line with previous empirical research and can be interpreted in different ways. It might be speculated that higher narcissistic self-perceptions in soloists might be a side-effect of their high self-efficacy ("I succeed, so I am good"), but then self-efficacy alone, devoid of those narcissistic perceptions is not more characteristic to soloists.

Thus, none of those two constructs operates independently and probably they may even affect one another. People with higher levels of narcissism and higher self-efficacy may achieve better results and they are more motivated to choose a solo career path. People with high self-efficacy are more persistent and committed to their tasks, they are better at coping with stress, difficulties and able to recover quickly from failure (Bandura, 1997). Acquiring musical competence, such as learning to play an instrument, is a long and taxing task; self-efficacy beliefs allow for a sustained long-term commitment, which in turn can translate into actual achievement for musicians (McPherson & McCormick, 2006). Thus, it is possible that individuals who believe that they can perform a task with satisfactory results have a real higher level of competence and can perform as a soloist.

Second, self-beliefs of efficacy affect the choices people make at important moments in their lives and which options they are weighing (Bandura, 2011). This conviction seems to be a necessary factor to even consider the option of a solo career. In turns, high levels of narcissism may motivate individuals to choose life paths that enable them to fulfill their needs to be noticed, admired, and glorified (e.g., Holland, 1985). Previous research has shown that narcissistic traits are particularly prevalent in high-status occupations, e.g., among politicians (Hill & Yousey, 1988). Being a solo musician carries more prestige than being part of a band or orchestra. The soloist does not have to share the admiration, the sense of impact on the audience, and the exhilaration of self, thus this career path is the best way to satisfy narcissistic needs.

Third, it seems that people with a higher sense of self-efficacy, or agentic narcissism may do better at the competition. As mentioned, personal expectations of efficacy promote effective coping with stress (Bandura, 1997). Previous studies also have shown that these beliefs reduce anxiety and promote successful performance (Hendricks., 2016; McPherson & McCormick, 2006). Similarly, the optimal level of agentic narcissism, which is associated with extraversion and self-confidence (Miller et al., 2011, 2021), may help a musician make an impression on an audience. Therefore, it is possible that individuals who are convinced of their worth and ability to perform satisfactorily, perform favorably at auditions or job interviews, are noticed, remembered, and thus are more likely to be cast in a solo role.

Fourth, our study is correlational, thus it could also be that a solo career increases or even leads to the development of self-efficacy or some narcissistic traits. This explanation is particularly plausible for self-efficacy because the development of this belief is closely related to the individual's experience.

According to Bandura (1997, 2011), a sense of self-efficacy is developed in four ways, for example, through mastery experience and thanks to social persuasion. Soloists have opportunities to persist with a difficult task (such as being the center of attention on stage), they are also more likely to receive direct feedback from a satisfied audience, which may gradually strengthen self-efficacy beliefs in the field of music and constantly “feeding” narcissistic needs.

Limitations and Future Research

The correlational design was one of the limitations, as it does not allow one to draw a cause and effect conclusions. Other limitation comes with the relatively small sample size, not numerous enough to test for differences resulting from different musical activities (singers, players, performed musical genre). In addition, this study did not control for the actual level of achievement, which is related to self-efficacy (Ningsih & Alimansur, 2019). Nevertheless, the achievement of proficiency in playing an instrument is not the only sufficient aspect that may be responsible for the selection and implementation of a solo music career (Lehman, 1903), it may be influenced by various other factors that were not controlled for in this study.

It is also a limitation to cover narcissism only in one facet. In future studies, it would be worthwhile to build on the full three-factor model of narcissism and test the importance of antagonistic, agentic and neurotic narcissism (Miller et al., 2021) for musicians’ careers.

Conclusion

This was the first study testing whether narcissism and self-efficacy differ between professional musicians performing solo and in bands. As expected, soloists were higher on the agentic facet of narcissism and self-efficacy than artists performing in ensembles. This result suggests that in the professional development, the individual characteristics should be accounted for, beside the level of proficiency in playing an instrument or singing. Thus, such related traits as agentic narcissism and self-efficacy should be promoted in musical career of those who opt for a solo career.

CRediT Author Statement

WERONIKA MOLIŃSKA (55%): conceptualization, methodology, software, validation, formal analysis, resources, writing (original draft), supervision, writing (review and editing).

JOANNA RAJCHERT (40%): formal analysis, resources, writing (original draft).

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