

# Leader consultation mitigates the harmful effects of leader narcissism: A belongingness perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing from belongingness theory, the present study proposes and empirically tests the impact of leader narcissism on employees' citizenship and antagonistic behaviors via their organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) depending on conditions of leader consultation behaviors. Survey data collected from 262 leader-employee dyads at a large Chinese information technology company largely supported our predictions. The results show that leader narcissism threatens employees' OBSE and further exerts negative indirect effects on their promotive voice and helping behaviors and positive indirect effects on their dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing. The results further illustrate that the negative relationship between leader narcissism and employee OBSE and the indirect effects of leader narcissism on the four outcomes via OBSE are significant only under conditions where narcissistic leaders fail to consult with their employees. Such effects turn non-significant in the presence of high leader consultation. Theoretical and practical implications are offered along with limitations and suggestions for future research directions.

## 1. Introduction

Narcissistic leaders, those characterized by self-centeredness, an inflated ego, sense of entitlement, and excessive demand for admiration and compliance, are widely considered detrimental to employee outcomes (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009; Maccoby, 2000). Indeed, conventional wisdom suggests that narcissistic leaders are interpersonally insensitive and dismissive (Lubit, 2002; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) and that these behaviors are likely to frustrate and demotivate those they lead (Hochwarter & Thompson, 2012). Yet, recent empirical evidence shows that narcissistic leaders may also sometimes display an apparent consideration and appreciation for others (Owens, Wallace, & Waldman, 2015), which can help counterbalance their detrimental impact on employees. Such behavioral inconsistencies are not entirely surprising, however, given that narcissists may intentionally use social influence to present themselves in more socially palatable ways in order to accomplish their own agenda (Jonason & Webster, 2012). Despite these fruitful findings and discussions, this line of research remains limited largely due to the lack of theoretical understanding about the mechanisms through which narcissistic leaders frustrate and demotivate their employees and the conditions under which their manipulative tendencies can mitigate this

impact (see Fig. 1).

The present study aims at contributing to the narcissism literature by offering a theoretically-driven explanation for why and how narcissistic leaders detract from employee outcomes, and why their deviation from narcissistic behavioral tendencies can mitigate such negative impacts. First, we provide a more nuanced understanding of the employee-related effects of leader narcissism by articulating the mediating mechanism that explains how employees react to their narcissistic leader. The identification of this mediating mechanism is an important step to advance the research on leader narcissism, as it is poorly understood in the existing literature. For example, Liu, Chiang, Fehr, Xu, and Wang (2017) found that when narcissistic leaders felt mistreated, they were more likely to engage in self-interested behaviors, therefore decreasing employees' prosocial or extra-role behaviors. Yet, it was unclear why employees chose to respond in such ways. Similarly, while Owens et al. (2015) found that the negative effects of leader narcissism on employee performance and job engagement were counterbalanced by leaders' humble behaviors, it remains theoretically unknown why employees reacted less negatively when their leader deviated from their narcissistic tendencies.

Drawing from belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), we propose employees' *sense of belonging* at work as a key psychological

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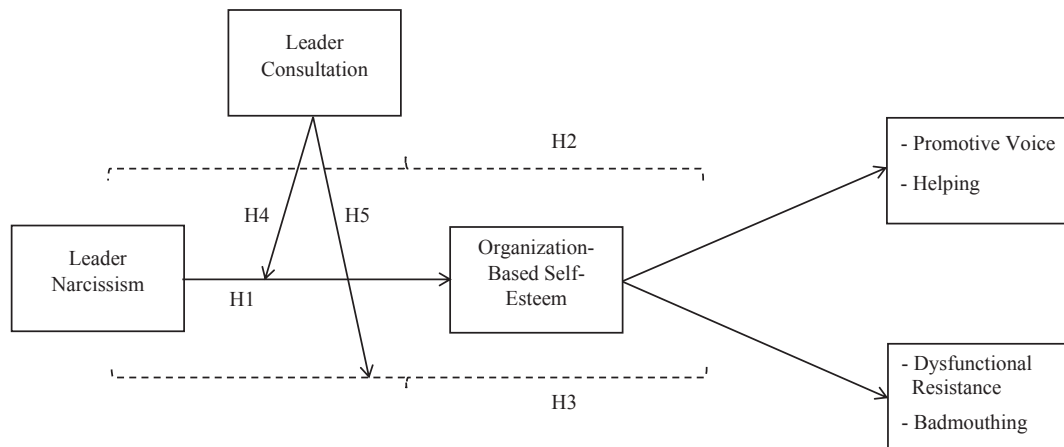


Fig. 1. Proposed research model of the belongingness consequences of leader narcissism.

mechanism underlying their behavioral reactions to leader narcissism. Stated briefly, belongingness theory posits that individuals possess a universal need to be accepted and valued by others (Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007). Yet, unlike most individuals, narcissists tend to reject the “mutuality of status, caring, and respect that characterizes functional adult relationships” (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002, p. 116). We contend that employees are likely to interpret such lack of care and concern from their leader as a threat to their sense of value and acceptance at work. Therefore, we propose that leader narcissism is negatively associated with employees’ organization-based self-esteem (OBSE; Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989), defined as “the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member” (Pierce & Gardner, 2004, p. 593).

Second, we draw further on belongingness theory to extend the nomological network of the distal outcomes of leader narcissism. Specifically, we illuminate how and why employees are likely to respond to the thwarted sense of belonging (i.e., diminished OBSE) experienced from interacting with a narcissistic leader. We propose that leader narcissism diminishes employees’ willingness to contribute to leadership outcomes in the form of citizenship behaviors, including *promotive voice*, which involves the communication of ideas and suggestions intended to improve the work-unit (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012), and *helping behavior*, which involves offering assistance in order to facilitate task accomplishment in the work group (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). We also expect employees to increase their covert antagonistic reactions toward the narcissistic leader, in the form of *dysfunctional resistance*, which involves noncompliance with leader requests with an intent to disrupt the workflow (Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001), and *badmouthing*, which refers to the communication of disparaging comments about the leader to others (Wilkerson, Evans, & Davis, 2008).

Finally, our research adds to the leader narcissism literature by theoretically explaining why and how narcissistic leaders deviate from their narcissistic behavioral tendencies, thus also providing empirical evidence to counter the claim that narcissists might lack sufficient self-control to enact behaviors helpful for the attainment of their goals (c.f., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). The narcissism literature has suggested that narcissists can be manipulative and may intentionally engage in behaviors that can garner them more positive views or evaluations from others (Paunonen, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, Leikas, & Nissinen, 2006; Vonk, Zeigler-Hill, Mayhew, & Mercer, 2013). A recent study also suggests that narcissistic leaders may use certain influence tactics to fulfill their need for control and dominance while satisfying their constituents’ sense of involvement in leadership processes (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017). From a belongingness perspective, when narcissistic leaders employ such “soft” influence tactics (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012) by displaying a sense of interest in, and appreciation for,

employees and their contributions, the extent of deprivation employees experience from interacting with their narcissistic leader should lessen. Drawing from belongingness theory, we investigate the moderating role of *leader consultation* (Yukl & Falbe, 1990), which refers to circumstances where leaders invite employees to participate in the decision-making process. When narcissistic leaders deploy consultation tactics, they are signaling to employees the opportunity to be involved with an otherwise demeaning and inaccessible leader. Therefore, we expect that leader consultation helps to lessen the negative impact of leader narcissism on employees’ thwarted sense of belonging.

## 2. The belongingness consequences of leader narcissism

Belongingness theory posits that humans have a fundamental need to belong and be accepted by others, one that is fulfilled through (1) frequent interaction and (2) adequate care and concern in their relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). While it is ideal for one’s interpersonal interactions to be “affectively positive or pleasant”, the extent to which such interactions are conflict free and non-negative in nature is of most importance in satiating the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 505). Within belongingness theory, self-esteem is positioned as a “mental meter” by which individuals gauge whether their belongingness needs are being met (Baumeister, 2012, p. 9). Whereas general self-esteem captures “the anticipated long-term probability of belongingness” (Baumeister, 2012, p. 9), OBSE captures an employee’s transient sense of value and acceptance at work (Ferris, Brown, & Heller, 2009).

### 2.1. Leader narcissism and organization-based self-esteem

Drawing on belongingness theory, we argue leader narcissism constitutes an important threat to employees’ sense of belonging at work. Primarily driven by their own psychological needs for dominance and authority resulting from their fragile self-view (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Wink, 1991), narcissists are prone to engage in interpersonal behaviors that demonstrate their superiority, often by depreciating others and their contributions (Back et al., 2013). As Lubit (2002, p. 132) indicates, “to maintain a positive image of themselves, [narcissists] project all their negative qualities onto others and therefore devalue others.” For narcissistic leaders, this tendency toward devaluation can manifest in the form of socially harmful behaviors that publicly belittle or humiliate those they lead, such as by ridiculing their employees or making jokes at their expense (Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993). Such exchanges are likely to be internalized by the target employee, causing a negative self-evaluation of their adequacy and overall sense of relational value and belongingness at work (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In addition, narcissists’ disinterest in the needs and welfare of others

is likely to further frustrate the belongingness needs of employees. Specifically, narcissistic leaders' preoccupation with success and personal advancement often motivates them to neglect, or reject, the inclusion of others in leadership processes (Maccoby, 2003). As a result, employees are likely to interpret this lack of interpersonal interest as an indication that they are neither a valued, nor accepted, member of the work environment. We thus hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Leader narcissism will be negatively related to employees' OBSE.*

### 2.2. The distal impact of leader narcissism via thwarted sense of belongingness

**Promotive voice and helping.** We also consider the motivational implications of a thwarted sense of belonging in response to leader narcissism. We posit that leader narcissism is particularly detrimental to employees' voice and helping. Voice and helping not only reflect employees' engagement in extra-role behaviors (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), but also their beliefs that they are a valued member of the organization (Liu, Hui, Lee, & Chen, 2013). Belongingness theory proposes two reasons why a thwarted sense of belonging from one's narcissistic leader can inhibit employee's voice and helping.

First, the negative self-evaluation experienced in response to leader narcissism may interfere with employees' willingness to contribute to outcomes or goals important to their leader. As forms of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), voice and helping necessitate employees to put forth additional effort beyond their in-role duties (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). However, when employees feel devalued or rejected by their narcissistic leader, such strong threats to their self-concept will motivate them to emotionally disconnect with their leader (Robinson, 1996). This may discourage employees from contributing to leadership outcomes reciprocally. Given the temperamental nature of narcissists (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), we suspect it is more common for employees to withhold behaviors that indirectly contribute to leadership outcomes, such as voice and helping. Second, a thwarted sense of belonging impairs one's self-regulatory functioning (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005), which can render employees less responsive to their leader's needs. For example, a thwarted belonging has been found to impair one's ability to reason logically (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002), which is needed for employees to evaluate the risks and benefits involved in speaking up or to determine if their extra-role efforts would be needed for the achievement of leadership outcomes (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). We thus hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Leader narcissism will have negative indirect effects on employees' (a) promotive voice and (b) helping via their OBSE.*

**Dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing.** A thwarted belonging is also likely to produce socially antagonistic consequences directed toward the source of the threat (Blackhart, Baumeister, & Twenge, 2006). Because narcissists are highly sensitive to, and prone to retaliate against, perceived slights or offenses (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), we suspect it is more common for employees to express their aggression discretely. We thus focus on employees' dysfunctional resistance, as such behavior allows employees to "frustrate their supervisors (thus satisfying their need to redress the injustices inflicted on them) in a manner that is somewhat ambiguous from the target's perspective in terms of intent" (Tepper et al., 2001, p. 975). We also focus on employees' badmouthing behavior (Wilkerson et al., 2008), which provides employees a means to verbally express their frustrations and redress prior offenses without inviting reprisal from the narcissistic leader (Ashforth, 1994; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939).

Upon experiencing a negative self-evaluation of their value and acceptance, employees are likely to aggress against the narcissistic leader in an effort to repair their damaged self-concept (Thau et al., 2007). Prior research suggests that nonconformity and verbal

expression of discontent and grievances with the leader can serve as a means to regain a sense of control and assert one's hegemony (Ashforth, 1994). Even when communicated indirectly through others, expressing one's criticisms about the source of the threat can be an effective way to help relieve one's frustrations (Dollard et al., 1939). In this regard, employees will likely view dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing as effective ways to validate their sense of self without directly confronting their highly volatile leader. In addition, a thwarted belonging can interfere with one's willingness to regulate antisocial impulses (Baumeister et al., 2005), thus increasing employees' tendencies to dysfunctionally resist the leader or speak negatively about the leader to others. We thus hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Leader narcissism will have positive indirect effects on employees' (a) dysfunctional resistance and (b) badmouthing via their OBSE.*

### 2.3. The moderating role of leader consultation

Thus far, we have argued that leader narcissism threatens employees' OBSE, which negatively impacts their voice and helping, and positively impacts their dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing. Nevertheless, we contend that narcissistic leaders might not consistently behave in ways that threaten employees' need to belong. For example, Jonason et al. (2012) suggested that despite their general insensitive nature and disinterest in others, narcissistic individuals still need to interact with and cooperate with others at work. They found that narcissistic individuals attempted to "get their way" at work by engaging in "soft" influence tactics. Social influence may be particularly useful for narcissistic leaders, given that leaders often rely on employees to facilitate leader processes (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Therefore, we focus on narcissistic leaders' use of influence tactics in the form of consultation behaviors in lessening their damaging effects on employee OBSE and the distal outcomes discussed.

First, consultation should reduce the lack of warmth and concern employees experience from their narcissistic leader. According to belongingness theory, while it is ideal for leaders to behave in ways that are affectively pleasant or positive, it is more important that they at least refrain from devaluing their employees (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When narcissistic leaders deploy consultation tactics, they are likely attempting to present themselves in ways that signal, at least temporarily, acceptance of and concern for their employees. Indeed, although employees are likely to interpret consultation tactics as their leader's appreciation and value of their inputs and contributions (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012), the purpose of consultation is to influence employees to carry out requests or engage in desired behavior (Yukl, 1999). The rationale behind such tactics is that employees are more likely to support and accept leader requests and agendas when they are involved in the process (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). It is thus reasonable to assume that when narcissistic leaders involve their employees in the decision-making process, they will abstain from insulting, criticizing, or otherwise belittling employees, as such behavior would undermine the purpose and effectiveness of this influence tactic. As a result, consultation behaviors may motivate employees to somewhat discount their narcissistic leader's typical devaluing and dismissive tendencies.

In addition, consultation behaviors should lessen the sense of isolation employees' experience in relation to their narcissistic leader. Prior research suggests that the opportunity for employees to offer their thoughts and suggestions forms the basis of social interaction and inclusion at work (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008), a key condition contributing to one's sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When narcissistic leaders deploy consultation tactics, they are not only signaling a degree of accessibility, but also their willingness to be available at an individual level. Indeed, as opposed to a group level phenomenon or a general leadership style, consultation is

conceptualized as a behavioral influence tactic directed at individual employees (Kim & Yukl, 1995). As a result, consultation provides employees a degree of individual attention and involvement that helps lessen the overall isolation, and ultimate deprivation, they experience from their leader (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Thus, we argue that narcissistic leaders who engage in consultative behaviors signal less of a threat to employees' belongingness, which results in employees' becoming less likely to reduce their work effort and behave in ways that detract from leadership processes. We thus hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 4.** *Leader consultation will moderate the negative relationship between leader narcissism and employees' OBSE, such that this negative relationship will be stronger in the presence of lower (vs. higher) consultation.*

**Hypothesis 5a.** *Leader consultation will moderate the negative indirect effects of leader narcissism on employees' (a) promotive voice and (b) helping via their OBSE, such that the negative indirect effects will be stronger in the presence of lower (vs. higher) leader consultation.*

**Hypothesis 5b.** *Leader consultation will moderate the positive indirect effects of leader narcissism on employees' (a) dysfunctional resistance and (b) badmouthing via their OBSE, such that the positive indirect effects will be stronger in the presence of lower (vs. higher) leader consultation.*

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Sample and procedures

Survey data for this study was collected from employees and supervising managers working at a large Chinese information technology company. The invited participants worked in a number of areas such as wireless solutions, internet content solutions, renewable energy solutions, software technology solutions, data center infrastructure, cloud computing, and internet media streaming. We briefed all invited participants about the purpose of this study and emphasized that their participation was completely voluntary.

Data was collected at two time points. At *Time 1*, we invited a total of 775 supervising managers to complete questions about leader narcissism. 560 responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 72.3%. We then asked the HR department to offer, for each work group (i.e., per one supervising manager), a personnel list of employees under the direct supervision of those 560 responding supervising managers. In the next step, we invited those employees whose first name appeared first by alphabetical order on that personnel list to complete questions about leader consultation and their own OBSE. Of the 560 employees invited, 447 returned valid responses, yielding a valid response rate of 79.8%. Four weeks later, at *Time 2*, we asked those 447 participating employee respondents to complete questions about the four outcome variables. 262 responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 58.6%.

Therefore, our final sample consists of 262 employees matched with their direct supervising managers. Among the 262 employees, 122 were female (46.6%). The average age and organizational tenure were 32.7 and 6.6 years, respectively. The average dyad tenure was 3.8 years. Among the 262 supervising managers, 49 were female (18.7%). The average age and organizational tenure were 39.2 and 8.7 years, respectively.

#### 3.2. Measures

We followed the standard translation and back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1970) to ensure that all the survey measures and materials were accurately and appropriately translated from English to Chinese. Unless specified, we used five-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") for each of the survey questions.

**Leader narcissism.** Leader narcissism was measured using the 16-

item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006), a short version of NPI-40 (Raskin & Terry, 1988). NPI-16 was also used in previous studies that assessed leader narcissism (e.g., Owens et al., 2015). Following the NPI-16 scoring procedures, we coded narcissism-consistent responses as "1" and narcissism-inconsistent responses as "0". A sample pair item was: "People always seem to recognize my authority" (a narcissism-consistent response) and "Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me" (a narcissism-inconsistent response). Leader narcissism scores were then computed by averaging out the 16 NPI items ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

**Leader consultation.** Leader consultation was measured using the 6-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) developed by Yukl and Falbe (1990). Employees were asked to rate on a five-point scale (1 = "never" to 5 = "almost always") indicating how frequently their supervising manager demonstrated the specified behaviors in the past three months. Sample items include: "This manager consulted with me before making decisions that would affect me", "This manager asked for my ideas and suggestions when making decisions about the work", "This manager asked me to participate in planning changes or new activities for the work unit."

**Organization-based self-esteem.** OBSE was measured using the 7-item OBSE scale ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ) validated and used in the Chinese context (Liang et al., 2012). This 7-item short-version scale was based on the original 10-item scale developed by Pierce et al. (1989). A sample item was: "I am valuable around here."

**Citizenship behaviors.** Employees were asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement about their engagement in the described behaviors in the past four weeks. Specifically, *promotive voice* was measured using the 5-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) developed by Liang et al. (2012). A sample item was: "I raised suggestions to improve the unit's working procedure." *Helping* was measured using the 4-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) from Ng and Van Dyne (2005). This 4-item scale is a short version of the original 7-item helping behavior scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). A sample item was: "I helped other group members with their work responsibilities."

**Antagonistic behaviors.** Employees were again asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement about their engagement in the described behaviors in the past four weeks. Specifically, *dysfunctional resistance* was measured using a 6-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) that was validated in the Chinese context by Brett, Uhl-Bien, Huang, and Carsten (2016). This 6-item scale is a short version of the original 9-item scale developed by Tepper et al. (2001). Respondents were asked to consider circumstances when they resisted responding to their managers' work-related request. A sample item was: "I act like I don't know about it." *Badmouthing* was measured using three items ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) adapted from the original 2-item badmouthing scale developed by Wilkerson et al. (2008). Specifically, to align with our research question, we first changed the target of badmouthing in the original scale from the company to the supervising manager. The two revised items were: "I almost never said bad things about this manager to trusted coworkers (reverse coded)" and "I often complained about this manager to trusted coworkers." We then added one more item to form a 3-item scale, which was: "I often criticized this manager in a very unpleasant manner to trusted coworkers."

**Control variables.** First, we controlled for psychological safety as prior research found that it significantly predicted promotive voice and OBSE (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liang et al., 2012). Second, we controlled for negative affect as it was found to influence employees' perceptions of social interactions at work in a way that more likely results in deviant behaviors or dysfunctional reactions (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Finally, we considered the potential cultural bias in the way Chinese employees interpreted their interactions with a narcissistic leader and their subsequent reactions. Following prior research (Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997), we controlled for traditionalism as it was found to affect how employees viewed their interactions with their leader in the Chinese context.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics, standard deviation, and inter-correlations.

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	32.66	3.87	–													
2. Gender	1.53	0.50	0.09	–												
3. Organizational tenure	6.61	3.00	0.78**	0.08	–											
4. Dyad tenure	3.84	1.55	0.54**	0.09	0.68**	–										
5. Psychological safety	3.59	0.86	–0.07	0.05	0.03	–0.04	–0.04	–0.05	0.06	(0.88)						
6. Negative affect	2.25	1.05	–0.07	–0.07	–0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.14*	0.02	(0.93)					
7. Traditionality	3.54	1.05	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.01	–0.04	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.14*	(0.92)				
8. Leader narcissism	0.39	0.29	–0.06	0.03	–0.04	0.01	–0.02	–0.03	0.02	(0.88)	–0.07	0.31**				
9. Leader consultation	3.50	0.79	–0.09	–0.02	–0.11	0.03	0.02	–0.03	0.04	–0.07	0.06	0.31**	(0.93)			
10. Organization-based self esteem	3.65	0.91	0.02	–0.05	0.04	0.03	0.14*	–0.03	–0.02	–0.42**	0.06	0.41**	0.18**	(0.90)		
11. Promotive voice	3.54	0.95	–0.09	–0.02	–0.03	–0.03	0.19**	–0.00	–0.13*	–0.14*	0.10	0.36**	0.18**	0.31**	(0.91)	
12. Helping	3.47	0.95	–0.09	–0.03	–0.05	–0.09	0.18**	0.04	–0.05	–0.10	–0.12*	–0.39**	–0.18**	–0.20**	0.15*	(0.89)
13. Dysfunctional resistance	2.11	0.79	0.10	0.06	0.03	–0.03	0.03	0.12*	0.00	0.11	–0.12*	–0.32**	0.06	–0.14*	0.15*	(0.89)
14. Badmouthing	2.13	1.01	0.03	0.09	0.03	0.06	0.02	0.17**	–0.02	0.03	–0.22**	–0.32**	0.06	–0.14*	0.15*	(0.89)

Note. N = 262. Gender was coded as 1 = female, 2 = male. Scale reliability is provided in the parentheses.

Two-tailed test.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

### 3.3. Analytical strategy

We first conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to evaluate the measurement validity of our proposed model and then compared it with several alternative measurement models. Following Hu and Bentler’s (1999) recommendation, we examined multiple model fit indices including chi-square statistics, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Given the non-nested nature of our data and the complexity of our proposed moderated mediation model, we incorporated Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 7) into Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and tested the whole structural and measurement model using Mplus 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). This SEM approach allowed us to simultaneously assess the structural paths and moderated indirect effects while accounting for measurement errors of the latent variables included. We also followed Selig and Preacher’s (2008) recommended Monte Carlo simulation approach to estimate the significance of the indirect effects of leader narcissism on the four outcome variables via OBSE. Finally, following recommendations from Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006), we tested the region of significance for the moderated mediation effects to determine the significance of differences between indirect effects estimated across values of the moderating variables.

## 4. Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of study variables. Prior to testing our hypotheses, we performed a series of Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) using Mplus 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010) to assess the measurement validity of our proposed seven-factor model. The CFA results showed that our baseline model produced good fit with the data:  $\chi^2 = 1437.17$ ,  $df = 1013$ , CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.05. We then compared this baseline measurement model with several alternative models that were theoretically plausible. The best competing model was a six-factor measurement model in which we loaded the items of employee dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing onto one single latent factor:  $\chi^2 = 1926.20$ ,  $df = 1019$ , CFI = 0.88, TLI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.07. The chi-square difference test showed that our seven-factor baseline model produced significantly better fit than this best competing model:  $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 489.03$ ,  $p < .01$ . Also, to demonstrate measurement validity of the three control variables included in our analyses, we also tested a ten-factor measurement model in which we assessed the three control variables as unique latent variables. The CFA results showed that this ten-factor model produced good fit with the data:  $\chi^2 = 2472.86$ ,  $df = 1784$ , CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.05. We thus decided to retain our seven-factor baseline model and proceed to testing our proposed hypotheses.

### 4.1. Tests of hypotheses

Incorporating Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 7) into SEM, we assessed the overall structural and measurement model simultaneously. As explained earlier, we also included three control variables (psychological safety, negative affect, and traditionality) while performing SEM. The SEM results are summarized in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that leader narcissism would be negatively related to employees’ OBSE. As reported in Table 2, the SEM results showed a significantly negative relationship between leader narcissism and OBSE ( $\beta = -0.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 1 was thus supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that leader narcissism would have negative indirect effects on employees’ promotive voice (2a) and helping (2b) via their OBSE. As shown in Table 2, the SEM results showed that OBSE was positively associated with both promotive voice ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and helping ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We then estimated the 95% confidence intervals of these indirect effects of leader narcissism using the

**Table 2**  
Summary of results of structural equation modeling.

Predictors	Dependent Variables				
	OBSE	Promotive Voice	Helping	Dysfunctional Resistance	Badmouthing
<i>Control variables</i>					
Psychological safety	0.20** (0.067)	0.19* (0.085)	0.21* (0.089)	0.09 (0.060)	0.07 (0.086)
Negative affect	−0.01 (0.047)	0.01 (0.060)	−0.05 (0.062)	0.09* (0.043)	0.18** (0.062)
Traditionality	−0.04 (0.048)	−0.11† (0.062)	0.05 (0.064)	−0.02 (0.044)	−0.06 (0.063)
<i>Independent variable</i>					
Leader narcissism	−0.29** (0.053)				
<i>Mediator</i>					
Organization-based self esteem		0.46** (0.069)	0.39** (0.070)	−0.34** (0.051)	−0.37** (0.069)
<i>Moderator</i>					
Leader consultation	0.23** (0.046)				
<i>Interaction</i>					
Leader narcissism × Leader consultation	0.25** (0.034)				

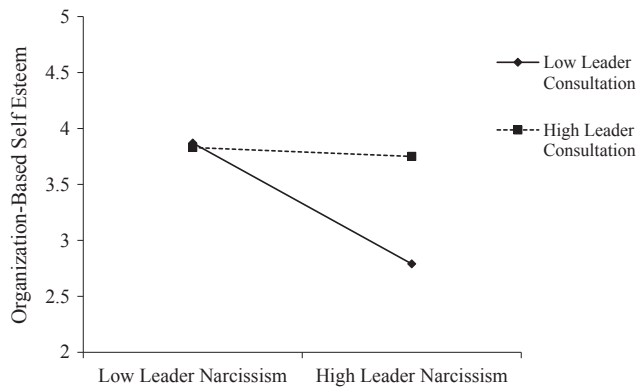
N = 262. OBSE: organization-based self-esteem.

Two-tailed test.

† p < .10.

\* p < .05.

\*\* p < .01.



**Fig. 2.** The moderating effect of leader consultation on the relationship between leader narcissism and employee OBSE.

Monte Carlo simulation approach (bootstrapping = 20,000; Selig & Preacher, 2008). The results showed that leader narcissism had significantly negative indirect effects on both promotive voice ( $\rho = -0.133$ , 95% CI [-0.206, -0.074]) and helping ( $\rho = -0.113$ , 95% CI [-0.179, -0.059]) via OBSE. Hypothesis 2 was thus supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that leader narcissism would have positive indirect effects on employees’ dysfunctional resistance (3a) and badmouthing (3b) via their OBSE. As shown in Table 2, the SEM results showed that OBSE was negatively associated with both dysfunctional resistance ( $\beta = -0.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and badmouthing ( $\beta = -0.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Following the same procedures described earlier, we then estimated the 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effects of leader narcissism on dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing via OBSE using the Monte Carlo simulation approach (bootstrapping = 20000; Selig & Preacher, 2008). The results showed that leader narcissism had significantly positive indirect effects on both dysfunctional resistance ( $\rho = 0.099$ , 95% CI [0.055, 0.151]) and badmouthing ( $\rho = 0.107$ , 95% CI [0.055, 0.171]) via OBSE. Hypothesis 3a and 3b were thus supported.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that leader consultation would moderate the negative relationship between leader narcissism and employees’ OBSE, such that this negative relationship would be stronger in the presence of lower (vs. higher) leader consultation. As shown in Table 2, the SEM

results showed that leader consultation had a significant moderation effect on the relationship between leader narcissism and employees’ OBSE ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We further plotted this moderation effect in Fig. 2. We then performed simple slope T-tests to determine the significance of the slopes. The results showed that the slope computed at one standard deviation below the mean of leader consultation was significantly negative ( $b = -0.540$ ,  $t = -9.309$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while the slope computed at one standard deviation above the mean was not significant ( $b = -0.040$ ,  $t = -0.592$ , *n.s.*). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that leader consultation would moderate: (5a) the negative indirect effects of leader narcissism on promotive voice and helping; and (5b) the positive indirect effects of leader narcissism on dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing via employees’ OBSE, such that these two indirect effects would be stronger in the presence of low (vs. high) leader consultation. As reported in Table 3, the SEM results showed that when leader consultation was low (i.e., -1 s.d.), leader narcissism had significantly negative indirect effects on promotive voice ( $\beta = -0.301$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and helping ( $\beta = -0.257$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and significantly positive indirect effects on dysfunctional resistance ( $\beta = 0.220$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and badmouthing ( $\beta = 0.244$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, when leader consultation was high (i.e., +1 s.d.), leader narcissism did not have significant indirect effects on promotive voice ( $\beta = 0.067$ , *n.s.*), helping ( $\beta = 0.057$ , *n.s.*), dysfunctional resistance ( $\beta = -0.049$ , *n.s.*), or badmouthing ( $\beta = -0.054$ , *n.s.*). To determine the significance of differences between the indirect effects estimated at low vs. high values of leader consultation, we followed Preacher et al.’s (2006) approach by testing the region of significance for the moderated indirect effects. The results showed that the moderated indirect effects were significantly different when the value of leader consultation was less than 1.16 units above its mean value, meaning that the moderated indirect effects were significantly different across low vs. high values (from -1 s.d. to +1 s.d.) of leader consultation. Therefore, Hypothesis 5a and 5b were both supported.

**5. Discussion**

In the present study, we proposed and empirically tested a moderated mediation model linking leader narcissism with employees’ citizenship (promotive voice and helping) and antagonistic (dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing) behaviors via employees’ OBSE, depending on conditions of leader consultation. Consistent with our

**Table 3**  
Summary of conditional indirect effects of leader narcissism on employee outcomes.

Moderator: Leader consultation	Leader narcissism = > Organization-based self-esteem = > Outcome variables							
	Promotive voice		Helping		Dysfunctional resistance		Badmouthing	
	Estimate	s.e.	Estimate	s.e.	Estimate	s.e.	Estimate	s.e.
Low (−1 s.d.)	−0.301**	0.054	−0.257**	0.052	0.220**	0.039	0.244**	.051
High (+1 s.d.)	0.067	0.036	0.057	0.031	−0.049	0.026	−0.054	0.029

N = 262. s.e.: standard errors; s.d.: standard deviation; The conditional indirect effects of leader narcissism on employee outcomes (promotive voice, helping behavior, dysfunctional resistance, and badmouthing) via employees’ organization-based self-esteem across values of leader consultation were estimated by incorporating Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS approach (Model 7) into structural equation modeling.

\*\* p < .01. Two-tailed test.

prediction, the results show that leader narcissism negatively relates to employee OBSE. In addition, while such impact reduces employees’ willingness to voice their suggestions or help others at work, it also increases employees’ propensity to actively ignore and avoid the leader’s requests and communicate disparaging comments about the leader to others. Our results further demonstrate that a leader’s use of consultation tactics can offset the damaging effect of their narcissism on employee OBSE, as well as its indirect effects on employee outcomes via OBSE.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Our study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, our study is among the first to theoretically articulate the psychological mechanism (OBSE) underlying employees’ behavioral reactions to leader narcissism. The broader narcissism literature has long recognized narcissists’ inability to fulfill others’ needs for intimacy and closeness (Campbell, 1999; Sedikides et al., 2002). Despite such tendencies, the leader narcissism literature has focused predominantly on narcissistic leader’s idiosyncratic characteristics (Owens et al., 2015) that counter-balance their narcissism, and the subsequent *distal* consequences incurred by employees, such as employees’ job engagement and task performance. Consequently, less attention has been devoted to understanding the theoretical mechanisms explaining why and how employees are likely to react to the interpersonally insensitive and dismissive tendencies of their narcissistic leader. Our findings demonstrate that OBSE constitutes a key mediating mechanism capturing employees’ diminished sense of belonging at work in response to leader narcissism.

Second, our study demonstrates the nuanced and potentially wide-ranging consequences of leader narcissism. Consistent with a belongingness perspective, we argued that when employees’ need to belong is thwarted, they are likely to respond by exerting less work effort while exhibiting more dysfunctional behaviors directed toward the source of the threat. Yet, while prior research suggests that individuals are likely to direct their frustrations *overtly* toward the source of the threat (Ferris et al., 2009; Thau et al., 2007), including one’s leader (Greenberg & Barling, 1999; Jones, 2009), we theorized and found that employees would retaliate toward the narcissistic leader discretely by reducing their citizenship behaviors (voice and helping) and aggressing covertly (dysfunctional resistance and badmouthing). We thus contribute to the understanding of the nomological network of consequences stemming from leader narcissism.

Third, we extend prior literature by illuminating how narcissistic leaders’ use of influence tactics can mitigate the effect of their demeaning and interpersonally distant tendencies on employee OBSE and work outcomes. The personality and broader narcissism literatures have long suggested that narcissistic individuals could be manipulative and engage in more socially favorable behaviors that counter their noxious personal qualities in order to accomplish their objectives (Jonason et al., 2012; Maccoby, 2000; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Only recently,

however, have leadership scholars begun examining the effects of narcissistic leader’s use of social influence (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017). We break new theoretical ground by demonstrating that narcissistic leaders’ use of influence tactics – particularly consultation behaviors – are capable of offsetting (rather than merely lessening as we hypothesized) the extent of belongingness deprivation employees experience. Our findings therefore also add to the narcissism literature by providing empirical evidence that narcissistic individuals might demonstrate, instead of lacking (c.f., Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), sufficient self-control to enact behaviors helpful for the attainment of their goals.

In doing so, we also contribute to the broader leadership literature. Leadership scholars have generally considered leader traits either independently from (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002), or as a precursor to (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011), leader behaviors. For this latter approach, research has generally assumed that leader traits consistently predict leader behaviors (DeRue et al., 2011). Yet, our results suggest that narcissistic leaders may deviate from certain trait tendencies in order to achieve their goals. For example, although it makes theoretical sense that leader narcissism – due to desires for self-aggrandizement and acclaim (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017; Jonason et al., 2012) – should be conceptually linked to consultation tactics, such behaviors necessitate the leader to deviate from other trait tendencies (e.g., devaluation, emotional distance, etc.). Our findings suggest that examining leader behaviors as boundary conditions of leader traits is important for understanding how employees reconcile potential within-person variations in the enactment of their leader’s trait tendencies. Importantly, the joint impact of leader traits and behaviors outlined in this study may not be limited to studying dark leader traits such as leader narcissism. In light of recent research recommending a multi-rater approach to understanding personality (McAbee & Connelly, 2016), our study offers a more contextually-specific approach to understanding the inconsistent behavioral tendencies of leaders that could compensate for the damaging effects caused by the nature of their traits.

Finally, our study adds to the understanding about leader narcissism and self-concept in the Chinese cultural context. Recent research suggests that the study of leader narcissism within a Chinese context is increasingly relevant and important (Liu et al., 2017; Wang, Li, & Kong, 2017). While emphasizing the importance of developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships at work (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998), the Chinese culture is also characterized with a general sense of admiration and respect for authority (Farh et al., 1997). Such cultural belief is deeply rooted in Chinese employees’ sense of traditionality and reflects in their interactions with the leader primarily by means of compliance (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007; Hui, Lee, & Rousseau, 2004). Thus, it is not without concern that Chinese employees might view the self-centered, arrogant, and dismissive behaviors of their narcissistic leaders as leaders’ expression of power instead of their preferences in developing interpersonal relationships, and therefore refrain from directing their negative reactions toward their leader (Liu, Kwan, Wu, & Wu, 2010). However, our findings provide at least preliminary evidence

showing that the demeaning and dismissive behavioral tendencies of narcissistic leaders in the Chinese context may be particularly detrimental to employees' need to belong and thus motivate them to react negatively towards the leader. This is consistent with emerging literature in Chinese management research confirming the presence of narcissistic leaders in Chinese companies and its detrimental impact on employees' well-being (Liao, Shao, & Tian, 2016).

### 5.2. Practical implications

Our study also has important implications for practitioners. First, our findings about the potentially harmful consequences of leader narcissism emphasize the importance for organizations to train those leaders with narcissistic tendencies to engage in more inclusive communication. Despite the assumption that those with strong, "dark side" traits, such as subclinical narcissism, cannot be trained, extant research suggests otherwise (Harms, Spain, & Hannah, 2011). Although narcissists have difficulty taking criticism, they may be receptive to training if they think it can help them advance or self-enhance in some way (Harms et al., 2011). Thus, tailoring an organization's leadership training and making it more palatable for those with narcissistic tendencies may provide them with the skills needed to be successful leaders.

Our study also has important implications for the recruitment of leaders. Although at first glance our findings might indicate that organizations should avoid hiring narcissistic managers, our results lend support to prior literature suggesting that the negative effects of narcissistic leaders on organizations and their members can be lessened (Grijalva & Harms, 2014; Maccoby, 2003). For organizations faced with the decision to select a talented narcissist, ensuring the individual is not overly narcissistic and/or has demonstrated a willingness to consult with others, could be a valuable addition to the selection criteria.

### 5.3. Limitations and future directions

While our study carries a number of strengths, it is not without limitations. Most notably, we conducted our study using field survey data from China. Despite recent research on leader narcissism having been tested in a Chinese context (Liu et al., 2017), there remain several potential concerns about the generalizability of our findings. Specifically, given the high levels of collectivism and power distance present in Chinese culture, more research is needed to understand whether the impact of leader narcissism might be different from that of a Western context. For example, high power distance and greater emphasis on collectivism present in Chinese culture may result in employees' greater tolerance of a narcissistic leader, which might mitigate the adverse influence of leader narcissism on employees. This, however, would suggest that the results found in the present study may in fact be stronger if tested in the West. To partially account for employees' cultural bias, we controlled for traditionalism in our analyses, which has been considered a strong factor that affects individuals' evaluation towards the interactions they have with their leader across Chinese and American cultures (Farh et al., 2007). We call for future research in leader narcissism to take a more active approach by explicitly exploring the role of culture (e.g., individualism, traditionality).

Second, although we argued that consultation tactics could reflect narcissistic leaders' attempts at manipulating their employees, we did not explicitly test when narcissistic leaders might be more likely to engage in these behaviors. As a result, we cannot rule out other potential explanations for narcissistic leaders' use of consultation. For instance, as Liu et al. (2017) indicate, there may be contextual factors that suppress narcissistic tendencies from manifesting in their work behavior. Given narcissists' fragile self-view, future research may wish to explore how identity threats (Leavitt & Sluss, 2015) play a role in motivating narcissistic leaders' inclusion of employees at work. Furthermore, as Owens et al.'s (2015) study suggest, there may exist

additional traits that help narcissistic leaders to display consultation. One trait that could help narcissistic leaders display consultation is affinity-seeking, defined as "the active [and strategic] social-communicative process by which individuals attempt to get others to like and to feel positive toward them" (Bell & Daly, 1984, p. 91). Although in general narcissists tend to have a strong desire for attention, adulation, and social approval (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), they might differ in the extent to which they desire to be liked by others, as opposed to merely being admired or respected. Finally, examining leader cultural values such as collectivism likely constitutes a fruitful area as a narcissistic leader who is also high in collectivist orientation may be more likely to engage in behaviors that involve their employees in leadership processes.

Third, as we were concerned with whether narcissistic leaders would constitute an accurate rating source for our outcomes of interest, we used employee ratings of helping, voice, dysfunctional resistance, and badmouthing. Voice and helping, for example, are usually obtained from one's supervisor or peer (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). We attempted to alleviate this concern by incorporating a four-week time-lag between ratings of employee OBSE and their behavioral outcomes. Despite this approach, the same-source nature of our mediator and outcomes of interests raises potential concerns of percept-percept bias and social-desirability (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Finally, we collected non-nested dyadic data (i.e., one subordinate per supervisor) as an attempt to more effectively match managers' responses with those from employees. Yet, our study would have benefited more from collecting multilevel data in which we would be able to account for team-level effects such as culture and team member exchange quality as these factors could also influence employees' OBSE. We call for future research to study this phenomenon from a multilevel perspective by accounting for these team-level factors.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study examines the belongingness consequences of leader narcissism via employees' diminished OBSE. Our findings show that while narcissism can be detrimental to employees' OBSE and thus trigger employees' negative reactions, the harmful impact of leader narcissism could be offset by leaders' use of consultation tactics. We hope these findings encourage future researchers to continue to explore the potentially harmful impact of leader narcissism on employee outcomes, and the factors capable of mitigating this effect.

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