Original Research

Narcissistic Leadership and Follower Voice: The Mediating Roles of Surface Acting and Emotional Exhaustion and Moderating Role of Attachment Style

Sadegh Ashegh Hooseini, Mohammad Sadegh Sharifirad[1]
Nahid Amrollahi Biuki
Department of Administrative Management, Ardakan University, P.O Box 184,
Ardakan, Iran

Abstract

Leadership has become an important topic in industrial-organizational psychology, and a popular concept for adult development. Researchers generally believe that one of the factors that lead to leaders harming followers is narcissistic leadership. Narcissistic leaders generally cause emotional damage to their followers with their actions and behavior and silence them by reacting negatively to criticism. In this regard, the current research, using resource conservation theory (COR), attachment theory and narcissism literature, examines how and in what ways narcissistic leaders suppress followers' voice behavior and when this effect can be reduced. Accordingly, this study develops a moderated mediation model where surface acting and emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and follower's voice behavior and the two attachment styles of anxious and avoidant moderate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and surface acting. The results largely support the hypotheses of this research based on the data collected from 305 students studying at Iranian public universities. Particularly, narcissistic leadership directly impacts follower's voice via surface acting and emotional exhaustion. Lastly, the narcissistic leadership and follower's voice connections are favorably moderated by avoidance attachment style. Today, organizations need constructive ideas and opinions from their members for individual and group growth. In order to prevent the waste of emotional resources and silencing the voice of employees, organizations should consider a suitable approach for the growth and development of a culture of criticism and questioning, as well as better communication with followers.

Keywords: Narcissistic leadership, Follower voice, Surface acting, Emotional exhaustion, Attachment style.

[1] *Corresponding author's Email: m.s.sharifirad@ardakan.ac.ir*

Introduction

The main feature of narcissism is holding contrasting self-concepts of grandiosity vulnerability causing their crave for external admiration (Back et al., 2013), impacting others' lives tremendously (Huang, Krasikova & Harms, 2020). Given that, researchers are highly attracted to study narcissism and its association with leadership (De Vries & Miller, 1985; Sosik, et al., 2014; Carnevale, Huang & Harms, 2018). Preoccupied with the self, narcissistic leaders can jeopardize mutual relationships through sharing some common characteristics such as unwillingness to accept criticism, aggressiveness, empathy deficiency and arrogance (Campbell et al., 2011). One of the detrimental effects of narcissistic leaders is reducing employee voice, which can stifle individual creativity (Chen & Hou, 2016), lower innovation (Gambarotto & Cammozzo, 2010) and even productivity (Kim, MacDuffie & Pil, 2010), all of which can mute followers' voice (Yao, Zhang, Liu, Zhang & Luo, 2019; Mousa et al., 2020). Considering the importance of voice behavior as a selective process to talk to keep silent (Morrison, 2011; Avey, Wernsing & Palanski, 2012), prior studies have shown narcissistic leaders decrease employees voice through lowering followers' energy; however, hitherto, no research has investigated "why" and "how" energy is depleted. This study considers surface acting defined as emotional labor changing outward emotional display rather than altering the inner true feelings (Abraham, 1998; Grandey, 2000) as the intervening variable and attachment styles-anxious and avoidant, as the moderators to cast more light on the mechanism through which followers do not voice.

The conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and narcissism literature were used to suggest a moderated mediation model delineating why and under what conditions narcissistic leaders have a negative impact on followers' voice and how this influence can be moderated. COR theory proposes that individuals are encouraged to conserve their limited resources or to gain new resources to avoid resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Unfortunately, narcissistic leaders cause job stress (Yao et al., 2019) through generating demands consuming employees' time, energy, and other resources (Carnevale al., 2018) and yet they expect constant admiration by their followers and reject negative feedback aggressively (Kumar, 2019). In return, we argue that followers resort to surface act as a coping strategy to fake positive emotions and/or suppress negative emotions to avoid losing more of their resources and to maintain their interaction with the leader.
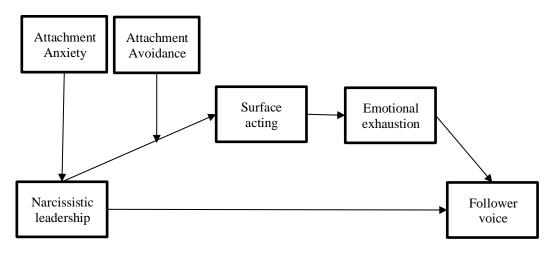
Based upon cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1954), doing surface acting initiates emotional/cognitive dissonance which can cause emotional exhaustion because employees contract stress due to an obligation to show emotions differing from their true feelings (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983); therefore, their resources are depleted (Grandey, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002); consequently, they become less open-minded, less driven and more apathetic (Hagen, 1989). Hence, emotionally exhausted individuals may be less likely to voice thereby conserving the remnants of their already repleted emotional resources (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Accordingly, surface acting can function as a cause for emotional exhaustion to stop followers' voice.
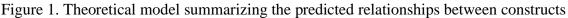
Additionally, this study considers the boundary conditions under which the adverse effect of narcissistic leadership can be attenuated. In this regard, considering that those

employees with high attachment anxiety tend to be more closely involved in work relationships and processes; nevertheless, this closeness comes at a cost in that they experience more strain when participating in social encounters (Leiter, Day & Price, 2015). On the contrary, people who have high levels of avoidance attachment, trusting other people is tough and do not share their feelings, nor depend on others; therefore, they shun intimacy and emphasize independence (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Therefore, it is argued with a high (vs. low) avoidance attachment style is less likely to engage in relationships and interactions; therefore, they are less influenced by the destructive behaviors of narcissistic leaders; however, people with high anxiety attachments style are more likely to engage in interactions and relationships, so they incur more costs from narcissistic leaders.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, this study is among the first elaborating on the emotional mechanism linking narcissistic leadership to emotional exhaustion (Spain, Harms & LeBreton, 2014; Carnevale, Huang & Harms, 2018). Second, using attachment theory as an important volitional variable in interactions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), this study tries to propose attachment styles- anxious and avoidant- as the enhancers or exacerbators of the relationship between narcissistic leadership and employees' voice. Third, this study also expands the leadership and voice literature by examining followers' emotional labor, including surface acting. The theoretical model appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical model summarizing the predicted relationships between constructs

Leader narcissism and followers' voice

Voice behavior refers to the expression of creative ideas, directions and opinions that encourage other people to accept these constructive suggestions (Ng & Feldman, 2012). The voice is considered as discretionary behavior through which Individuals select whether to initiate in this behavior at any moment in time or not, a choice that is impacted by a range of factors. The occurrence of voice behavior is contingent on diverse factors including the cost-benefit analysis (Detert & Burris, 2007). In other words, employees usually start a calculated and deliberate decision-making process before articulation,

which helps the evaluation of voice behavior consequences (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton et al., 1998; Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

However, recent studies on employee voice behavior have demonstrated the association between the implementation of the ideas expressed by employees through voice behavior and leadership style. Putting it differently, the follower can assess the cost and benefit of voice behavior based on the leader's style and behavior (Howell et al., 2015). Among leadership styles, narcissistic leaders are more likely to create conditions that would discourage follower voice (Liao et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2016). Huang et al. (2019) examined the action of narcissistic leaders to silence their followers from a COR perspective and figured out that narcissistic leaders as emotional vampires are motivated to maintain their limited psychological and social resources (e.g., a strong ego and perceptions of superiority) thereby, hindering follower voice (Huang et al., 2019). The absence of understanding others' emotional states under the label of apathy is a core quality of narcissism (Hart, Hepper & Sedikides, 2018). In dyadic relationships, narcissistic leadership may dictate demands which deplete cognitive and emotional resources, thereby reducing employee energy and even deterring employees from speaking up (Carnevale et al., 2018). As an indispensable part of their conduct, narcissistic leaders are sensitive to criticism, and they are inclined to adopt knowledge concealing strategies with follower (Glad, 2002) and often react aggressively in response to negative opinions and criticism and, generally, they are not enthusiastic to seek the views of their subordinates (Nevicka et al., 2011) and thus followers who defend themselves in silence, keep their information and opinions in their minds not to lose their self-protection and feel fear (Van Dyne et al.,2003). Finally, the prediction of non-appropriate responses from narcissistic leaders after receiving feedback seals the lips of followers due to the possible resource loss (Huang et al. (2019). Based on the previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Leader narcissism is negatively related to follower voice.

The mediating roles of surface acting and emotional exhaustion

Drawing on COR theory, we argue that narcissistic leadership is an important stressor depleting the positive emotions of followers and act as emotional vampires (Bernstein, 2012; Carnevale, Huang & Harms, 2018). As a result, they capitalize upon surface acting to stop more resource loss. To elaborate, narcissists need persistent adulation and validation of their superior power to maintain their inflated, but nonetheless tenuous, self-perception (Grijalva& Harms, 2014; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001); thus, in many cases, they try to satiate their excessive need for dominance over others (Raskin et al., 1991; Raskin & Terry, 1988) through the sheer obedience of others (Bushman & Baumeister 1998). To establish such a climate, narcissistic leaders humiliate followers and deal aggressively with those who offer negative feedback (kumar, 2019) and tend to surround themselves with admiring and flattering followers, all of which can harm followers' health (Brooks, 2016). According to COR theory, individuals are motivated to engage in resource conservation activities (Hobfoll, 1989). To minimize harm, employees are likely to lose considerable cognitive and emotional resources to cope with their narcissistic leader's fragile ego (Raskin & Terry,1988; Wink, 1991).

The consequences of the injuries and cost imposed by narcissists may vary greatly, depending on the degree and the way these injuries are prevented. Some people are able to conceal their emotional strains for themselves behind the facade of their apparently well-adjusted personality; however, are mostly acting against their own feelings (Jørstad, 1996). Research has shown that followers vail their true feelings to enhance their interactions and minimize the harm of narcissistic leadership through surface acting, thereby conveying positive emotions (Lee & Madera,2019). Surface acting independently helps voice to be less costly and safer for people (Grant, 2012). This results in investing a certain amount of emotional effort in their jobs to express organizationally desirable emotions based on organizational policies and emotional norms (Prati, et al, 2009). This climate is likely to obstruct followers' expression of their ideas, opinions, and criticisms and this will drain energy and demotivate productive voice behaviors.

Looking through the perspective of emotional depletion, various factors influence emotional exhaustion such as organizational factors and individual characteristics (Mulki et al., 2006). Organizational factor such as leadership style (Mulki et al., 2006) is an important individual factor boosting stress (Stordeur et al., 2001; Gaines & Jermier,1983; Thompson et al., 2005). In this regard, surface acting that may be initiated by narcissistic leadership acts as an active stressor for followers (Hochschild, 1983). According to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1954), engagement in surface acting develops emotional/cognitive dissonance that could be an antecedent of emotional exhaustion because employees have an obligation to display emotions that differ from their true feelings (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983) and also this pretentious behavior causes job burnout, resource depletion, depersonalization, and depression (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Morris and Feldman, 1997), which ultimately boils down to emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003).

Emotional exhaustion features lack of energy (Maslach, 1982) and a feeling that one's emotional resources are utterly depleted (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998), thereby less open mindedness, less motivation and more apathy pursues (Hagen, 1989). Given that, emotions have a special effect on expression and voice (Blanton, 1915) and according to Feldman (2012, p. 216) "followers probably use voice to regulate personal and emotional resources through deciding whether to voice or not." The conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides an appropriate ground to examine the connection between stress and voice and the motivation to use voice to protect or acquire personally valued resources (Qin et al., 2014).

In some situations, speaking up can cause social and professional risks in addition to costing valuable time and energy; hence, emotionally exhausted employees may be less likely to voice to conserve the remnants of their already diminished emotional resources (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). On the same ground, defensively silent followers withhold information and opinions to protect themselves and escape from probable fear (VanDyneetal.,2003). After the consideration of the above-mentioned points, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: Surface acting and emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and followers' voice behavior in a way that narcissistic leadership

causes surface acting from the followers' side to feel emotionally exhausted and ultimately voice behavior is impaired.

The moderating role of attachment style

Recent research on attachment theory revolves around the hinge of classifying individuals into two types of avoidance (i.e., uncomfortable with others' desires for closeness and dependency) and anxiety (i.e., desiring a high level of closeness to others, but anxious that others might not want to be close) (Swaminathan, Stilley & Ahluwalia, 2009; Levy et al., 2011; Baldwin & Fehr, 1995). Considering the conspicuous impact of attachment style on relationships and social interactions (liu et al., 2013), this study investigates the effect of two types of anxiety and avoidant attachment on the relationship between leader and follower is investigated. Consistent with the stress-generation hypothesis (Hammen, 1991), attachment insecurity may contribute to the increased likelihood of creating additional stressful life events (Bottonari, Roberts, Kelly, Kashdan & Ciesla, 2007; Hankin, Kassel & Abela, 2005). Moreover, individuals with insecure attachment are prone to have deficits in regulating emotions (Mikulincer, Orbach & Iavnieli, 1998; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2013) and developing and maintaining close interpersonal relationships (Bartholomew, 1990). In contrast, those individuals having high levels of avoidance attachment tend to dismiss the importance of social and interpersonal domains (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and prefer to maintain a safe emotional gap from others when stress occurs (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995). This avoidance of intimacy is judged as a self-protective stance against disappointment and rejection (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002). Accordingly, we argue that followers with a high level of avoidant attachment avoid engaging in relationships with the narcissistic leader, and as a result, may find themselves less harmed by the stressful behaviors of narcissistic leaders; therefore, followers with high levels of avoidance attachment may be less likely to take on the surface acting.

H₃: Follower's avoidance attachment style moderates the positive relationship between leader narcissism and surface acting in a way that this positive relationship will be stronger (vs. weaker) in the presence of high (vs. low) attachment avoidance.

On the contrary, attachment anxiety is related to intensifying appraisals of distressful situations, in which threats are perceived as extreme and coping resources as insufficient (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Individuals experiencing more anxiety when abandoned tend to possess a negative self-view (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995). They are more hypersensitive to the signs of rejection and they feel a compulsive need to be close to others (Leiter, Day & Price, 2015). As a result, they are more dependent and tend to become enmeshed in relationships (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002). More exposure to social encounters imposes more strain to those with higher levels of attachment anxiety and this is partly due to their need for dependence (Leiter, Day & Price, 2015). Accordingly, it is argued that individuals with high levels of anxiety attachment are more likely to be harmed when confronted with the traumatic behaviors of narcissistic leaders. Also, people with low anxiety attachment styles are less likely to bear the costs of narcissistic leaders, so anxiety attachment styles may moderate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and surface acting. With the above said, The following hypothesis is proposed:

H₄: Follower's anxiety attachment style moderates the positive relationship between leader narcissism and surface acting in a way that this positive relationship will be stronger (vs. weaker) in the presence of high (vs. low) attachment anxiety.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 305 undergraduate and graduate students from public universities. Due to the dispersion of students and unavailability, an online questionnaire was used and sent through social media. About 1061 people saw the questionnaire; however, 350 students completed the questionnaire (response rate of 33%). Out of these 350 participants, finally 305 good data were obtained. The sample demographics of the final participants were as follows: 59.7% were female; they were 23.12 years old on average (SD =4.53); There were about 23 members in each class, and at least five people took part in the survey. Survey forms sent to students include a report of the professor's narcissism, assessment of anxiety and avoidance attachment styles, surface acting, emotional exhaustion, and voice behavior.

Measurements

Narcissistic leadership: Narcissistic leadership was measured with an 8-item scale developed by Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, and Hiller (2009). Students were asked to rate the extent to which each item characterized their professor on a five-point scale ranging from "1=not at all" to "5=to a large extent". Sample items include "Arrogant", "Conceited", and "Show-off" (α=.81).

Surface acting: To measure students' surface acting, the 5-item scale developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) was adapted to suit the relationship between the professor and the student. A sample item was "For better communication, I try not to express my true feelings" with a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) . The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.85.

Emotional exhaustion: Emotional exhaustion was measured with a 5-item scale adapted from Schaufeli et al. (2003). Students answered these questions on a four-point scale ranging from "1= not at all" to "4=to a large extent". Sample items include: "I feel emotionally drained by my studies", "I feel used up at the end of a day at university" and "Studying or attending a class is really a strain for me." (α=.80).

Voice behavior: Voice behaivor was measured with the 6-item voice behavior scale (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) after some changes to suit research context. Students were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a five-point scale ranging from "1=Very low" to "5=Very much". A sample item was: "I express my opinions about the class even if my opinion is different and the professor and others disagree with me." (α=.81).

Attachment Styles: Both types of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were measured by 10-items developed by Leiter, Price, & Day (2013) with 5 items per dimension. The questions were adapted to suit the academic context. Using a 5-point

Likert type scale (1-not at all like me; 3-somewhat like me; 5-very much like me), professors and students both showed the extent to which items described them (e.g., for attachment anxiety: "I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them"; for attachment avoidance: "At university, I do not need close friendships with others". For students, Cronbach's alphas were α= .72 and α= .81 for attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, respectively and for professors, Cronbach's alphas were α= .72 (anxiety) and α= .81 (avoidance).

Analysis

PROCESS macro for SPSS developed by Hayes (2013) was used to test the hypotheses via considering two nested models. Initially, bootstrapping procedure (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) was chosen to analyze the mediation model (Model 1). In the second phase, moderated-mediation analysis (Model 2) was performed based on Preacher et al. (2007) bootstrapping procedure to extract the proposed conditional indirect effects proposed in Hypotheses 2 after considering moderators in the conceptual model (Edwards and Lambert 2007). In bootstrapping technique, a sampling distribution pertaining to indirect effect is generated through resampling with replacement and can be utilized to make confidence intervals. The exclusion of zero in the confidence intervals is the indication of significance for the indirect effects (Shrout and Bolger 2002). One of the merits of bootstrapping is the building of non-normal sampling distribution causing more robust statistical analysis through Type 1 error reduction (MacKinnon et al. 2004; Preacher and Hayes 2008).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Age	23.20	4.53										
Gender	1.59	.49	-.45									
Class member	23.03	13.27	-.41**	.03								
Class time	2.40	1.51	-.49	.01	-.06							
Narcissistic leadership	2.44	.12	-.10	-.11*	-.03	.1	.81					
Attachment avoidance	2.36	.80	.05	-.01	-.02	.07	.75	.83				
Attachment anxiety	2.83	.80	-.09	-.04	.08	.05	.21**	-.10	.74			
Surface acting	2.41	.89	-.15**	-.13*	.01	.1	.34**	.15**	.30**	.85		
Emotional exhaustion	2.14	.62	-.16**	-.1	.04	.07	.29**	.09	.26**	.42**	.81	
Follower voice behavior	3.18	.78	.13*	-.05	-.12*	.02	-.12**	-.18**	-.07	-.39**	-.37**	.81

N = 305. Alpha reliabilities are in italics and appear on the diagonal
M: mean, SD: Standard Deviation
**p<0.01
*p<0.05

In the output of PROCESS, the index of moderated mediation as an interval estimate was considered to prove the mediation is accentuated while diverse values of the moderator are considered (Hayes 2014). In this regard, first, unstandardized coefficients are reported as better metrics (Asher 1983; Hayes 2013; James et al. 1982), second, mean centering was utilized to enhance the interpretation direct effects in Model 1 and Model 2. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics, correlations and coefficient alphas among all study variables.

Hypothesis 1 postulates a direct effect between narcissistic leadership and follower voice behavior. This hypothesis was supported with significant direct effects (see Tables 2, 3), narcissistic leadership effect on voice behavior in Model 1 (*b effect* = 0.08, *p*=0.03); however, the direct effect was not significance for the moderated mediation model (Model 2) (*b effect* = 0.04, *p*=0.2). Moreover, the indirect effects of narcissistic leadership on voice behavior were significant for both Model 1 (indirect effect = 0.02, CI.95 = -0.039, -0.011) and Model 2 (indirect effect =-0.03, CI.95=-0.068, -0.006), indicating partial mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986). Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the two variables of surface acting, and emotional exhaustion will simultaneously mediate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and follower voice behavior in a way that surface acting is the first and emotional exhaustion is the second mediator. The results for Model 1 indicated that, first, the model with two mediators with no moderators is significant and the indirect effects of narcissistic leadership on follower voice behavior is conveyed by the two variables of surface acting and emotional exhaustion (indirect effect = 0.02, CI.95 = -0.039, -0.011). In Model 2, the moderated mediated model with two mediators showed a good index of model fit and indirect effects of the mediators were significant for diverse levels of both moderators.

In the conceptual model, attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance of followers moderate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and surface acting such that the indirect effect is stronger when attachment anxiety is high, and this indirect effect is weaker when attachment avoidance is high. Support was only found for the attachment avoidance of followers with significant interaction terms in the moderated-mediation models (see Tables 2, 3).

Table 2. Mediation and moderated mediation estimates for follower voices

Mediation model					
Direct effects	Coefficient	SE	t	p	Model R^2
Surface acting as DV					
Constant	1.73	.11	15.05	.0000	
Narcissistic leadership	.27	.04	6.42	.0000	.11 ***
Emotional exhaustion as DV					
Constant	1.29	.10	12.80	.0000	
Narcissistic leadership	.09	.03	3.15	.0018	.20 ***
Follower voice as DV					
Constant	3.39	.10	31.79	.0000	
Narcissistic leadership	-.08	.03	-2.12	.03	.01*

Mediation model					
Direct effects	Coefficient	SE	t	p	Model R²
Indirect effect	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI
Narcissistic leadership on followers voices	-.071	.018	-.111		-.039
Narcissistic leadership on followers voices	-.032	.015	-.067		-.007
Narcissistic leadership on followers voices	-.023	.007	-.038		-.011

Moderated-Mediation Model					
Direct effects	Coefficient	SE	t	p	Model R²
Surface acting as DV					
Constant	2.11	.35	5.96	.0000	
Narcissistic leadership	.01	.12	.10	.91	
Avoidance attachment	-.15	.14	-1.06	.28	.15***
Narcissistic*Avoidance	.10	.04	2.25	.02	.01*
Conditional indirect effects	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI
Low	-.0155	.0067	-.0305		-.0037
Mean	-.0229	.0072	-.0387		-.0105
High	-.0304	.0102	-.0528		-.0135
Index of moderated mediation	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI
Avoidance attachment	-.009	.005	-.022		-.0004

N = 305. Effect size estimates are unstandardized coefficients. Moderator values of low and high are the mean plus/ minus one standard deviation. Mean centering was used for product terms DV dependent variable, SE standard error, Boot 50,000 bootstrap samples, LLCI bias corrected lower limit confidence interval, ULCI bias corrected upper limit confidence interval
*** p<0.001

Table 3. Mediation and moderated mediation estimates for follower voices

Moderated-Mediation Model					
Direct effects	Coefficient	SE	t	p	Model R²
Surface acting as DV					
Constant	.46	.39	1.17	.0000	
Narcissistic leadership	.45	.13	3.37	.0008	
Anxiety attachment	.49	.14	3.49	.0005	.18***
Narcissistic* Anxiety	-.07	.04	-1.71	.08	.007
Conditional indirect effects	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI
Low	-.025	.008	-.045		-.010
Mean	-.020	.006	-.0342		-.009
High	-.014	.006	-.029		-.003
Index of moderated mediation	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI		Boot ULCI
Anxiety attachment	.006	.005	-.003		.019

N = 305. Effect size estimates are unstandardized coefficients. Moderator values of low and high are the mean plus/ minus one standard deviation. Mean centering was used for product terms DV dependent variable, SE standard error, Boot 50,000 bootstrap samples, LLCI bias corrected lower limit confidence interval, ULCI bias corrected upper limit confidence interval
*** p<0.001

For attachment avoidance, there was a significant positive interaction term on the narcissistic leadership to surface acting path (effect = 0.11, p=0.02). Moreover, the index of moderated mediation indicates that any two conditional indirect effects defined by different values of attachment avoidance are statistically different (index = -0.009, CI.95 = -0.023, -0.000). Comparison between the mediation and moderated-mediation models indicates an additional 4 % variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$) in voice behavior. For attachment anxiety, there was not a significant interaction term on narcissistic leadership to surface acting path (effect = 0.28, p<0.001), as well as a not significant index of moderated mediation (index = 0.007, CI.95 = -0.003, 0.019). To delineate the presence of moderated mediation, the indirect effect at difference levels of the moderator was reported (1 SD below the mean, the mean, and 1 SD above the mean; cf. Aiken and West 1991). Table 2 illustrates these moderated indirect effects through changes in the level of attachment avoidance for voice behavior. Figure 2 graphically illustrates the magnitude of this indirect effect at continuous levels of the attachment avoidance moderator with a 95 % confidence band (cf. Bauer and Curran 2005). Although the index of moderated mediation was no significant, all levels of attachment anxiety have significant and increasingly stronger positive indirect effects. Figure 3 graphically depicts the magnitude of this indirect effect at continuous levels of attachment anxiety with a 95 % confidence band.
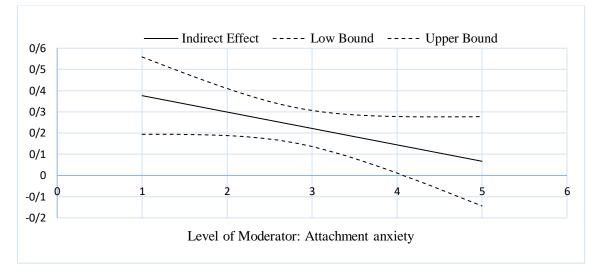

Figure 2. A plot of the indirect effect of narcissistic leadership on surface acting versus the moderator (Attachment Anxiety) with confidence bands. The horizontal line denotes an indirect effect of zero, while the vertical line represents the boundary of the region of significance
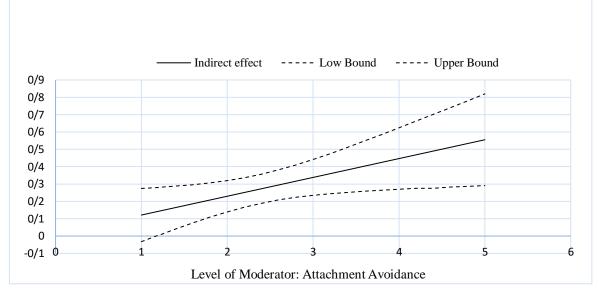
Figure 3. A plot of the indirect effect of narcissistic leadership on surface acting versus the moderator (Attachment Avoidance) with confidence bands. The horizontal line denotes an indirect effect of zero, while the vertical line represents the boundary of the region of significance

Discussion

Research has shown that narcissistic leadership has negative impact on a large number of followers 'outcomes, including followers' voices (Carnevale et al., 2018; Huang e al., 2020). however, the mechanism is not well depicted specifically through a socio-emotional mechanism (i.e., surface acting in this study) and a volitional factor (i.e., attachment styles); therefore, this study had some contributions to the literature of narcissism particularly narcissistic leadership, emotional labor and attachment theory. First, according to the COR theory, it was shown that the effect of leader's narcissism can impair followers' voice behavior via the full mediation of surface acting and emotional exhaustion. Second, through using the attachment style theory, we identified that only avoidance functions as a moderator in the relationship between narcissistic leadership and surface acting.

Theoretical implications

The study's findings showed that narcissistic leadership increases surface acting as emotional labor which in return causes a decline in emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with the findings of Zhang, Zhou, Zhan, Liu & Zhang (2018), postulating that surface acting depletes emotions. This finding elaborates further on the mechanism narcissistic leaders cause emotional exhaustion. More specifically, in an Iranian culture, in which power distance is high (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003), surface acting can be the best resort to maintain emotional resources when there is no good prospect of expressing ideas to those who deem themselves 'idols' in diverse fields, specifically their profession. It is noteworthy to mention that when attachment styles are not considered, narcissistic leadership both directly and indirectly via surface acting emotional exhaustion undermine voice behavior of followers and this implies the deleterious effects of narcissism in the dyadic relationship of leaders and followers.

Due to the excessive need for praise and respect from their followers (Raskin et al., 1991), narcissistic leaders better communicate with those who meet these needs and repress those who criticize them (Harms & Spain, 2015; Spain et al., 2014). Therefore, followers take countermeasures to prevent potential threats. This is consistent with the COR literature because individuals take steps to conserve resources when faced with stressful situations. Our findings on the positive relationship between leader narcissism and surface acting adds to the narcissism literature by suggesting that narcissistic leaders create stressful conditions for followers and followers try to adhere to organizational policies, emotional norms, and better communication show good organizational feelings (Prati et al., 2009).

Second, although the issue of follower voice and related research streams has recently expanded, there is still no understanding of the dynamics of sound and the path that takes place between levels and mechanisms (Townsend, Wilkinson, Dundon & Mowbray, 2020). Our study is the first research on the characteristics of followers that can block their voice by a special mechanism. Therefore, extends the nomological network of voice behavior by identifying the narcissism leader as a predictor of the followers; voice and investigates double mediators through which the impact of narcissistic leadership to less voice behavior from the followers' side. Looking through the lens of emotional exhaustion, followers who experience emotional exhaustion may make less voice to maintain what is left of their wasted energy (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Our findings show that narcissistic leaders, due to the depletion of their followers 'emotional and cognitive resources, firstly, cause surface acting and surface acting then causes emotional exhaustion. To the best knowledge of the authors, this study is among the first to investigate this cascading impact hampering followers' voice behavior, particularly in the context of educational environments where the voice of the followers is of considerable importance.

Although recent research has sought to discover the characteristics of leaders and followers moderating their impact on followers (Galvin et al., 2015; Owens et al., 2015; Spain et al., 2014), this study is one of the first studies to focus on the personal characteristics of followers, including attachment style, to moderate the effects of narcissistic leadership. Relying on attachment theory and the fact that attachment style plays a role in the stress of an event (Sung, Nam & Hwang, 2020; Ingram & Luxton, 2005), our results suggest that people with high avoidance attachment styles are less prone to harm from narcissistic leaders and are less inclined to surface act. In terms of moderation, it was found that avoidance attachment moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and surface acting. This suggests that avoidance attachment mitigate the negative impact of narcissistic leadership on surface acting. In other words, when attachment avoidance is higher, this high level of avoidance (i.e., fear of dependency) can decrease surface acting. Research has already shown that attachment avoidance is negatively related to disclosure tendencies in daily events (Garrison, Kahn, Miller & Sauer, 2014). This negative relationship with emotional enclosure is in contrast with the definition of surface acting, which can ultimately reduce emotional exhaustion and increase voice behavior. Moreover, even after the consideration of diverse levels of attachment avoidance, the moderated mediated model was verified. On the other hand, we expected anxiety attachment to moderate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and surface acting, so that when narcissistic leadership was high and anxiety attachment was low, followers were less likely to turn to surface acting. Unexpectedly, for individuals with low anxiety attachment, the indirect effects of narcissistic leadership on followers' voices via surface acting and emotional exhaustion were not significant. Based on the vigilance-avoidance theory, in the face of threating stimuli, anxious individuals will raise their vigilance to threat and later deter form attending to the threatening stimuli (Armstrong & Olatunji, 2012; Asmundson & Stein, 1994; Koster et al., 2005; Mogg & Bradley, 2002; Rohner, 2002). This lack of consistency in their behavior may cause the moderation of attachment anxiety to lose its significance.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations to this research that may indicate directions for future research. First, although the hypotheses of this study are largely bolstered, the direct impact of narcissism on voice behavior was not supported. Future research may therefore replicate our conceptual model with different and more valid measurements for voice behavior and leader narcissism. Although the survey data was selected from different universities, the average leader narcissism was low. It is likely that the participants answered the questions based on those classes and teachers which whom they had better educational experience. Therefore, future research may select some random classes and ask the students to rate their questions based on those restricted classes. This can reduce the bias emanating from the desired perceptual selection. Second, in this study only focused on one outcome of leader narcissism (i.e., voice behavior) and other dependent variables were not considered. Future research may consider mental health because of surface acting, thereby lowering voiced to reduced well-being (Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Future research may propose other mechanisms and outcomes of narcissistic leadership. Third, the data of this study was collected from the academic environmental though some researchers have emphasized on the analogy of leader-follower and professor-student relationships (e.g., Colquitt, Lepine & Wesson, 2014). Since the method was not experimental and the data were cross-sectional, causal inferences may not be deduced. Future research can use experimental methods to collect data and help the detection of causality.

Conclusion

This study began to answer the question of how narcissistic leaders repress followers and when the attachment styles followers that can prevent them against this harm. The findings of the present study showed that narcissistic leaders, by creating stressful conditions, trigger emotional labor, including surface acting in followers, and surface acting leads to emotional exhaustion, and ultimately these factors reduce the voice of followers. The results of this research also showed that only high avoidance attachment style can reduce the positive effect of leader narcissism on surface acting which ultimately mitigate the impact of leader narcissism on followers' voice.

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