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The Relationship Between Collective Narcissism and Group-Based Moral Exclusion: The Mediating Role of Intergroup Threat and Social Distance

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Abstract

In our study, we investigated the relationship between collective narcissism and group-based moral exclusion. Since collective narcissists are motivated to see their group as unique and superior, and tend to show hostility towards outgroups threatening this presumed superiority, we hypothesized that perceived intergroup threat and social distance can mediate the relationship between collective narcissism and group-based moral exclusion. We tested this assumption in two intergroup contexts by investigating the beliefs of members of the Hungarian majority population about Muslim immigrants and Roma people. Our results showed that collective narcissism had a positive indirect effect on group-based moral exclusion in the case of both outgroups. Furthermore, both threat and social distance were significant mediators in the case of Muslim immigrants, but mostly social distance mediated the indirect effect of collective narcissism on moral exclusion of the Roma. These results indicate that collective narcissists tend to rationalize their intergroup hostility by the mechanism of motivated moral exclusion, and to find suitable justifications for doing so.

Keywords: collective narcissism, moral exclusion, intergroup threat, social distance, Muslims, Roma people

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Growing global inequality, violent conflicts, and climate change increasingly draw attention to questions of intergroup solidarity between the citizens of the world and dilemmas about which groups of people are worthy of support, help, and fair treatment, or quite the contrary, which groups deserve indifference or retaliation. The recent rise of right-wing populism across Western democracies, or the outcome of the Brexit vote are closely related to the dilemma about where to draw the borders of one's moral community, about whether ethnic minorities, immigrants, or refugees from war zones are entitled to the same moral treatment and concern as "regular" citizens. It seems, decisions about these dilemmas partly depend on beliefs about the ingroup (i.e., the nation), as glorification or narcissistic beliefs about the nation are closely associated with intergroup hostility and exclusion (Kende, Hadarics, & Szabó, 2019; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, & Batayneh, 2018).

In this paper we show evidence supporting the assumption that narcissistic national ingroup identification is connected to the moral exclusion of outgroups (i.e., decisions about fair treatment or the lack thereof). By integrating the theoretical frameworks of collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009) and moral exclusion (Opatow, 1990), we demonstrate that collective narcissists, who develop their national identity for self-defensive purposes rather than for prosocial ones, tend to deny basic moral guidelines of support and fairness from outgroups because these outgroups are perceived as threatening and/or psychologically distant from them.

Collective Narcissism and Intergroup Attitudes

The definition of collective narcissism consists of two interconnected beliefs about the ingroup: one is about its exaggerated greatness and the other is the insufficient recognition and admiration of this greatness by others. Collective narcissists believe that their group is special and therefore deserves special treatment and respect (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Research shows that collective narcissism is strongly related to a wide array of negative intergroup attitudes and behavioral intentions (for reviews see Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazar, & Lantos, 2019).

Among others, a great deal of evidence shows that narcissistic ingroup attachment is closely connected to an exaggerated level of perceived intergroup threat. At least partly, it is based on collective narcissists' continuous need for approval by others and the validation of the superiority of their group. Seemingly, if they feel that they do not get this recognition, they tend to perceive it as a hostile act on the behalf of others, that is why they are more sensitive to perceived insults, criticism, or the lack of proper recognition than other group members. Empirical studies have shown that collective narcissists express hostile intergroup intentions in the presence of ingroup image threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). Furthermore, collective narcissists are hypersensitive to ingroup insult, so they respond with aggression even to minor incidents, which otherwise would fall well beyond the definition of insult (Golec de Zavala, Peker, Guerra, & Baran, 2016).

Nonetheless, it seems that collective narcissism is related to perceived intergroup threat in a broader sense that is beyond direct ingroup image threat, and collective narcissists tend to perceive the otherwise neutral or equivocal acts of other groups as intentional hostilities that threaten the well-being, central values, or goals of the ingroup. One line of research demonstrates this by showing a strong link between collective narcissism and a general tendency to believe in conspiracies against the ingroup (e.g. Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala, & Olechowski, 2016; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Łozowski, Górska, & Winiewski, 2019). Furthermore, collective narcissism was also identified as a significant predictor of perceived intergroup threat and hostile attribution (Cichocka et al., 2016; Dyduch-Hazar, Mrozinski, & Golec de Zavala, 2019; Golec de Zavala, Guerra, & Simão, 2017). In sum, one of the most important consequences of collective narcissism is an exaggerated perception of threat to the ingroup (Cichocka, 2016).

Other evidence suggests that collective narcissism results not just in a higher level of intergroup threat but also in an elevated perception of social distance. As we saw, one of the core constituents of collective narcissism is an exaggerated sense of ingroup greatness (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), which implies vertical distancing from other groups. In order to satisfy the egoistic need for a positive self-esteem, collective narcissists are motivated to perceive other groups as inferior (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). In accordance with this idea, collective narcissism has been found related to ingroup glorification, which is a belief in the superiority of one's ingroup (Cichocka et

al., 2016). Furthermore, collective narcissism predicts also a preference for hierarchical social arrangements (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, 2017), and explicit outgroup derogation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

Group-Based Moral Exclusion

Moral exclusion happens “when individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply” (Opatow, 1990, p. 1). When members of an outgroup are placed beyond this scope of moral concern, they are not considered to be entitled for just and morally appropriate treatment anymore, consequently, neither withdrawal of prosocial behavior, nor implementation of harmful and unjust behavior is viewed as morally wrong. Accordingly, targets within this scope of moral regard are indeed perceived to be entitled to positive treatment and considerations for their well-being, whereas negative treatment is more acceptable towards those who are excluded from this moral circle (Hadarics & Kende, 2018; Lima-Nunes, Pereira, & Correia, 2013; Opatow, 1990, 1994; Passini & Morselli, 2017).

People have a tendency to deny positive and fair treatment from members of outgroups that they cannot identify with, or perceive them endangering the ingroup’s well-being, goals, or cultivated norms and values. Therefore, perceived characteristics of the outgroup (i.e., target perceptions) can contribute to their moral exclusion by justifying their moral disregard (Bandura, 2016; Opatow, 1990). Specifically, previous research has shown that psychological distance from outgroups and perceived intergroup threat are associated with moral exclusion.

In this context, social distance refers either to the perceived similarity between the ingroup and the outgroup (Brockner, 1990; Olson, Cheung, Conway, Hutchison, & Hafer, 2011; Opatow, 1994) or the closeness between the groups (Brockner, 1990; Leite, Dhont, & Hodson, 2019; Singer, 1999). Perceived threat on the other hand, refers to the perception of the harmful behavior of the target, conflicts related to group-level goals, and negative stereotypes about the outgroup emphasizing norm-violating misbehaviors (Hadarics & Kende, 2019; Lima-Nunes et al., 2013; Olson et al., 2011; Opatow, 1994).

When people engage in group-based moral exclusion (i.e., accept immoral behavior toward members of the outgroup), they nevertheless want to maintain a sense of personal moral integrity. On the one hand, this positive moral self-image is maintained if the outgroup is not regarded as worthy of moral concern (Lima-Nunes et al., 2013; Pereira, Vala, & Costa-Lopes, 2010). On the other hand, moral exclusion can be justified by serving the ingroup’s goals as it is described by the dual-process model of prejudice (Duckitt, 2001). According to this theory, the source of prejudice is either the perceived threat to the ingroup’s security or group-based dominance. Evidence shows that group-based moral exclusion is associated with both of these motivational goals, that is, members of outgroup can be morally excluded either because they represent a threat to the ingroup’s sense of security and conventional values, and also to maintain existing social hierarchies (Hadarics & Kende, 2019; Passini & Morselli, 2017). This connection suggests that the justification of immoral treatment and aggression toward outgroups can satisfy both of these social needs.

A Potential Link Between Collective Narcissism and Moral Exclusion

As we have seen, collective narcissists may be especially sensitive to intergroup threat and may be motivated to maintain intergroup distance. Therefore, we can assume that moral exclusion can serve as a strategic tool for collective narcissists to justify intergroup aggression. Since perceived social distance and intergroup threat are of the most important bases of group-based moral exclusion, it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between

collective narcissism and moral exclusion is mediated by intergroup threat and social distance, two characteristics being very likely to be perceived by collective narcissists.

Our hypothesis about this mediation process is further supported by the assumed directions of the relationships between these variables both in the moral exclusion and the collective narcissism literature. In the former, perceived outgroup characteristics are often called as “*precursors*” (Hafer & Olson, 2003) or “*antecedents*” (Lima-Nunes et al., 2013; Olson et al., 2011; Opatow, 1990) of moral exclusion, and the same direction from threat and social distance to moral exclusion is also supported by experimental studies that found a stronger tendency for moral exclusion after manipulating these perceived outgroup characteristics (Brockner, 1990; Olson et al., 2011; Opatow, 1994). In their longitudinal study, Leite and colleagues (2019) also found that perceived threat and ingroup supremacy predicted moral exclusion over time, but not the other way around.

Meanwhile, in the collective narcissism literature, variables related to intergroup threat and social distance are much more considered as consequences of collective narcissism. In her extensive review, Cichocka (2016) mentions intergroup threat as a “*consequence*” of collective narcissism which induces an “*exaggerated perception of threat to the in-group*” (p. 291). Accordingly, both Cichocka and colleagues (2016), and Golec de Zavala and colleagues (2017) considered perceived intergroup threat as a result of collective narcissism, and as such, a mediator between collective narcissism and other intergroup beliefs. There is also indicating evidence about the direction of the relationship between collective narcissism and social distance. In their 4-wave longitudinal study, Golec de Zavala et al. (2020, Study 6) found that the longitudinal relationships from collective narcissism to social distance were always significant, but the reversed relationships were weaker and not always significant.

The Study

We investigated the mediating role of perceived intergroup threat and social distance between collective narcissism and group-based moral exclusion. These relationships were tested in two intergroup contexts: between ethnic majority Hungarians and Muslim immigrants on the one hand, and Roma people on the other. These two intergroup contexts can be characterized by important similarities and differences. Roma people have lived in Hungary for centuries, they are the largest ethnic minority group in the country, making up 5 to 8% of the population (Pásztor & Péntzes, 2013). Nevertheless, they continue to be severely discriminated and marginalized. Roma people are mainly rejected based on negative stereotypes about laziness and criminality (Enyedi, Fábrián, & Sik, 2004), and the perceived lack of efforts they make about integration and assimilation (Cooper, 2002). In contrast, the number of Muslim immigrants living in the country remains extremely low. Nevertheless, immigration from Muslim countries have become the main topic of right-wing populist political propaganda since 2015, mainly presenting Muslim immigrants as a threat to security by equating immigration with terrorism (Simonovits & Bernát, 2016). Despite the differences, prejudice against the Roma and Muslim immigrants (previously measured as anti-Arab and general xenophobia) are and have been similarly high, shared by the majority of the population, and expressed in blatant and explicit ways (Bruneau, Kteily, & Laustsen, 2018; Kende, Hadarics, & Láštíková, 2017). According to a recent opinion poll by the Pew Research Center (2016) 64% of the majority Hungarians maintained unfavorable views about the Roma, and 72% did the same about Muslims, which were among the highest rates within the 10 investigated countries. Another recent Eurobarometer (2019) study showed that 22% of Hungarians would feel uncomfortable if they had a Roma colleague, and 34% in case of a Muslim colleague. Among the respondents, 44% answered the same if one of their children had a Roma partner, and the rate was even higher (49%) in case of a Muslim person. These rates were among the highest ones within the EU.

Method

Sample

Our sample consisted of 1080 participants from an online participant pool using a multiple-step, proportionally stratified, probabilistic sampling method. Due to this method our sample was demographically similar to the Hungarian population in terms of age, gender, type of residence, and level of education. The recruitment was carried out by a professional public opinion company. Our survey was part of an omnibus survey where other research questions were tested parallelly.ⁱ We report all measures and data exclusions related to the variables of the research question.

All participants reported Hungarian as their nationality, no participants indicated that they were Muslim, ten respondents reported that they were Roma, and 11 participants did not wish to report their ethnicity. These 21 participants were removed from the analysis, since our main focus was on the beliefs of the Hungarian majority population. Our respondents did not receive any material reward for their participation, and they completed the anonymous questionnaire after accepting an informed consent form on the first page of the questionnaire. The sample was randomly split: half of the respondents completed the questionnaire related to the Roma ($N = 512$; 52.1% women; age: 46.60 ± 15.39), and the other half related to Muslim immigrants ($N = 547$; 52.3% women; age: 47.14 ± 15.49). In terms of education level of the first group, 33% had a higher education degree, 44.8% had secondary education, and 22.2% lower than secondary education. In the second group, 35.1% had a higher education degree, 43.9% had secondary education, and 21% lower than secondary education.ⁱⁱ

Measures

Social Distance

We used two standard items from the Eurobarometer (2015, 2019) survey, where respondents indicated how comfortable they would feel if they had a Roma/Muslim immigrant colleague or one of their children had a Roma/Muslim immigrant partner ($1 = \text{not at all comfortable}$; $10 = \text{totally comfortable}$). Higher scores on this scale indicated a lower level of social distance, however as our predictions were phrased about distance, we reversed the scores of this scale so that higher means indicated larger social distance.

Intergroup Threat

Threat was measured by 3 items adapted from Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, and Cotterill (2015). (“Roma people / Muslim immigrants pose a health threat to Hungarians”, “The cultural values of Roma people / Muslim immigrants are in opposition with Hungarian values”, “Roma people / Muslim immigrants endanger the physical safety of Hungarians.”; $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$, $7 = \text{strongly agree}$).

Moral Exclusion

We measured moral exclusion of the Roma and Muslim immigrants with Opatow's (1993) *Moral Exclusion Scale* (adapted to Hungarian by Hadarics & Kende, 2018, 2019; items: “I believe that considerations of fairness apply to Muslim immigrants / Roma people too”; “I am willing to make personal sacrifices to help or foster Muslim immigrants' / Roma people's well-being”; “I am willing to allocate a share of community resources to Muslim immigrants / Roma people”; $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$, $7 = \text{strongly agree}$). Higher scores on this scale indicated a higher level

of moral inclusion, however as our predictions were phrased about moral exclusion, we reversed the scores of this scale so that higher means indicated higher level of moral exclusion.

Collective Narcissism

We measured collective narcissism with the 5-item version of the *Collective Narcissism Scale* with reference to the national ingroup as “Hungarians” (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013). As this measure was not available in Hungarian, we applied a translation-backtranslation technique (Brislin, 1980) to obtain it. Answers were measured on a 7-point scale in this case too (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).ⁱⁱⁱ

Analytic Strategy

First, we checked the adequacy of our measures by setting up a measurement model in the case of both groups. These measurement models were estimated using confirmatory factor analysis. To test the mediating role of perceived intergroup threat and social distance between collective narcissism and moral foundations we applied structural equation modeling (SEM) with the SPSS AMOS 25.0 software (Arbuckle, 2017). The amount of missing data was low in both samples (0.77% in Muslim group and 2.97% in the Roma group), and missing values were replaced with imputed values calculated with the regression method (Byrne, 2010).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The hypothesized four-factor solution, with collective narcissism, social distance, intergroup threat, and moral exclusion represented as separate factors, fitted the data adequately in both groups (Muslim: $\chi^2 = 177.36$; $df = 59$; CFI = .979; RMSEA = .061; SRMR = .037; Roma: $\chi^2 = 217.18$; $df = 59$; CFI = .957; RMSEA = .072; SRMR = .048). Besides, this fit was significantly better than either a two-factor solution with collective narcissism and outgroup beliefs representing two separate factors (Muslim: $\Delta\chi^2 = 593.52$; $\Delta df = 5$; $p < .001$; Roma: $\Delta\chi^2 = 335.45$; $\Delta df = 5$; $p < .001$) or a three-factor solution with the items measuring social distance and intergroup threat loading on the same factor (Muslim: $\Delta\chi^2 = 279.71$; $\Delta df = 3$; $p < .001$; Roma: $\Delta\chi^2 = 155.17$; $\Delta df = 3$; $p < .001$). The standardized factor loadings of all items were above .60 in the four-factor solutions. We also performed a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to check for structural equivalence across the two groups, and in this way to test whether the four-factor solution is adequate in the case of both groups in one common multigroup model. This multigroup model showed an adequate fit indicating structural equivalence across our two groups ($\chi^2 = 394.48$; $df = 118$; CFI = .970; RMSEA = .047; SRMR = .038).

The four latent variables were checked for internal consistency (composite reliability), construct validity and divergent validity in the case of both CFA models. The composite reliability (CR) values of all latent variables were between .80 and .91, showing an adequate internal consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) was then calculated to confirm constructs' convergent validity, and we found that all AVE values ranged between .63 to .79 confirming the convergent validity for all latent variables. After establishing convergent validity, discriminant validity of each construct was evaluated by contrasting the square root of AVE values (ranging from .79 to .89) for each construct with the values of intercorrelations between constructs (ranging from .19 to .78, see Table 1), which were all smaller than the square root AVE values verifying the discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1

Correlations Between the Latent Variables

Variable	1	2	3
Group 1 (Muslim)			
1. Collective Narcissism	–		
2. Social Distance	.60***		
3. Intergroup Threat	.71***	.76***	
4. Moral Exclusion	.52***	.78***	.77***
Group 2 (Roma)			
1. Collective Narcissism			
2. Social Distance	.30***		
3. Intergroup Threat	.29***	.73***	
4. Moral Exclusion	.19***	.75***	.63***

*** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Testing

We set up a structural model for the two subsamples separately to test how collective narcissism is related to moral exclusion, and to what extent this relationship is mediated by social distance and intergroup threat. All these variables were set up as latent variables, and we controlled both models with the effects of respondents' gender, age, education level, subjective financial status, and left-right political preference.

Subjective financial status was measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *significantly below average*; 5 = *significantly above average*; Group 1: $M = 2.45$; $SD = 1.06$; Group 2: $M = 2.50$; $SD = 0.98$), while political-ideological preference was measured on a 7-point left-right scale (1 = *left*; 7 = *right*; Group 1: $M = 4.34$; $SD = 1.64$; Group 2: $M = 4.12$; $SD = 1.70$). Highest educational level was indicated according to the following 4 levels: 1 = *primary education or lower*; 2 = *vocational education*; 3 = *high school diploma*; 4 = *university/college education* (Group 1: $M = 3.07$; $SD = 0.80$; Group 2: $M = 3.12$; $SD = 0.79$).

Political preference was incorporated in the models because both collective narcissism and negative beliefs about culturally different outgroups are more closely associated with the political-ideological right (Cichocka et al., 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Our goal was to avoid a potential spurious correlation between collective narcissism and outgroup attitudes that is only due to their mutual connection to political preferences. This was especially important in the Hungarian context, since anti-Roma rhetoric and anti-Muslim rhetoric had been an integral part of Hungarian political communication in the years preceding this study (Glózer, 2013; Vidra, 2017). Control variables were built into the models as predictors for each latent variable.^{iv}

Results of the hypothesized models testing (see Figure 1) revealed that both models showed an acceptable fit (Muslim: $\chi^2 = 257.71$; $df = 104$; CFI = .974; RMSEA = .052; SRMR = .033; Roma: $\chi^2 = 301.11$; $df = 104$; CFI = .951; RMSEA = .061; SRMR = .039). Collective narcissism had a positive total effect on moral exclusion in both models, although it was only marginally significant in the Roma model (Muslim: $\beta = 0.39$; $b = 0.30$; $SE = 0.05$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.21, 0.40]; Roma: $\beta = 0.11$; $b = 0.06$; $SE = 0.03$; $p = .061$; 90% CI [0.01, 0.12]). More importantly, a positive overall indirect effect was revealed between collective narcissism and moral exclusion in both models, which supports our assumptions about the mediated effects (Muslim: $\beta = 0.51$; $b = 0.40$; $SE = 0.04$; $p < .001$; 95%

CI [0.32, 0.49]; Roma: $\beta = 0.21$; $b = 0.12$; $SE = 0.03$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.07, 0.18]). Furthermore, beside the positive indirect effect, collective narcissism had also a weak negative direct effect on moral exclusion in both samples (Muslim: $\beta = -0.13$; $b = -0.10$; $SE = 0.04$; $p = .008$; 95% CI [-0.19, -0.01]; Roma: $\beta = -0.10$; $b = -0.06$; $SE = 0.03$; $p = .025$; 95% CI [-0.11, -0.00]).

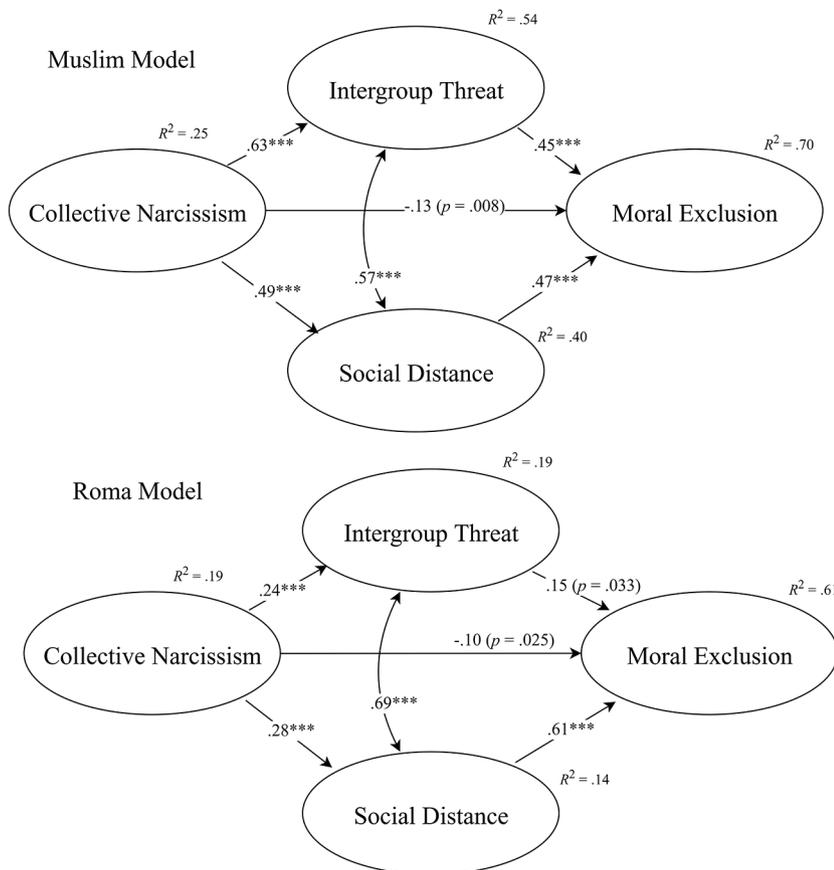


Figure 1. SEM models testing the mediating role of social distance and intergroup threat between collective narcissism and moral exclusion.

Note. Only the latent variables are charted for a clearer display. A detailed summary of the model results can be found in the [Supplementary Materials](#). Relationship strengths are indicated by standardized regression coefficients.

*** $p < .001$.

Probing the bases of the hypothesized mediations further, we found that collective narcissism showed a positive relationship with both intergroup threat (Muslim: $\beta = 0.63$; $b = 0.66$; $SE = 0.05$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.55, 0.76]; Roma: $\beta = 0.24$; $b = 0.23$; $SE = 0.05$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.12, 0.35]) and social distance (Muslim: $\beta = 0.49$; $b = 0.91$; $SE = 0.09$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.72, 1.08]; Roma: $\beta = 0.28$; $b = 0.45$; $SE = 0.09$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.26, 0.62]). Besides, we found also in both models that moral exclusion was predicted by both social distance (Muslim: $\beta = 0.47$; $b = 0.20$; $SE = 0.03$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.13, 0.27]; Roma: $\beta = 0.61$; $b = 0.22$; $SE = 0.03$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.15, 0.31]) and perceived threat (Muslim: $\beta = 0.45$; $b = 0.34$; $SE = 0.05$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.22, 0.46]; Roma: $\beta = 0.15$; $b = 0.09$; $SE = 0.04$; $p = .033$; 95% CI [0.02, 0.20]).

To reveal the extent to which the relationships between collective narcissism and moral exclusion is mediated by social distance and threat, a series of mediation analyses was conducted with the bootstrapping technique as suggested by Macho and Ledermann (2011), where we requested 95% confidence intervals using 5000 resamples. We found that collective narcissism had an indirect effect on moral exclusion mediated by social distance in both models (Muslim: $\beta = 0.23$; $b = 0.18$; $SE = 0.03$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.12, 0.25]; Roma: $\beta = 0.17$; $b = 0.10$; $SE = 0.03$; $p = .033$; 95% CI [0.05, 0.16]). Furthermore, the indirect effects mediated by perceived threat were also positive in both models, but only marginally significant in the Roma model (Muslim: $\beta = 0.28$; $b = 0.22$; $SE = 0.04$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.14, 0.31]; Roma: $\beta = 0.04$; $b = 0.02$; $SE = 0.01$; $p = .065$; 90% CI [0.002, 0.05]).

We also tested the equivalence of each pathway between the main variables across the two models. For this purpose, we set up a multigroup model, and constrained the pathways one by one to be equal across the two groups. After that, based on $\Delta\chi^2$ -tests and AIC fit values, we checked whether the fit indices of these constrained models were significantly worse than the fit of the original non-constrained multigroup model (fit of the non-constrained multigroup model: $\chi^2 = 558.83$; $df = 208$; CFI = .964; RMSEA = .040; SRMR = .034; AIC = 898.83). The results of these analyses can be seen in Table 2. These show that the relationships between collective narcissism on the one hand, and intergroup threat and social distance on the other were significantly stronger in the Muslim group compared to the Roma, just like the pathway from intergroup threat to moral exclusion. The relationship between collective narcissism and moral exclusion turned out to be invariant, just like the pathway from social distance to moral exclusion.

Table 2

Change in the Fit Indices of the Constrained Multigroup Models

Constrained path	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p ($\Delta\chi^2$ -tests)	ΔAIC
CN-ME	0.87	1	.351	1.13
CN-IT	35.21	1	< .001	33.21
CN-SD	13.34	1	< .001	11.34
IT-ME	14.75	1	< .001	12.75
SD-ME	0.44	1	.507	1.60

Note. CN = Collective Narcissism; IT = Intergroup Threat; SD = Social Distance; ME = Moral Exclusion.

Finally, we tested whether it is more reasonable and parsimonious to consider perceived threat and social distance as mediators between collective narcissism and moral exclusion than to treat either collective narcissism or moral exclusion as mediators. We set up three models in both groups for this purpose. In the first pair of models, perceived threat and social distance were mediators between collective narcissism and moral exclusion but the direct relationship between these latter two variables was erased to test the importance of the mediator variables. The fit of these models was only slightly worse than the fit of the original ones reported above. (Muslim: $\chi^2 = 265.04$; $df = 105$; CFI = .973; RMSEA = .053; SRMR = .034; AIC = 433.04; Roma: $\chi^2 = 306.22$; $df = 105$; CFI = .950; RMSEA = .061; SRMR = .040; AIC = 474.22).

In the second pair of models, collective narcissism was set as mediator between the two perceived outgroup characteristics and moral exclusion, and direct relationships were erased again. These models showed a much worse fit to the data compared to the fit of the original ones, and even to the fit of their counterparts with the outgroup characteristics as mediators (Muslim: $\chi^2 = 545.08$; $df = 106$; CFI = .925; RMSEA = .087; SRMR = .086; AIC =

711.08; Roma: $\chi^2 = 534.52$; $df = 106$; CFI = .893; RMSEA = .089; SRMR = .115; AIC = 700.52). Finally, in the third pair of models, we set moral exclusion as a mediator between the two perceived outgroup characteristics and collective narcissism, and direct relationships were erased again. Once again, these models showed worse fit than the models with the outgroup characteristics as mediators (Muslim: $\chi^2 = 381.74$; $df = 106$; CFI = .953; RMSEA = .069; SRMR = .064; AIC = 547.74; Roma: $\chi^2 = 325.13$; $df = 106$; CFI = .945; RMSEA = .064; SRMR = .051; AIC = 491.13). These findings support that it is the most parsimonious model to assume that perceived threat and social distance mediate the effect of collective narcissism on moral exclusion.

Discussion

We found that collective narcissism was related to group-based moral exclusion, and perceived intergroup threat and social distance were important mediators in this relationship. We collected evidence from two intergroup contexts, between the Hungarian majority population on the one hand, and the Hungarian Roma and Muslim immigrants on the other. Although some differences could be observed between these two cases, similarities in the results suggest that collective narcissists tend to perceive outgroups in a more negative way what makes their moral exclusion more probable.

It has already been known that collective narcissists tend to treat outgroups with a certain extent of hostility (e.g. Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the relationship between collective narcissism and moral exclusion implies that they tend to justify this negative treatment by placing these outgroups without the boundaries of moral regard. Furthermore, we were able to identify mediated effects between collective narcissism and moral exclusion through social distance and intergroup threat, which suggests that these perceived group characteristics enable collective narcissists to rationalize their moral disregard and their subsequent hostile behavior.

Beside the generally similar pattern of relationship between the variables, we also found some differences between the intergroup contexts. Most importantly, three of the four relationships involved in the mediations were stronger in the case of the Muslim model, and both social distance and intergroup threat were important mediators in that model, whereas it was mainly social distance that mediated the indirect effect of collective narcissism on moral exclusion in the Roma model. These differences fit with the dominant stereotypes about these two target groups in the Hungarian contexts. While Roma people are generally treated with hostility on the basis of stereotypes of laziness and petty criminality, and a preference for low contact with them (Enyedi et al., 2004; Kende et al., 2017), Muslim immigrants are mostly talked about as posing a security threat to the nation, and a cultural threat to European way of living and values.

The most important difference between these two intergroup contexts, that can be relevant to our results, is probably their salience within the Hungarian public thought. It is worth highlighting that immigration from Muslim countries has become a central topic within the Hungarian domestic political discourse since the beginning of the European Refugee Crisis started in 2015, and it was also the most emphasized topic by the Hungarian government party (Fidesz) during the parliamentary elections campaign in 2018 (Bíró-Nagy, 2018). It is also worth noting that the media framing on Muslim immigrants is rather negative, and it emphasizes the threat related to this outgroup (Vidra, 2017). The salience of this issue is also shown by the fact that anti-Muslim attitudes were high but stable until 2015, but started an increase related to the political events in the post-2015 period. On the other hand, prej-

udice against the Roma has been high but much more stable over time (Eurobarometer, 2015, 2019; Simonovits & Bernát, 2016).

To highlight the differences between the two intergroup contexts in terms of salience at the time of data collection, we checked the number of hits for the expressions “roma” and “cigány” for Roma people and “bevándorló”, “migráns”, and “muszlim” for Muslim immigrants on Google within the period from 1 January to 31 March, when we conducted the data collection. This test estimated 51.600 hits for the Roma, and 503.000 hits for Muslims.^v

The threat of Muslim immigration has dominated public discourse in Hungary since 2015. This context may have increased the strength of the relationship between collective narcissism and perceived threat of Muslim immigrants. This is in accordance with the approach of ideological thinking as motivated social cognition (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), which argues that any kind of individual motivation can only lead to political preferences that are offered by the political environment. Since immigration from Muslim countries dominates the Hungarian political discourse, Muslim immigrants serve as a more available target for collective narcissists to satisfy their self-protective and self-enhancing needs. Nevertheless, the same relationships could be observed also in the case of the Roma group, although in a weaker form.

The salience and the framing of the issue of Muslim immigration can also offer a possible explanation to our finding that both perceived outgroup characteristics mediated the effect of collective narcissism on moral exclusion in case of the Muslim outgroup, but it was mainly social distance that served the same function in the Roma model. Although previous research on moral exclusion emphasizes the importance of social distance and intergroup threat as antecedents of moral exclusion (Opatow, 1990), this does not necessarily mean that both of these perceived characteristics are equally relevant in all intergroup contexts. Dominant public discourse can prime those target characteristics that subsequently direct people’s behavior (Semetko, 2007; Valentino & Nardis, 2013), and consequently, it can prime justifications for moral exclusion. Specifically, in a media environment where the threatening behavior of Muslims and the importance of defending the nation’s boundaries is continuously emphasized, perceived intergroup threat can easily get highlighted as a plausible justification for moral exclusion. Nonetheless, this extensive media framing was absent in the case of the Roma, which can explain why intergroup threat was not a strong predictor of moral exclusion in their case. On the other hand, in the case of social distance-based moral exclusion, members of the excluded outgroup do not do anything specific to make others exile them from the boundaries of moral regard, but they have not been considered within those boundaries in the first place (Lima-Nunes et al., 2013; Olson et al., 2011). This latter mechanism might be less sensitive to media priming and framing effects, since in such a case, the media is not required to frame the behavior of the outgroup as threatening or immoral in some other ways. This moderating role of media coverage and exposure should be tested by further research in the future.

After interpreting our results, it is necessary to highlight some limitations in our study. We have to stress that our study was a cross-sectional survey study, and as being such, it is not suitable to conclude on the directions of the investigated relationships. Although our model comparison procedure supports that it is reasonable to handle social distance and intergroup threat as mediators in the relationship between collective narcissism and moral exclusion, based on a correlational study we cannot say it with certainty that it is collective narcissism per se that makes people perceive outgroups as either threatening or being psychologically distant.

Although as we saw, intergroup threat and social distance is mostly considered as antecedents of moral exclusion (e.g. Hafer & Olson, 2003; Lima-Nunes et al., 2013) and consequences of collective narcissism (Cichocka, 2016),

and there are experimental and longitudinal studies that also verify the directions of the relationship (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; Leite et al., 2019; Olson et al., 2011; Opatow, 1994), other causal directions are also worth considering. For example, the literature of moral justification suggests that people tend to rationalize their immoral behaviors not just before but also after their occurrence (Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015). We can therefore assume that perceived outgroup characteristics can function as posterior justifications for moral exclusion, and in such a case the direction between perceived outgroup characteristics (e.g. perceived threat and social distance) and moral exclusion might turn around, because people can be motivated to see the excluded target group in a more negative way in order to justify the exclusion itself. This would result in a model where moral exclusion is placed in the mediator position.

In another possible model, collective narcissism can be the mediator between intergroup threat and moral exclusion. This can be based on the fact that one important antecedent of collective narcissism is a frustrated need for personal control (Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka et al., 2018). According to the relevant theoretical explanation, if one lacks control over private life events, a narcissistic social identity can be constructed for self-defensive purposes to restore the sense of control. The source of this sort of frustration is mostly considered unrelated to intergroup relations, but if it is a specific outgroup that seemingly frustrates these personal goals, then perceived intergroup threat, as a source of this frustration, might also function as an antecedent rather than a consequence of collective narcissism. This assumed mechanism would implicate a model where collective narcissism is a mediator between intergroup threat and moral exclusion.

Future research might verify these other possible directions between the investigated constructs, but we have to stress that these potential alternative directions and mechanisms do not falsify the mechanism described in our study, and our mediation tests based on different models did not support these alternatives.

Furthermore, we have to note that some indicators of secure or positive national identity is also measured in several studies about the influence of defensive national identity on intergroup relations, but our study did not include such a measure. However, these positive indicators are typically not related or negatively related to negative outgroup attitudes if their negative or defensive counterpart is controlled for (e.g. Cichocka, 2016; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006; Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999). Because of this, we assume that the revealed positive relationships between collective narcissism and the measured outgroup attitudes wouldn't be essentially different by incorporating positive national identity, or they might have been even stronger by partialling out the effect of positive national identity. Besides, there is a good chance that the remaining negative direct (non-mediated) relationship between collective narcissism and moral exclusion in both models is due to the suppressing effect of positive national identity (see Cichocka, 2016), and these relationships wouldn't have even appeared with positive national identity incorporated into the models.

Finally, we conducted our study in the context of Hungary which has some unique characteristics that are relevant to the current research. Although both anti-Roma and anti-immigrant attitudes are prevalent in all East-Central European countries, and these issues can be found in the Western European context as well, democratic institutions and media freedom have been severely weakened in the country resulting in an uncontrolled level of governmental propaganda. This context may therefore be unique, and generalizations limited. However, with the growing populism and growing anti-immigrant movements around the world, insights from Hungary may carry important messages outside the country and the region, and highlight the specific importance of understanding the consequences of an inflated but fragile national identification.

Conclusion

In our study, we integrated the literatures of collective narcissism and moral exclusion, and collected empirical evidence to the link between these constructs. Our findings support the idea that the darker side of national identification does not only increase the willingness to commit hostile acts towards certain outgroups as previous research suggested, but it also enhances the chances of the moral justification of these acts. Nonetheless, these justifications do not emerge randomly, but they are the results of motivated social cognition, as it is shown by collective narcissists' tendency to use perceived social distance and threat - two characteristics they are especially sensitive to - to rationalize their moral indifference.

Notes

i) Study 1 from the publication of [Kende, Lantos, and Krekó \(2018\)](#) was carried out by analyzing data from the same omnibus database, but the hypotheses we tested and the theoretical constructs they were based on were different and unrelated to those tested by Kende and colleagues, since they investigated how the ethnic vs. civic perception of citizenship predicts group-based collective action preferences. The only construct that was used in both studies was intergroup threat, what was considered as a mediator between ethnic perception of citizenship and collective action preferences in the cited study.

ii) For more information on the demographic characteristics of the Hungarian population see:

http://www.ksh.hu/mikrocenzus2016/kotet_3_demografiai_adatok

iii) Descriptive statistics and correlations between the items can be found in the [Supplementary Materials](#) (Table S1).

iv) All correlations, pathways, and factor loadings within these models can be found in the [Supplementary Materials](#) (Tables S2-S4).

v) We also have to note that many hits for “roma” included items related to the capital of Italy (Rome), what might easily led to an overestimation of relevant hits for the Roma.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Supplementary Materials

The online supplementary material contains descriptive statistics of all the analyzed variables and the correlations between them (Table S1), and all the correlations (Table S2), regression coefficients (Table S3), and factor loadings (Table S4) from our Muslim and Roma SEM models (for access see Index of [Supplementary Materials](#) below).

Index of Supplementary Materials

Hadarics, M., Szabó, Z. P., & Kende, A. (2020). *Supplementary materials to "The relationship between collective narcissism and group-based moral exclusion: The mediating role of intergroup threat and social distance"* [Additional information]. PsychOpen. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.4352>

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