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Narcissists don't care about approval: the role of narcissism and status motives in explaining the relationship between self-objectification and approval motivation

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Abstract
Prior research has established that women who self-objectify seek approval from others more strongly than women who self-objectify less. Yet the boundary conditions of this link remain largely unexamined. Building on hierometer theory, which postulates that narcissism tracks social status and motivates status-optimizing behaviour, we tested whether the desire for social status (e.g., among narcissists) severed the association between self-objectification and approval seeking. Two cross-sectional studies (NS1 = 200; NS2 = 201) using moderated mediation models found support for this proposition. The moderated mediation model shows that the link between self-objectification and approval seeking was attenuated among narcissists, as narcissists seek higher social status, instead of favour and approval from others. Together, the studies suggest that self-objectification no longer predicts approval seeking among individuals who prioritise status over inclusion. The findings help further connect the self-objectification literature to research on social status and self-regard. Practical implications and extensions are discussed.

Keywords Self-objectification · Social approval · Narcissism · Status

Introduction

Self-objectification refers to the process by which individuals come to view and treat themselves as objects to be evaluated on the basis of their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification has important intrapersonal consequences. People who self-objectify are more prone to depression and anxiety, as well as feelings of shame (Jones & Griffiths, 2014). Self-objectification also has important interpersonal consequences, such as spending less time talking when interacting with other people (Saguy et al., 2010), and picking partners who also self-objectify (Strelan & Pagoudis, 2018). Chen et al. (2022a, b) found a consistent positive association between trait self-objectification and approval motivation, which helps to explain these various interpersonal consequences of self-objectification as specific expressions of a more general, motivational process. In the present research, we set out to further examine this link between self-objectification and approval motivation. Specifically, we examine the role of grandiose narcissism in regulating the link between self-objectification and approval motivation as a putative boundary condition to their link.

Objectification theory and self-objectification

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) introduced *objectification theory*, which served as a significant model to investigate and comprehend women's experience as sexualized objects within a culture that promotes the sexualization of their bodies. The term *sexual objectification* refers to "the experience of being treated as a body (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p.174). Sexual objectification happens frequently in many women's daily lives: Holland et al. (2017) found that young women experienced a

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sexually objectifying event, typically in the form of objectifying gaze, once every other day on average, and witnessed the sexual objectification of others about once per day on average. Using a daily dairy approach, Swim et al. (2001) found that women experienced an average of 1.38 instances of sexual objectification per week, and Brinkman and Rickard (2009) found that female students from western U.S.A. experienced objectifying events more than once per day.

Societal norms that prioritize or emphasize women's appearance lead women to internalize sexual objectification. This internalization is called self-objectification, which involves viewing oneself as an object rather than a subject. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), self-objectification is a process wherein an individual adopts an external perspective towards themselves and assesses their worth mainly on the basis of their physical appearance. Self-objectifying women are chronically preoccupied with other people's evaluations of their appearance and societal norms for beauty. Consequently, they are usually anxious about their appearance and monitor themselves closely. Unsurprisingly, anxiety about one's appearance links self-objectification with symptoms of depression (see Jones & Griffiths, 2014 for a review; see also Lamp et al., 2019; Milan & Dominguez Perez, 2021; Miner-Rubino et al., 2002), poor body image (Grippo & Hill, 2008), disordered eating (see Cheng et al., 2017 for a review; see also Kilpela et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2020; Schaefer & Thompson, 2018), less safe sexual practices (Anderson et al., 2018), and sexual dysfunction (Brock et al., 2021; Claudat & Warren, 2014; Grower & Ward, 2021; Speno & Aubrey, 2019). Self-objectification can also cause poorer performance in tasks that require cognitive abilities (e.g., mathematical tasks, scramble word tasks; Fredrickson et al., 1998; Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005; Quinn et al., 2006).

Approval motivation and interpersonal consequences of self-objectification

Identifying the downstream outcomes of self-objectification in women can help to gain insight into and improve women's psychological well-being. Prior studies have primarily concentrated on the intrapersonal effects of self-objectification in women. However, research on the interpersonal consequences of self-objectification has been less frequent, although it is gradually gaining momentum. For example, Saguy et al. (2010) found that when women self-objectified, they showed signs of withdrawal in social interactions (i.e., they disclosed less about themselves). In addition, studies have demonstrated that women who experience self-objectification display lower levels of sexual assertiveness, such as engaging in unprotected sex and being less inclined to reject unwanted advances (Franz et al., 2016; Impett et al., 2006). Strelan and Pagoudis (2018) found that objectification even affected people's mating choices: people who self-objectified or objectified others tended to have partners who also self-objectified or objectified others, respectively.

Recently, Chen et al. (2022a, b) found that women who reported a greater tendency to self-objectify showed an increased need for others' approval. Specifically, they found positive correlations between different measures of trait self-objectification on the one hand, and the self-reported need for others' approval, on the other. Furthermore, this research found that trait self-objectification was associated with modified social media self-presentation, evident from admitting more effort spent on altering profile pictures and from selecting photo filters featuring greater deviation from original images.

The finding that self-objectification in women is linked to an elevated need for others' approval is important because this desire may help to understand why previously documented interpersonal consequences of self-objectification occur. Consider the findings by Saguy and colleagues (Saguy et al., 2010), who reported that self-objectification among women correlated with withdrawal from social interactions. The researchers explained their findings by proposing that self-objectifying women may be concerned about aligning with the gender stereotype of women during interactions (i.e., acting like a "good object" that is agreeable and obedient; Rudman & Glick, 2001). From an approval-seeking point of view, this finding may be explained as an attempt to act in line with others' perceived preferences. Likewise, the finding that self-objectification leads to lower sexual assertiveness (Franz et al., 2016; Impett et al., 2006) might reflect attempts to act upon others' expectations. Indeed, approval seeking is a precursor to norm and stereotype conformity (Bascle, 2016; Carter et al., 2019).

The link between self-objectification and a need for approval offers a potential unifying explanation for the specific interpersonal consequences of self-objectification. What remains unanswered, however, is what regulates this link and what its boundary conditions are. We propose that an answer to this question may lie in the relations that these variables have with social goals and self-regard. Specifically, we propose that the association between self-objectification and approval seeking may be attenuated among individuals who do not prioritize the social goal of inclusion (i.e., being liked and accepted by others). That is, this link may be severed for those who prioritize the social goal of status (i.e., being respected and admired by others), such as, individuals high in grandiose narcissism. Below, we elaborate on the theoretical rationale for this proposition.

Narcissism and the pursuit of status

By 'narcissism', we mean grandiose narcissism—a subclinical type of narcissism—which involves an exaggerated sense of superiority and self-importance, a sense of entitlement, and a propensity to exploit others (for a review see Krizan & Herlache, 2017). Grandiose narcissism arguably represents narcissism in its prototypical form (as opposed to vulnerable or pathological narcissism; Miller et al., 2012).

Individuals high in grandiose narcissism crave external validation from others, especially in the form of status (Mahadevan & Jordan, 2022; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019). Grandiose narcissists possess a sense of superiority over others, and therefore believe they are entitled to special privileges, and desire the respect and admiration of others (Brummelman et al., 2016).

Several lines of theory and research suggest that narcissism might serve an interpersonal function. In particular, *hierometer theory* (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2021) postulates that narcissism serves a status-regulating function (see also Grapsas et al., 2020). Narcissism is theorized to track one's level of social status—the degree to which a person is considered respected and honored (Fiske, 2010; Gruenfeld et al., 2008)—and motivate status-optimizing behavior. When an individual is respected and honored, they become more narcissistic, which motivates them to engage in assertive status-seeking behaviour to maintain or enhance their level of status.

Drawing from the above theorising, several studies indicate that narcissism functions as a hierometer that tracks status. For example, highly narcissistic individuals express an elevated desire for status, but not for inclusion (Mahadevan & Jordan, 2022). In addition, highly narcissistic individuals appraise themselves as better-than-average on status-related agentic traits (e.g., intelligence) but not on inclusion-related communal ones (e.g., cooperativeness; Bosson et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2002). Elevated levels of social status (but not social inclusion) also correspond to higher levels of trait narcissism (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2019b). Furthermore, experimentally manipulating people's levels of status (but not inclusion) to be higher (vs. lower) leads to higher state narcissism (Mahadevan et al., 2019a). Finally, highly narcissistic individuals report behaving assertively but not affiliatively (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2020). Thus, narcissism appears to be linked primarily to the pursuit of status rather than inclusion.

Self-objectifying narcissists do not need others' approval

Narcissism prioritizes status-focused behaviour and motivation (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2020). What implications does this have for the link between self-objectification and the need for approval? The link between self-objectification and need for approval is plausibly explained by the desire to be liked and accepted (i.e. included) by others. In contrast, narcissists, who seek status over inclusion, are therefore less likely to experience a need for others' approval, even if they self-objectify. Thus, level of narcissism may temper (i.e., moderate) the link between self-objectification and the need for approval. Recent studies have found that narcissism tempers the link between self-objectification and body image concerns (Carrotte & Anderson, 2019; Dryden & Anderson, 2019), indicating that grandiose narcissism may be "protective" in this context. This moderating role of narcissism on body image may serve as preliminary evidence that narcissists have fewer body image concerns, although this remains an empirical question.

Present research

We tested two hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that narcissism tempers (i.e., moderates) the link between self-objectification and need for others' approval (H1). Specifically, we predicted that the positive association between self-objectification and need for approval will be less pronounced for those who are more narcissistic, evidenced by a negative interaction term between self-objectification and narcissism. Second, we hypothesized that the moderating role of narcissism can be attributed to the heightened desire for status that highly narcissistic individuals possess (H2). Specifically, we predicted a positive association between narcissism and status seeking, and that status seeking would act as a mediator of narcissisms' moderating impact, effectively replacing the negative interaction between narcissism and self-objectification with one between status seeking and self-objectification.

Both of our studies examined self-objectification and need for approval. In Study 1, we tested hypothesis H1, which postulates a moderating role for narcissism. In Study 2, we expanded on this by testing hypothesis H2, which proposes that the role of narcissism can itself be attributed to status seeking. Throughout our studies, we focused on trait-based measures of the variables in question.

Research on self-objectification and approval motivation has focused on women (Chen et al., 2022a) as previous research has documented that self-objectification has a more harmful impact on women than on men (Rollero, 2013; Swim et al., 2001). In the current research, we followed the operationalization of previous research and examined the psychological processes underlying the link between self-objectification and approval motivation in women.

Study 1

Overview

Our goal for Study 1 was to test whether narcissism moderated the link between trait self-objectification and approval motivation (H1).

Method

We conducted a cross-sectional study, and tested our hypothesis correlationally.

Participants and design

We recruited 200 women (M_{age} = 29.81, SD = 10.89) from the online research participant recruitment website *Prolific.co*. A post-hoc sensitivity power analysis showed that the sample size provided a power of (1 – β) = 0.90, enabling us to detect a population correlation sized ρ = 0.23, adopting a (two-sided) Type-I error rate of α = 0.05. The sample was predominantly White (74.5%), with 12.5% Asian, 7% Hispanic, 2.5% mixed ethnic group, 2.5% Arabic, and 1% Black. Each participant was compensated with £0.80 for taking part in the study.

Procedure and materials

After giving informed consent, participants completed measures of their narcissism, trait self-objectification, and approval motivation, along with basic demographic questions.[1]

Narcissism We used the *Narcissistic Personality Inventory* (NPI-16; Ames et al., 2006) to assess narcissism. The NPI-16 consists of 16 pairs of items. Within each pair, one statement is narcissistic, such as "I really like to be the center of attention" and one statement is non-narcissistic, such as "It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention." For each pair, participants select the option that describes them better. The number of narcissistic items chosen was totalled, with a higher score indicating a higher level of narcissism. The NPI-16 is a valid and reliable measure of grandiose narcissism (Ames et al., 2006).

Trait self-objectification We used the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998) and the body surveillance sub-scale from the objectified body consciousness scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996) to assess trait objectification. In the SOQ, participants were instructed to rank order 10 body attributes (0 = the least impact on my physical self-concept, 9 = the greatest impact on my physical self-concept), with five appearance-based attributes (e.g., physical attractiveness, measurements), and five competence-based attributes (e.g., strength, physical coordination). Scores were calculated by subtracting the total ranked scores on competence from the total ranked score on appearance. Scores ranged from -25 to 25, with higher scores reflecting more self-objectification. The body surveillance sub-scale of the OBCS contains eight statements that were rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample statements include "I rarely compare how I look with how other people look". Scores on this scale were averaged, with higher scores suggesting more self-surveillance.

Approval motivation We used the revised Martin-Larsen approval motivation scale (1984) to assess participants' need for social approval. Participants rated 20 items such as "I change my opinion (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else" on a 5-point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Scores on this scale were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater desire for approval.

Results

The SOQ assesses the extent to which participants perceive observable body attributes as more important than non-observable body attributes. The subscale from OBCS assesses reported level of body surveillance. Both scales an individual's level of preoccupation with their appearance (Kahalon et al., 2018), which is a key component of self-objectification. Past research has combined the two measures to create a self-objectification composite (Chen et al., 2022a; Miner-Rubino et al., 2002) for the benefit of measurement accuracy. In Study 1, the two self-objectification measures were highly correlated (r = 0.50, p < 0.001). Therefore, we followed the operation of previous research and aggregated them as an indicator for trait self-objectification. As the formats of these two scales were different, we first standardized them and then averaged their scores.

Descriptive statistics and correlations between main variables

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among the main variables in this study. Consistent with previous research, self-objectification correlated positively with approval motivation. In contrast,

[1] We also measured self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) to assess trait self-esteem (1965); see supplement for details about this secondary variable.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and bivariate correlations of main variables in Study 1

Study 1						
Variables	M	SD	α	1	2	3
1. Self-objectification	.00	.87	.67	-		
2. Approval motivation	2.92	.50	.80	**.23 (*p* = .001)*** **		
3. Narcissism	2.80	2.69	-	-.03	**-.18 (*p* = .011)***	

*** $p <= .001$; * $p < .05$

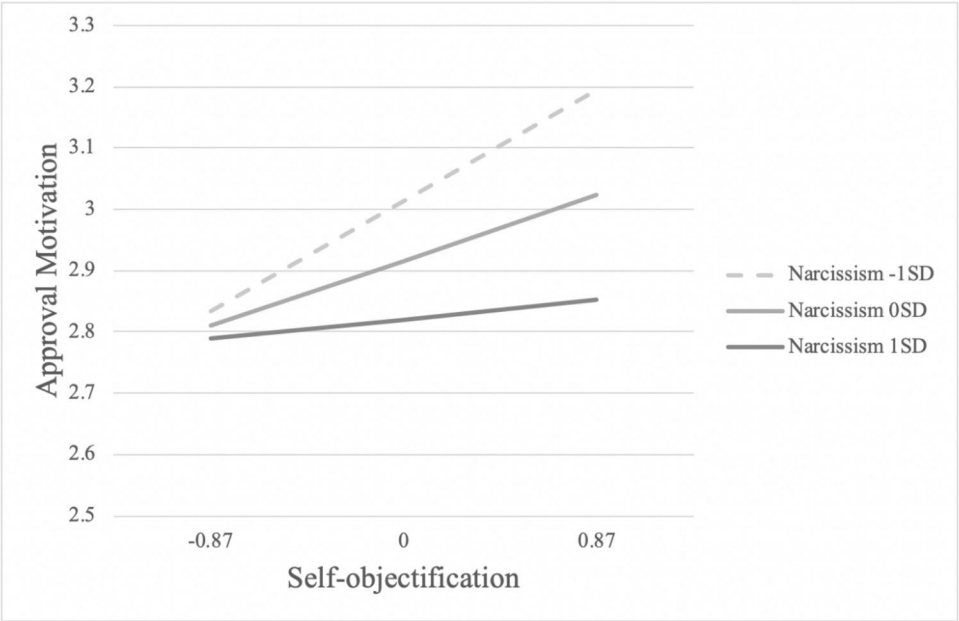

Fig. 1 Narcissism moderates the relationship between trait self-objectification and approval motivation in Study 1

self-objectification was uncorrelated with narcissism, and approval motivation correlated negatively with narcissism. Thus, individuals who self-objectified more were more likely to desire others' approval, whereas highly narcissistic individuals were less likely to desire others' approval.

Narcissism as a moderator (H1)

We predicted that highly narcissistic individuals, who are preoccupied with status rather than social inclusion, would not display the association between self-objectification and approval seeking otherwise found for their less narcissistic counterparts. We tested this with a moderation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017; Model 1). We entered trait self-objectification (standardized), narcissism (standardized), and the interaction between self-objectification and narcissism as predictor variables. We entered approval motivation as the outcome variable. There was a partial effect of self-objectification on approval motivation, $B = 0.12$, $t(196) = 3.10$, $p = 0.002$, as well as a partial effect of narcissism on approval motivation, $B = -0.10$, $t(196) = -2.81$, $p = 0.005$. Importantly, we found a significant self-objectification × narcissism interaction (indicative of moderation), $B = -0.09$, $t(196) = -1.97$, $p = 0.050$ (see Fig. 1 for the interaction pattern). Thus, as hypothesized, narcissism moderated the link between self-objectification and approval motivation. H1 was supported.

We explored the interaction further with the Johnson-Neyman technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936), which indicates the region where the association between the examined variables goes from being statistically significant to non-significant (Johnson & Fay, 1950). It showed that the association between self-objectification and approval motivation was significant when narcissism was within the lower 68.50% of scores, but not significant when narcissism was within the higher 31.50% scores. This result meant that among those whose level of narcissism was in the upper-third of scores (31.50%), the correlation between self-objectification and approval seeking motive no longer existed. This pattern of results provided evidence that is consistent with Hypothesis 1.[2]

[2] We additionally explored whether self-esteem moderated or mediated the relationship between self-objectification and approval motivation using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017). Results can be found in the supplement.

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and bivariate correlations of main variables in Study 2

Study 2								
Variables	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-objectification	.00	.88	.72	-				
2. Approval motivation	2.76	.50	.79	**.30 ($p < .001$)*****				
3. Narcissism	3.22	2.79	-	.11	**-.28 ($p < .001$)*****			
4. Inclusion motivation	4.77	1.33	.89	**.48 ($p < .001$)*****	**.50 ($p < .001$)*****	-.02	-	
5. Status motivation	4.00	1.19	.84	**.16 ($p = .024$)***	.03	**.51 ($p < .001$)*****	**.16 ($p = .021$)***	-

$^{***}p <= .001$; $^{*}p < .05$

Discussion

We tested in Study 1 if the positive association between self-objectification and approval motivation was moderated by narcissism (H1). The results supported this hypothesis. The positive association between self-objectification and need for approval was less pronounced for those who are more narcissistic. Next, we tested if this moderating influence of narcissism could indeed be attributed to the social status motivation expressed by highly narcissistic individuals (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2020).

Study 2

In Study 1, we found evidence that the link between trait self-objectification and approval motivation was tempered by narcissism. According to hierometer theory (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2021), narcissism tracks status. Study 2 served two key purposes: first, we sought to replicate the Study 1 findings. Second, we sought to further disentangle the mechanism underlying the role of narcissism by testing if the moderating role of narcissism could in turn be attributed to an elevated desire for social status among those high in narcissism (H2).

Method

As in Study 1, we conducted a cross-sectional study, and tested our hypotheses correlationally.

Participants and design Participants were 201 respondents recruited via *Prolific.co* ($M_{age} = 27.71$, $SD = 10.18$). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis indicated that this sample size granted a power of $(1 - \beta) = 0.90$ to detect a population correlation sized $\rho = 0.23$, adopting a (two-sided) Type-I error rate of $\alpha = 0.05$. The sample was comprised of 60% White, 17% Asian, 11% Hispanic, 10% Black and 1% mixed race participants. Participants received £1.00 in exchange for their participation.

Procedure and materials As in Study 1, participants completed the NPI-16 (Ames et al., 2006), the SOQ (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998), and the body surveillance sub-scale from the OBCS (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). We again standardised the latter two scales and then averaged their scores as an indicator of overall trait self-objectification. Participants completed the status motivation sub-scale of the fundamental social motives inventory (Neel et al., 2016). The status motivation scale includes 6 items such as "It's important to me that other people look up to me". Scores were averaged, with higher scores indicating higher status motivation.[3]

After this, participants completed the revised Martin-Larsen approval motivation scale (1984). Participants then completed demographic questions, and were thanked, debriefed, and rewarded.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among the main variables. As in Study 1, self-objectification correlated positively with approval motivation and was uncorrelated with narcissism, whereas approval motivation correlated negatively with narcissism. In addition, narcissism correlated positively with status motivation. Thus, individuals who self-objectified more were more likely to desire others' approval. In contrast, highly narcissistic individuals were less likely to desire others' approval and more likely to desire status.

The moderating role of narcissism (H1) We next ran a moderation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017; Model 1), in which approval seeking was predicted by self-objectification (standardized), narcissism (standardized), and their interaction. We found a partial effect of self-objectification on approval motivation, $B = 0.18$, $t(197) = 5.10$, $p < 0.001$, as well as a partial effect of narcissism on approval motivation,

[3] We also measured self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) to assess trait self-esteem (1965), and the affiliation (exclusion concern) sub-scale of the fundamental social motives inventory (Neel et al., 2016); see supplement for details about these secondary variables.

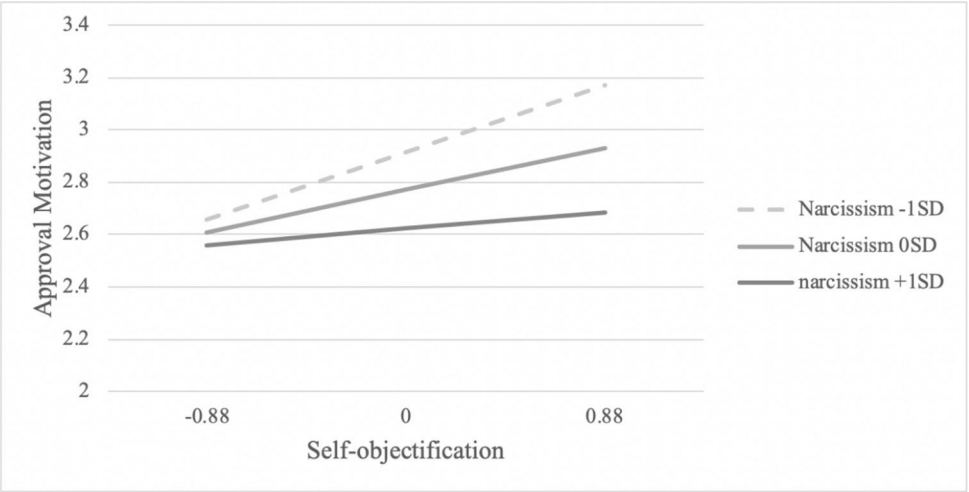

Fig. 2 Narcissism moderates the relationship between trait self-objectification and approval motivation in Study 2

$B = -0.15$, $t(197) = -4.61$, $p < 0.001$. Importantly, the interaction between self-objectification and narcissism (indicative of moderation) was significant, $B = -0.11$, $t(197) = -3.02$, $p = 0.003$ (Fig. 2).

We explored the interaction further with the Johnson-Neyman technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936). It showed that the correlation between self-objectification and approval motivation was significant for individuals whose narcissism scores were within the bottom 79.60%, but not significant for individuals whose narcissism scores were in the top 20.40%. That is, the association between self-objectification and need for approval was attenuated for highly narcissistic individuals. These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1 and with the findings of Study 1.

Status motivation explains the role of narcissism (H2) To test whether the moderating role of narcissism is accounted for by the elevated status motivation that highly narcissistic individuals possess, we ran a moderated mediation analysis on SPSS, using the PROCESS macro (Model 14, Hayes, 2017). Figure 3 displays the conceptual model (for the Model 14 statistical model, please see Fig. 4). Narcissism was found to be a significant predictor of status motivation, $B = 0.51$, $t(199) = 8.40$, $p < 0.001$. Status motivation, self-objectification, and narcissism were all found to be significant predictors of approval motivation, with $B = 0.09$, $t(196) = 2.56$, $p = 0.011$, $B = 0.16$, $t(196) = 4.54$, $p < 0.001$ and $B = -0.20$, $t(196) = -5.40$, $p < 0.001$, respectively. The interaction term between status motivation and self-objectification was also significant, with $B = -0.07$, $t(196) = -2.15$, $p = 0.033$. The overall model was supported by the index of moderated mediation, with the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval being [-0.08, 0.00] (see Fig. 4 for the PROCESS statistical model).[4]

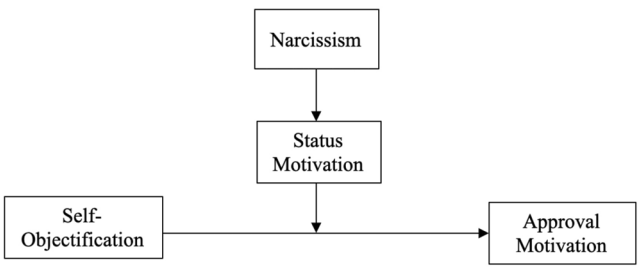

Fig. 3 Conceptual model on the relationship between self-objectification, approval motivation, narcissism and status motivation in Study 2

Discussion

The results of this study replicated and extended the findings of Study 1. Narcissism once again moderated the positive correlation between self-objectification and approval motivation, supporting H1. Moreover, taking into consideration hierometer theory, the moderated mediation model we tested supported our hypothesis (H2), suggesting that the moderating role of narcissism (between self-objectification and approval motivation) can be attributed to increased status motivation among high narcissists.

[4] We again employed a mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017; Model 4) to test if the correlation between self-objectification and desire for approval could be accounted for by their mutual association with self-esteem. Following the mediation, we employed a sequential mediation analysis with PROCESS (Hayes, 2017; Model 6) to test if the explanatory role of self-esteem could, in turn, be attributed to the social inclusion motivation that comes with low self-esteem. Results can be found in the supplement.

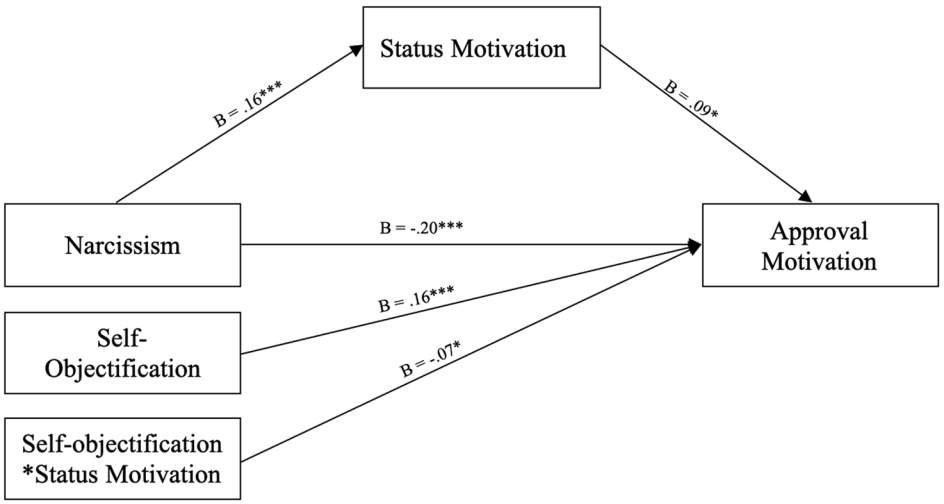

Fig. 4 Moderated mediation model between self-objectification, approval motivation, narcissism and status motivation in Study 2

General discussion

Across two studies, we examined the links between self-objectification, approval motivation, and narcissism. Specifically, we examined if narcissism could help to understand the nature of the previously documented positive relationship between self-objectification and need for approval. Based on prior theorizing and empirical work on hierometer theory (Mahadevan et al., 2016, 2021), we proposed that the correlation between self-objectification and need for approval would be diminished, if not entirely severed, among individuals high in narcissism. This is the case, we proposed, because narcissists tend to discount inclusion motives in favour of status motives, and hence care less for others' approval.

We found support for our hypotheses across two studies. In Study 1, we found that the link between self-objectification and need for approval was attenuated among those high in narcissism (H1). In Study 2, we further disentangled this process and found that, as predicted, the moderating impact of narcissism could be attributed to the elevated desire for status that narcissists endorsed (H2). Together, these results confirm that narcissism plays a critical role in the link between self-objectification and need for approval, by attenuating this association.

Implications and contributions

This current research is the first in connecting processes postulated in the context of objectification theory with those from hierometer theory. In so doing, it offers a connection between two disparate fields through finding common ground. Hierometer theory posits that narcissism tracks social status. Past research consistently suggests that individuals who exhibit high levels of grandiose narcissism balance the choice between social status and inclusion by prioritizing the pursuit of status (Grapsas et al., 2020; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019). Narcissism strongly correlates with desire for status but not inclusion (Mahadevan & Jordan, 2022), which is consistent with findings in the present study.

Moreover, the present study contributes significantly to the expanding field of research on the interpersonal outcomes of self-objectification. Previous research on the interpersonal consequences of self-objectification found that self-objectified women tend to behave in a way that is more 'object-like', such as showing signs of withdrawal during cross-sex interpersonal interactions (Saguy et al., 2010), and being less sexually assertive (Franz et al., 2016). These interpersonal consequences of self-objectification can be explained as an effort to act more in line with people's expectation of a woman (e.g., agreeable and submissive). Chen and colleagues' (2022a, 2022b) findings that self-objectification among women is associated with an elevated desire for approval further support this explanation. The relationship between self-objectification and elevated approval motivation helps to explain the interpersonal behaviours of self-objectified women in general. Understanding the conditions of this link could provide useful insights for future research in this field.

Our studies focused on need for approval as one particular correlate of self-objectification. They suggest that this need reflects an attempt at being socially included. However, the finding that this process is different among women high in narcissism raises the question of what behaviours or motivations self-objectification may produce among this group. Given the importance of status seeking motives among narcissistic individuals, perhaps narcissistic women high in self-objectification may express a higher degree of status signalling in their clothing or other facets of appearance. Narcissistic individuals are more likely to prefer exclusive,

unique, and customizable consumer products and brands (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2013). This tendency may be especially pronounced among high self-objectifiers.

Limitations and future research direction

We focused on grandiose narcissism in the current research. While grandiose narcissism is the most commonly researched type, it is by no means the only one. Future research could examine other types of narcissism, such as vulnerable or pathological narcissism. For instance, past research has found that, unlike grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists desire both status and inclusion, but feel they have attained neither (Mahadevan & Jordan, 2022). Accordingly, the link between self-objectification and approval motivation may not be attenuated among those high in vulnerable narcissism.

Within our studies, we used the revised Martin-Larsen approval motivation scale (1984) to measure approval motivation. While this is an established and popular measure of need for approval, its items arguably focus on *preventing* failure to gain others' approval rather than pursuing approval more actively. For example, items such as "In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be", and "I am careful at parties and social gatherings for fear that I will do or say things that others won't like" may capture a socially cautious element of the need for approval. It would be interesting for future research to examine how results hold up when the need for approval is measured with items that include more 'active' attempts at obtaining others' approval, such as helping others or charitable behaviour.

It is also important to stress that our results are correlational in nature, and therefore, caution must be exercised when trying to assign causality to the processes in question. We hope that our initial studies provide a basis for future research to rely on experimental methods instead of, or in addition to, cross-sectional ones. Likewise, we focused in our research on individual differences only. Yet, several of our variables lend themselves to state measurement and induction. It would be interesting to examine if our findings generalize to momentary fluctuations above and beyond the trait-level at which we currently examined them.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research contribute to the existing research on self-objectification and interpersonal motives among women. We explored the nature of the link between self-objectification and approval motivation specifically in the context of narcissism. In two studies, we found that the link between self-objectification and approval motivation does not occur, or at least to a lesser degree, among those who are high in narcissism, because they prioritise status over inclusion motives.

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Data availability All data and materials of the project can be viewed on https://osf.io/jyvft/?view_only=addef77b8bb24f0283a38420c530d73d.

Declarations

Ethical approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Our studies received ethical approval from the King's College London Research Ethics Office (registration number MRSP-19/20-17814).

Informed consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the studies.

Conflicts of interest The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. All authors consented to the submission of this manuscript.

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