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Us Versus Them: Generational Conflict Through The Lens of Collective Narcissism

Abstract: This article examines the relationship between generational (collective) narcissism (vs. identification with one's generation) and attitudes towards different generational groups. We hypothesized that generational narcissism (but not generational identification *per se*) would be positively associated with the dehumanization of generational out-groups and generational in-group. This hypothesis was tested in two studies conducted among Polish and British participants. Study 1 (N = 402) showed that generational narcissism predicted higher dehumanization of out-groups (i.e., younger and older generations). In Study 2 (N = 799), we extended these findings with a two-wave longitudinal design, demonstrating that generational narcissism exerted a positive overtime effect on both out-group (but only younger, and not older, generation) and in-group (i.e., own generation) dehumanization. Additionally, we found partially contrasting results for generational identification, which predicted a decrease in time of both out-group (but only older, and not younger, generation) and in-group (i.e., own generation) dehumanization. Our work adds to the discussion on today's polarisation between generations and underlines the potential contributing role of collective narcissism in intensifying generational conflict.

Keywords: *dehumanization, collective narcissism, in-group identification, intergenerational conflict*

You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. Greta Thunberg (National Public Radio [NPR], 2019)

The younger generation now tells me how tough things are—give me a break. No, no, I have no empathy for it, give me a break. Joe Biden (Meza, 2018)

In a time when the world is struggling with increased polarization within societies (Marchlewska et al., 2024; Ondercin et al., 2020; Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2023), the gap between older and younger generations is growing more evident (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Whiteley, 2023). Incompatibilities between generations can be clearly seen, for example, in the vastly differing voting patterns and political views held by older versus younger people (Clark, 2024; TVN24, 2023). The opening quotes by Greta Thunberg (NPR, 2019) and Joe Biden (Meza, 2018) serve as examples where youth accuse the elders of being conservative and out of touch with reality while the

older generation sees the young as naive and inexperienced, dismissing their progressive aspirations. These statements demonstrate a growing ideological self-categorization and polarization trend, highlighting a broader narrative of cultural and generational warfare deeply embedded in societal structures (Twenge et al., 2015).

In this paper, we aim to explore those generational divisions by examining how generational collective narcissism, which is a defensive form of group identity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) based on the belief in an in-group's unrecognized superiority, may partly translate into mutual conflict. Specifically, our research is first to



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investigate how individuals identify with their generation (i.e., people born and living at about the same time) may be linked to how they treat others (i.e., members of other generations), as well as members of their own generation. Drawing on previous research on collective narcissism and its concomitants (e.g., Marchlewska et al., 2024), we propose new insights into the links between its generational form (i.e., generational narcissism) and psychological mechanisms potentially responsible for perceiving out-group and in-group members as less (vs. more) human.

DEHUMANIZATION: DEPRIVING PEOPLE OF THEIR HUMANITY

Dehumanization refers to a psychological process where people or groups are seen as not having human qualities, dignity, or rights (Murrow & Murrow, 2015; Oliver, 2011). This concept is integral to understanding different forms of discrimination and violence that occur among what seem ordinary individuals; it provides a way to understand how people can engage in acts of cruelty against others (Staub, 1990). Dehumanization may arise from several sources, including socio-cultural factors such as legitimizing ideologies and delegitimizing beliefs about other groups (Haslam, 2006), psychological mechanisms such as reciprocal or meta-dehumanization processes (Kteily et al., 2016), and situational contexts such as intergroup conflict and violence, including tensions between younger and older generations, in which denying the humanity of the other becomes particularly salient (Leidner et al., 2013; North & Fiske, 2012). Importantly, dehumanization does not occur only in extreme or violent contexts, but also in everyday intergroup relations, where social groups can be subtly or blatantly denied full humanness on the basis of perceived social value or threat (Haslam, 2006; Fiske, 2009; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). In this sense, generational divisions make a suitable context for studying dehumanization between groups that are socially important yet often in conflict. Haslam and Loughnan (2014) indicate that research related to dehumanization is mostly focused on examining the spectrum between subtle and blatant dehumanization. Subtle dehumanization is regarded as relatively mild, characterized by indirect, implicit, and nonconscious processes, in contrast to the explicit and overt nature of blatant dehumanization (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Given our interest in more direct and conscious expressions of dehumanization, this paper will focus on blatant dehumanization, where individuals are fully aware of their denial of another person's humanity (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). This focus reflects the fact that intergenerational tensions are often expressed openly, for example, in public discourse and everyday judgments about younger and older people (Meza, 2018; NPR, 2019). Examining blatant dehumanization, therefore, allows us to capture direct evaluations of other generations as less human, rather than more subtle or implicit forms of bias.

An illustrating example is the measure called "Ascent of Man" (Kteily et al., 2015), in which participants are

presented with an image that portrays the evolutionary progression from ape to human in five stages. Participants indicate how evolved they consider other people. The relevance of this measure in assessing someone's dehumanization level is a result of the ability to express a literal view of others as genetically less human (Bruneau et al., 2018). This kind of perception allows the exclusion of targeted groups from morality, thereby enabling perpetrators to justify their actions without guilt and feelings or reservations about morals (Bandura, 1999; Opatow, 1990). Dehumanization might also be considered a component of prejudice, as it is associated with human rights violations and extreme violence (Haslam, 2006).

Considering that dehumanization usually occurs in environments with significant gaps in values and experiences (North & Fiske, 2012), it might also be observed between generations. This refers to ageism, which can be both aimed at younger and older age groups (Iversen et al., 2009). Ageism might be described as prejudice or discrimination against people because of their age (Iversen et al., 2009). Discrimination based on age is specific because it differs depending on whether it refers to older or younger people. The nature of ageism towards older people is associated with deterioration and death, contrary to its nature against youths and their developmental potential (Iversen et al., 2009). For instance, older people might be considered as lacking cognitive competence, which was proven to be one of the links to perceiving someone as less human (Cuddy et al., 2005).

Similarly, young individuals are subjected to dismissive labels such as "snowflakes" or "entitled" – which may trivialize their concerns and struggles (Pražmo, 2019). The use of such metaphors is a common manipulation technique designed to alter readers' perceptions of a given group of people in a negative way (Pražmo & Augustyn, 2020; Wills, 2009), thus possibly contributing to their dehumanization. Such a vision of others perpetuates the cycle of mutual resentment and misunderstanding between generations and its effects on public policy and intergenerational equity (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018).

Societally, systems of hierarchy and competition, such as those found in capitalist societies, can reinforce dehumanization by emphasizing efficiency and productivity over individual humanity (Bell & Khoury, 2011). Such a way of thinking can possibly lead to exaggerating differences between in-groups and out-groups because of the need to enhance group dominance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In line with this logic, there might be a tendency for both younger and older generations to perceive each other with stereotypes that amplify real or imagined differences, contributing to a form of dehumanization that is continuously reinforced by societal structures and media portrayals (North & Fiske, 2015). Furthermore, those individuals who strongly identify with their generation may be more prone to dehumanize people from other generations, no matter if they are older or younger. Previous research, however, showed that group identity may take different forms (e.g., Cichocka, 2016; Cislak & Cichocka, 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2022), with

collective narcissism being the one with the harmful effects from the perspective of intergroup relations. Therefore, in this work, we propose that collective (generational) narcissism should be taken into consideration as an explanatory factor of the dehumanization of both older and younger people.

COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM'S ROLE IN SHAPING INTER- AND INTRAGROUP RELATIONS

Collective narcissism is characterized by a strong attachment to one's in-group, linked with an emotional commitment to an unfounded notion of the in-group's unmatched greatness and a demand for recognition of that greatness by others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). It is also seen as a protective allegiance to an in-group (Adorno, 1951; Cichocka, 2016), mirroring the dynamics of individual narcissism. As much as individual narcissists might expect special treatment and privilege for themselves, collective narcissists can also seek the same for the group they are a part of (Cichocka, 2016). The interpersonal effects of individual narcissism are frequently mirrored in the intergroup effects of collective narcissism, such as anger, excessive reactions to criticism and negative feedback, or a lack of empathy (Cichocka et al., 2016; Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). Importantly, although usually examined in the context of national groups (e.g., Cichocka et al., 2016; Górka, Marchlewska et al., 2022; Górka, Stefaniak et al., 2022; Maciantowicz et al., 2023; Michalski et al., 2023; Rogoza et al., 2024) collective narcissism can, in fact, refer to all groups with which people can identify (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). For instance, previous studies also examined collective narcissism in relation to religion (e.g., Marchlewska et al., 2019, 2023), gender (Marchlewska et al., 2021), or political (Gronfeldt et al., 2023b; Marchlewska et al., 2024) groups. Past research also explored collective narcissism within football teams (Larkin, 2019) and LGBT+ people (Górka et al., 2023).

Despite collective narcissism occurring in various kinds of groups, its negative consequences are similar across the different examined identities (e.g., Górka et al., 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2019, 2021, 2023). In fact, collective narcissists are focused on defending their in-group's image for any price, meaning aggression and violence toward those who allegedly disrespect the group or pose a threat to it (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, Marchlewska et al., 2021, 2024). One of the explanations for that phenomenon stems from the Threatened Egotism Theory, which refers to individual narcissism and its need to defend self-image (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). It has been suggested that, just as individuals group members can exhibit narcissistic traits (like a grandiose self-image) and act in narcissistic ways (such as displaying aggression toward people who are ostensibly posing a threat to them; Baumeister, 1996). A similar process might emerge among collective narcissists who, due to their emotional investment in the

grandiose in-group's image, are vulnerable to any signs of threat against them (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2020). Therefore, collective narcissists display violent attitudes towards out-groups by which they feel threatened (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala, 2013b; Górka, Stefaniak et al., 2022; Marchlewska et al., 2019, 2021, 2024; Szczepańska et al., 2022). Collective narcissists manifest their hostile attitudes in various ways, such as prejudice (Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Górka, Stefaniak et al., 2022, 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2021, 2022; Szczepańska et al., 2022), the acquiescence of hate speech toward out-groups (Putra et al., 2022), conspiracy beliefs (Cichocka et al., 2016; Karakula et al., 2026; Marchlewska et al., 2019; Molenda et al., 2023) or even dehumanization of out-group members (Marchlewska et al., 2024).

Interestingly, the negative manifestations of collective narcissism do not concern only intergroup relations and out-group attitudes. Some studies indicate that despite declaring high attachment to the in-group, collective narcissists demonstrate behaviors and attitudes that can have adverse outcomes for their own group (e.g., Cichocka et al., 2022; Molenda et al., 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2020, 2021, 2024; Szczepańska et al., 2022, 2024). For example, they exhibit higher disloyalty towards in-group members (Marchlewska et al., 2020) and score higher on intentions to conspire against their in-group (Biddlestone et al., 2022; Molenda et al., 2023). Marchlewska and colleagues (2022) also found that national narcissists scored high on social cynicism and, in turn, low on the tendency to support political systems that assume their in-group members' (i.e., other citizens') participation in the political process. Similarly, Cichocka and colleagues (2022) showed that in organisations, collective narcissism predicted treating coworkers instrumentally, which was mediated by self-serving motives. As such, narcissistic identity is usually perceived as detrimental to both in-group and out-group members, primarily aimed at individual profits. People scoring high on collective narcissism tend to be egocentric and are generally unwilling to act in the best interests of others, whether they are part of the in-group or out-group (e.g., Maciantowicz et al., 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Molenda et al., 2023). Yet, obviously, collective narcissism is not the only way to identify with the in-group.

An alternative for collective narcissism is secure in-group identification, which involves an identification with the in-group devoid of narcissistic traits (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). This form of identification is characterized by a stable, confident attachment to the group that does not rely on external validation or the denigration of out-groups to maintain a positive self-concept (Cichocka, 2016). Secure group identification fosters genuine in-group pride and cooperation without the negative implications of collective narcissism (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). After controlling the overlap between in-group identification and collective narcissism, we can observe the unique effects of secure in-group identification, which demonstrates loyalty and concern toward the in-group (Macian-

towicz et al., 2023; Marchlewska et al., 2020). In contrast to collective narcissism, secure in-group identification is mostly associated negatively with various kinds of prejudice (Cichocka, 2016; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Szczepańska et al., 2022).

Understanding different forms of generational identity, including generational narcissism versus (secure) generational identification, may help us better comprehend how these identities shift amidst growing intergenerational tensions. This article focuses on generational narcissism as the key factor influencing these shifts. When we look at it from the perspective of a growing polarization between young and old (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018), collective narcissism presents itself as a concept through which we can understand the intergenerational tensions present in today's social world. Older generations may view the changes introduced or embraced by youths as not just different but as direct threats to the status quo that they have built and sustained. Contrarily, younger generations are in a constant feeling of being suppressed and disrespected by elders, as in the proverb "*Children should be seen and not heard*". This dynamic can promote mutual dehumanization, where each generation may view the other through negative stereotypes – older people as outdated and younger as naive. In this article, we aim to demonstrate the important role of collective narcissism as an essential predictor of dehumanization in a generational context.

OVERVIEW

The aim of our research was to provide a more complex understanding of the relationship between generational (collective) narcissism (vs. identification with one's generation) and attitudes towards different generational groups. To this end, we conducted two studies – among British (Study 1) and Polish (Study 2) participants. In Study 1, we hypothesized that generational narcissism (but not generational identification) would be positively associated with the dehumanization of generational out-groups (H1) and generational in-group (H2). In the two-wave longitudinal Study 2, it was hypothesized that generational narcissism (but not generational identification) at Time 1 (T1) would predict an increase in out-group (H3) and in-group (H4) dehumanization at Time 2 (T2). Across all studies, we controlled for a non-narcissistic measure of generational identification (Cameron, 2004; Cichocka, 2016). This enabled us to isolate an index of generational identification free from narcissistic characteristics (i.e., an unpretentious investment in the in-group, independent of the recognition of the group by others; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013b; Marchlewska et al., 2018). Prior research showed that non-narcissistic identification was positively associated with collective narcissism, as both involve a positive evaluation of the in-group, but accounting for their shared variance allows to observe their unique effects (Cichocka et al., 2018). Data and study materials for all studies are available at the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/53q2t/?view_only=23cacde-d43e8457f841f39f1817db011

STUDY 1

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Data for Study 1 were obtained through an online survey conducted among British participants via Prolific Academic. We were provided with 402 participants (197 women, 201 men, and four others), aged between 19 and 77 ($M_{\text{age}} = 43.32$, $SD = 13.70$). They were asked to complete demographic questions, measures of generational dehumanization, generational (collective) narcissism, and generational identification, with a debrief at the end of the survey. We also controlled for political conservatism as it might be considered an important covariant based on previous research on dehumanization (Marchlewska et al., 2024; Pacilli et al., 2015)¹. A sensitivity analysis using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) found that our study was sensitive to detect a small effect size of Cohen's $f^2 = 0.02$ (linear multiple regression: fixed model, R^2 increase, Type I error = .05, power = .80).

Measures

Dehumanization. It was measured with the Ascent of Man scale (Kteily et al., 2015). Participants were presented with an image depicting five stages of evolutionary progress from ape to human. The image was presented alongside a 9-point scale, where 1 represented the earliest stage and 9 the most advanced phase of evolution. Participants indicated how evolved they considered people from out-groups (**younger and older generations**), and their in-group (i.e., **own generation**). The younger and older generations were treated as relative categories, referring to people younger or older than the participant rather than to specific generational cohorts. Responses were reverse-scored so that higher scores represented stronger dehumanization.

Generational Narcissism. It was measured with a short five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala, 2013a, 2013b) in relation to the generational group. Participants indicated to what extent they agreed with statements, such as "People of my generation deserve special treatment" or "If people of my generation had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place", on a scale from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 5 = *I strongly agree*, $\alpha = .83$.

Generational Identification. It was measured with a short, three-item version (Górska et al., 2020; see also Cislak et al., 2021; Study 3) of the Social Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004), in relation to the generational in-group. Participants responded to the following statements: "In general, being a person of my generation is an important part of my self-image", "I have a lot in common with other people of my generation", "Generally, I feel

¹ Besides variables reported here, Study 1 also involved measures of political views and social psychological variables (e.g., need for uniqueness) included for the purposes of different projects. Please contact the first author for details.

good when I think about myself as a person of my generation", on a scale from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 5 = *I strongly agree*, $\alpha = .77$.

Political Conservatism. This variable was measured with a single item: "Please tell us about your political orientation" Responses were recorded on a scale from 1 = *Extremely liberal* to 7 = *Extremely conservative*.

Results

Zero-Order Correlations

We first computed correlations between continuous variables (Table 1). Generational narcissism was positively correlated with generational identification and dehumanization of the younger generation. Generational identification was negatively associated with the dehumanization of one's own generation. All three types of dehumanization were positively correlated with each other. Moreover, political conservatism was positively related to the dehumanization of both the younger and one's own generation but negatively to the dehumanization of the older generation.

Regression Analyses

Second, we computed three multiple regression analyses to investigate the effect of generational narcissism (vs. generational identification) on three types of generational dehumanization (towards younger, older and one's own generations; Table 2). In line with our assumptions, we found a significant positive effect of generational narcissism on the dehumanization of the younger and older generation (i.e., out-groups). However, there was no significant effect of generational narcissism on the dehumanization of one's own generation (i.e., in-group). Moreover, there was no significant effect of generational identification on the dehumanization of the younger and older generation. However, we found a significant negative effect of generational identification on the dehumanization of one's own generation. Political

conservatism was a significant and positive predictor of dehumanization of the younger and own generation but a negative predictor of dehumanization of the older generation.²

Study 1 supported our hypothesis about the positive links between generational narcissism and the dehumanization of out-groups (i.e., younger and older generations). In such a way, we demonstrated the destructive out-group concomitants of generational narcissism. However, despite our predictions, we did not find a significant link between generational narcissism and in-group dehumanization. Interestingly, we found a negative relationship between non-narcissistic generational identification and in-group dehumanization, suggesting that non-narcissistic forms of generational identity may serve as a protective factor against negative attitudes towards the in-group. Those results motivated us to research those associations in a different cultural context (i.e., on a Polish sample) with a two-wave study design.

STUDY 2

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Data for Study 2 were gathered via an online survey conducted on a nationwide sample of Poles, representative of gender, age, and settlement size. The data were collected by an external research company that has previously been used in academic research. (e.g., Szczepańska et al., 2022). Out of the 1143 respondents who filled in the first measurement, 799 (69.9%) also completed the second measurement. The sample for this study consisted only of the individuals who participated in both waves of the survey, aged between

² Reported effects remain consistent in direction and significance when the covariates (age and political orientation) are excluded from the analyses.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 1)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Dehumanization: Younger generations	2.61	1.88	-						
2. Dehumanization: Older generation	2.01	1.31	.69***	-					
3. Dehumanization: Own generation	2.23	1.62	.36***	.52***	-				
4. Generational narcissism	2.38	0.80	.12*	.07	-.06	-			
5. Generational identification	3.04	0.86	.01	-.02	-.20***	.54***	-		
6. Age	43.32	13.70	.05	.003	.02	-.07	.08	-	
7. Political conservatism	3.51	1.23	.21***	-.10*	.10*	.07	.06	.18*	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Predictors of Three Types of Generational Dehumanization (Study 1)

Dependent variables	Dehumanization: Younger generations				Dehumanization: Older generations				Dehumanization: Own generation			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	95% CI
Intercept	1.08*	0.49		[0.11, 2.05]	2.46***	0.43		[1.60, 3.31]	2.39***	0.34		[1.72, 3.07]
Control variables												
Age	0.004	0.01	.03	[-0.01, 0.02]	0.01	0.01	.04	[-0.01, 0.02]	0.002	0.01	.02	[-0.01, 0.01]
Political orientation	0.30***	0.08	.19	[0.15, 0.45]	-0.15*	0.07	-.12	[-0.28, -0.02]	0.12*	0.05	.11	[0.01, 0.22]
Independent variables												
Generational narcissism	0.38**	0.14	.16	[0.11, 0.65]	0.27*	0.12	.14	[0.04, 0.51]	0.11	0.10	.07	[-0.08, 0.30]
Generational identification	-0.20	0.13	-.09	[-0.45, 0.06]	-0.18	0.11	-.09	[-0.40, 0.04]	-0.38***	0.09	-.25	[-0.55, -0.20]
<i>F</i>	$F(4, 397) = 6.35^{***}$				$F(4, 397) = 2.44^*$				$F(4, 397) = 6.06^{***}$			
<i>R</i> ²	.06				.02				.06			

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

18 and 87 (386 women, 413 men, $M_{age} = 47.89$, $SD_{age} = 16.02$)³. A sensitivity analysis using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) found that our study was sensitive to detect a small effect size of Cohen's $f^2 = 0.01$ (linear multiple regression: fixed model, R^2 increase, Type I error = .05, power = .80).

Measures

Dehumanization. It was measured as in Study 1 with the Ascent of Man scale (Kteily et al., 2015).

Generational Narcissism. It was measured as in Study 1 with a short five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala, 2013a, 2013b), in relation to the generation in-group, $\alpha_{T1} = .89$, $\alpha_{T2} = .90$.

Generational Identification. It was measured as in Study 1 with a short, three-item version (Górska et al., 2020; see also Cislak et al., 2021; Study 3) of the Social Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004), in relation to the generation in-group, $\alpha_{T1} = .85$, $\alpha_{T2} = .86$.

Political Conservatism. This variable was measured as in Study 1.

Results

Zero-Order Correlations

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the variables assessed in Study 2 are presented in Table 3. Across both measurements, generational narcissism was positively related to the dehumanization of people from the younger generation and generational identification at T1 and T2. Moreover, both measures of generational identification were negatively correlated with each type of dehumanization across both measuring times. All three types of dehumanization measured at T1 and T2 were positively correlated with each other across both measurements. Additionally, political conservatism was positively related to the dehumanization of the younger generation and generational narcissism at T1 and T2, but negatively to the dehumanization of the older generation, but only at T1. Age was positively correlated with generational narcissism and generational identification and negatively with three types of dehumanization, all at T1 and T2.

Hypotheses Testing

We estimated a saturated autoregressive cross-lagged path model using Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Age and political conservatism measured at T1 were included as covariates. Figure 1 presents the results of the model tested in Study 2⁴. In terms of stability, all variables were positively related to themselves over time (range from $B = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.42], $\beta = .33$, $p < .001$ for dehumanization of own generation to $B = 0.63$, 95%

³ Besides variables reported here, Study 2 also involved measures of political views and social psychological variables (e.g., need for uniqueness) included for the purposes of different projects. Please contact the first author for details.

⁴ The exclusion of covariates, as well as the inclusion of additional controls (education and subjective economic status), did not change our conclusions substantively.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 2)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Dehumanization: Younger generations T1	2.88	1.95	–											
2. Dehumanization: Older generations T1	2.59	1.83	.44***	–										
3. Dehumanization: Own generation T1	2.16	1.36	.54***	.54***	–									
4. Generational narcissism T1	2.82	1.00	.11**	.04	-.01	–								
5. Generational identification T1	3.75	0.84	-.16***	-.16***	-.23***	.32***	–							
6. Dehumanization: Younger generations T2	2.80	1.83	.53***	.30***	-.37***	.12***	-.15***	–						
7. Dehumanization: Older generations T2	2.60	1.67	.34***	.51***	.32***	.07	-.14***	.51***	–					
8. Dehumanization: Own generation T2	2.23	1.37	.36***	.33***	.46***	.06	-.22***	.61***	.59***	–				
9. Generational narcissism T2	2.79	0.99	.09*	.01	-.04	.69***	.27***	.14***	.04	.02	–			
10. Generational identification T2	3.73	0.84	-.16***	-.14***	-.23***	.28***	.61***	-.13***	-.15***	-.22***	.41***	–		
11. Age	47.89	16.02	-.23***	-.18***	-.10**	.15***	.26***	-.22***	-.13***	-.10**	.10**	.25***	–	
12. Political conservatism	3.50	1.85	.12***	-.10**	.02	.21***	.03	.18***	-.04	.05	.26***	.07*	-.11**	–

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

CI [0.57, 0.70], $\beta = .64$, $p < .001$ for generational narcissism).

Generational narcissism measured at T1 was positively related to dehumanization of the younger generation ($B = 0.16$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.30], $\beta = .09$, $p = .027$), dehumanization of own generation ($B = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.20], $\beta = .09$, $p = .008$), and generational identification at T2 ($B = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.13], $\beta = .08$, $p = .020$), all measured at T2. We did not find a significant relation between generational narcissism measured at T1 and the dehumanization of the older generation.

Generational identification measured at T1 was negatively related to dehumanization of own generation ($B = -0.22$, 95% CI [-0.33, -0.11], $\beta = -.14$, $p < .001$) and dehumanization of the older generation ($B = -0.14$, 95% CI [-0.27, -0.01], $\beta = -.07$, $p = .038$), both measured at T2.

Dehumanization of the younger generation assessed at T1 was positively related to the dehumanization of own generation at T2 ($B = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.13], $\beta = .11$, $p = .022$) and dehumanization of the older generation measured at T2 ($B = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.18], $\beta = .12$, $p = .009$). There was no significant effect of dehumanization of the older generation measured at T1 on any variable at T2 (except for itself).

Moreover, the dehumanization of own generation measured at T1 was negatively related to generational identification at T2 ($B = -0.07$, 95% CI [-0.12, -0.01], $\beta = -.11$, $p = .015$), and positively related to the dehumanization of the younger generation assessed in T2 ($B = 0.14$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.27], $\beta = .10$, $p = .049$).

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate results from Study 1 in a different cultural context (i.e., Poland) using a cross-lagged panel model. We found that generational narcissism

at T1 positively predicted out-group dehumanization at T2 (but only younger, and not older, generation), thus partly confirming H3. As we assumed, generational narcissism at T1 positively predicted an increase in dehumanization of one's own generation at T2, thus supporting H4. Similarly to Study 1, we found a negative effect of generational identification at T1 on in-group dehumanization (i.e., own generation) at T2. Overall, we managed to demonstrate the destructive effects of generational narcissism in the context of in-group and out-group attitudes.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies conducted in different socio-political contexts, the United Kingdom and Poland, we hypothesized and found that generational (collective) narcissism was positively associated with the dehumanization of generational out-groups and generational in-group (i.e., own generation; but only in Study 2). This, however, did not refer to non-narcissistic generational identification, which not only negatively predicted in-group dehumanization but was also either unrelated or negatively related to out-group dehumanization.

In both studies, we observed that individuals scoring higher on generational narcissism (but not generational identification) were more likely to dehumanize people who are in younger, older, or even their own generation (in Study 2). We also demonstrated in the two-wave longitudinal Study 2 that generational narcissism at T1 (and not generational identification) predicted an increase in dehumanization of younger and one's own generation at T2. These results supported our hypotheses and indicated the importance of the role generational (collective)

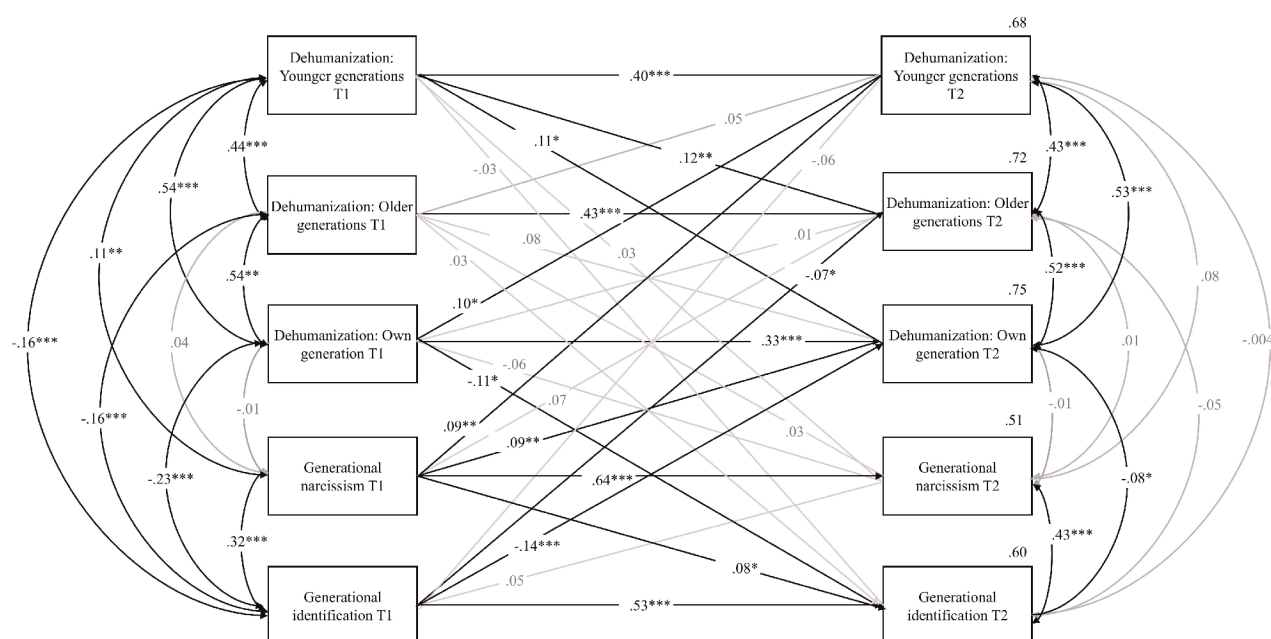


Figure 1. Results of Autoregressive Cross-Lagged Panel Models Testing the Relationships Between Three Types of Generational Dehumanization, Generational Narcissism and Generational Identification (Study 2)

Note. Standardized coefficients presented. Greyed out arrows reflect the non-significant effects ($p \geq .05$).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

narcissism plays in explaining the dehumanization of both generational out-groups and in-group.

Exploring those generational divisions emphasised the role of collective narcissism in relation to generational groups. Additionally, our results also highlighted the specific characteristic of collective narcissism, namely, that it is not only related to a negative attitude towards out-groups but also to in-groups – in this case, one's own generation. This paradoxical phenomenon was earlier proven, showing how those higher in collective narcissism show greater disloyalty to their own in-group (Marchlewska et al., 2020) but also show more willingness to conspire against it (Molenda et al., 2023). Our research further supports the notion that collective narcissists might manifest such hostile reactions in relation to the in-group.

In our research, we did not focus only on the adverse effects of generational narcissism, but we also examined if the effects of a non-narcissistic (i.e., secure) form of generational identity would be opposite, meaning negatively associated with the dehumanization of out-groups (i.e., younger and older generations). Even though in Study 1, we did not find significant effects of generational identification on the dehumanization of older generations, in Study 2, we observed a negative relationship in the cross-lagged panel model between generational identification at T1 and the dehumanization of older generations at T2. Indeed, previous research (Cichocka, 2016; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Szczepańska et al., 2022) suggested that non-narcissistic identification is often related to less prejudiced attitudes towards out-groups (i.e., younger and older generations), but we recommend to explore this relationship further to clarify these findings.

Our results clearly suggest that non-narcissistic generational identification is linked to the dehumanization of the in-group (Study 1 and Study 2). As such, they suggest that those highly identified with their in-group (i.e., own generation) might have more positive (or less negative) attitudes towards their in-group (Marchlewska et al., 2020). However, we may also look at these relations from a different perspective. Generational narcissism at T1 predicted an increase in the dehumanization of one's own generation at T2. At the same time, dehumanization of the in-group (i.e., own generation) at T1 was related to lower generational identification at T2, suggesting that a negative attitude towards the in-group can have the potential to attenuate generational identification. According to this, our results indicate that there is a potentially vicious cycle where generational narcissism not only fails to work as a protective mechanism but may also contribute to intergenerational conflicts and undermine collective identity over time.

Our studies emphasised the importance of including, differentiating, and understanding different forms of generational identity while doing research on such topics as an intergenerational conflict to better comprehend how these identities shift amidst growing tensions between generations. Our findings support Cichocka's (2016) assertion that secure (i.e., non-narcissistic) in-group identification is rather associated with positive attitudes

in the group-related domain. In contrast, collective narcissism seems to be at least partly responsible for negative intergroup relations between generations. In our studies, generational narcissism went hand in hand with blatant dehumanization, which is an extreme form of prejudice (Haslam et al., 2007). Previous research shows that when individuals perceive others as less human, they are more prone to support aggressive policies, discrimination and even justify acts of violence (Kteily et al., 2015). Furthermore, blatant dehumanization has been linked to decreased prosocial attitudes and a lower willingness to engage in cooperative efforts with dehumanized groups (Haslam, 2006). Considering that younger and older generations are so different regarding their socio-political concerns (Fisher, 2024), working together will be even more challenging due to the deepening conflict between them (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Whiteley, 2023). Rather than viewing dehumanization solely as a form of prejudice, it is crucial to consider its role in exacerbating intergroup tensions and fostering exclusionary attitudes that can escalate into discrimination and conflict. By understanding the interplay between the narcissistic form of generational identity and blatant dehumanization, researchers may better address the fundamental causes of intergenerational conflicts and work towards minimizing their harmful effects on society.

We postulate that the novel concept of generational narcissism introduced in this article should be more broadly investigated in the future. For instance, future research would do well to examine the links between generational narcissism and various group-related outcomes (e.g., conspiracy beliefs). In fact, it was proven that collective narcissism is an important factor in predicting different types of conspiracy beliefs (Cichocka et al., 2016; Karakula et al., 2026; Marchlewska et al., 2019). For example, Michalski and colleagues (2023) found a positive relationship between national narcissism and climate change conspiracy beliefs. Of importance, younger people are more likely to engage in climate change-related activities and promote the importance of its issue. In comparison, older people are considered to be the ones who believe in conspiracy theories about global warming (Sarathchandra & Haltinner, 2020). Thus, future studies might investigate the role of generational narcissism in explaining attitudes, conspiracy beliefs, and collective action related to climate change. Moreover, considering that there are many different reference groups of collective narcissism (e.g., Gronfeldt et al., 2023a, 2023b; Górska et al., 2023; Larkin, 2019; Marchlewska et al., 2019, 2021, 2023, 2024), we suggest using various forms of collective narcissism in future research to determine in which contexts this new form of generational narcissism will be particularly significant and has its own unique effects.

Although the Ascent of Man scale is a widely used measure of blatant dehumanization (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Kteily et al., 2015), also in studies on collective narcissism (e.g., Marchlewska et al., 2025), its application to generational groups may be conceptually challenging. Moreover, because the measure describes humanness in

terms of ‘evolvedness,’ it may reflect a blend of perceived status, competence, and group difference rather than pure dehumanization (Zigerell, 2020). Future research should replicate these results using different measures of out-group derogation. The Ascent of Man scale (Kteily et al., 2015) also raises ethical concerns, as asking participants to evaluate groups in terms of humanness is not a morally neutral act and may introduce implicit assumptions about the legitimacy of graded differences in humanity (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2021). From this perspective, asking participants to rank social groups in terms of humanness may inadvertently normalize dehumanizing judgments, even if this is not the researchers’ intention (Crandall et al., 2018). Moreover, although younger and older generations were defined in relative age terms, the perceived age distance between participants and the target groups may have varied across individuals. For instance, for older participants, the younger generation may have referred to established adults, whereas for younger participants, it may have referred to adolescents. Future research would do well by conducting additional studies in more specified conditions, for instance, by checking these relationships between particular generations. The present research focused on blatant dehumanization, but intergenerational conflict may also be reflected in more subtle forms, such as infra-humanization, which are not captured by the Ascent of Man measure (Leyens et al., 2007). Future research should therefore examine whether generational narcissism would also be associated with these less explicit, everyday forms of diminished humanness, which may be particularly prevalent in intergenerational contexts.

Additionally, we acknowledge the critique of cross-lagged panel models by Hamaker et al. (2015), particularly the risk of spurious results due to unaccounted trait-like differences. Most importantly, our studies were correlational, limiting our causality inferences. Future studies should establish the causality of the observed relationships by using experimental or intensive longitudinal self-report methods. More advanced research methods would allow us to better understand the issues related to intergenerational conflict (e.g., what can be done to attenuate prejudice among those scoring high on generational narcissism). Explaining the mechanisms behind tensions is recommended for future research. Another limitation concerns the small effect sizes of our results. Given the complexity of psychological mechanisms behind the nature of intergenerational attitudes and large sample sizes of our studies, modest effects are to be expected and are common in social psychological research (Funder & Ozer, 2019). In this context, in our studies, the effects should be interpreted as modest in size but theoretically meaningful, rather than as strong or exclusive drivers of dehumanization. In addition to methodological limitations related to modeling and causal inference, our study is also not free from data-related constraints. We observed some selective attrition in Study 2. Specifically, participants who dropped out after T1 did not differ from those retained in the sample in generational narcissism, but they reported lower generational identification and higher baseline dehumanization of the younger generation.

This suggests that the final longitudinal sample may slightly underrepresent low-identification respondents and those higher in the dehumanization of the younger generation, although attrition was unrelated to the main predictor of the study – generational narcissism (see Supplementary Materials).

Moreover, our findings converge in indicating an association between generational narcissism and the dehumanization of younger generations and a consistent negative link between secure generational identification and the dehumanization of one’s own generation. However, we acknowledge the variability in other observed relationships across studies (e.g., the nonsignificant relationship between generational narcissism and the dehumanization of the older generation). These differences might reflect broader cultural distinctions between the U.K. and Poland in attitudes toward age hierarchy (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Norms related to respecting seniors might shape how generational boundaries are evaluated, potentially affecting older generations being perceived as targets of dehumanization. More broadly, future research should examine these processes in cultural contexts beyond WEIRD societies to assess the generalizability of the present findings (Henrich et al., 2010). Another possible explanation for the inconsistency, particularly regarding the dehumanization of older generations, is the socio-political context during data collection, as Study 2 was conducted shortly after the 2023 elections in Poland, a period marked by heightened political tensions that might have been relevant for intergenerational perceptions. The significance of the political context can also be observed in the results of political conservatism in correlational and regression analyses. In both studies, higher political conservatism was associated with greater dehumanization of younger generations, whereas it was unrelated or negatively related to the dehumanization of older generations. This asymmetry may reflect ideological stereotypes related to age and aligns with previous work linking conservatism to negative evaluations of social change and younger people, while maintaining more favourable views of tradition and older age groups (North & Fiske, 2012, 2015).

Overall, our results highlight the potential contributing role of collective narcissism in intensifying generational conflict. Demonstrated results indicate that generational narcissism is related to inter-group conflict between generations and attenuating it may serve as a promising solution for ensuring harmony between generations (younger versus older individuals). The psychological mechanisms that drive collective narcissists still need to be researched and addressed by academics.

Declarations of interest: none.

Data and study materials availability statement: The data and study materials that support current findings are openly available in the Open Science Framework repository at https://osf.io/53q2t/?view_only=23cacde-d43e8457f841f39f1817db011

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