

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Just Because I'm Great (and You're Not): When, Why, and How Narcissistic Individuals Give Gifts to Others

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** We examined the roles of Narcissistic Admiration and Narcissistic Rivalry in gift giving. We hypothesized that Admirative and Rivalrous individuals diverge in their likelihood of giving gifts.

**Method:** Across six studies ( $\Sigma N = 2198$ ), we used correlational and experimental methodology and capitalized on both scenarios and actual gift giving.

**Results:** Narcissistic Admiration was positively, but Narcissistic Rivalry was negatively, associated with gift-giving likelihood (Studies 1–2). These findings were explained by diverging communal motivations for gift giving (Study 3). Consistent with the notion that Rivalrous individuals are less likely to give gifts for communal reasons because they feel threatened by social closeness, the negative association between Narcissistic Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood was attenuated when the gift recipient was more socially distant (vs. close; Study 4). Further, gifts that are recipient-centric (e.g., customized with a recipient's name) are less focused on attributes of the giver and less likely to foster social closeness. Therefore, consistent with Admirative individuals' use of gift giving to promote themselves as a superior communal relationship partner, the positive association between Narcissistic Admiration and gift-giving likelihood was attenuated for gifts that were recipient-centric (Study 5). Socially desirable responding, self-esteem, and fear of failure (Study SM1) did not account for the findings.

## 1 | Introduction

Gifts seem to be a very common narcissist issue. They give gifts when love bombing. They give it to you, and then leverage your gratitude so that you give them attention.

Post on Quora (Salymander\_1 [2023](#))

Here's how narcissists act on your birthday: They might give you the same boring gift every year or

pretend to forget your day. Or, they might not get you anything, not even a card.

Post on Quora (Jordan [2023](#))

People in the U.S. spend billions of dollars on gifts each year (Raymond [2022](#)). Although there is a substantial literature on gift giving (Branco-Illodo and Heath [2020](#); Givi and Galak [2022](#); Rixom, Mas, and Rixom [2020](#)), research on the relevance of personality traits in gift giving is sparse (Givi et al. [2023](#)). In this article, we focus on narcissism, a personality trait<sup>1</sup> whose role in gift giving is not well understood, in

part due to its complex, multifaceted character (Krizan and Herlache 2018; Miller et al. 2021). For example, narcissists engage in love-bombing, or bestowing on another person excessive attention and flattery (Arabi 2023), while also engaging in gaslighting, an unsettling questioning of another's perception of reality (Arabi 2023).

We disentangle the intricate relation between narcissism and gift giving by examining two forms of grandiose narcissism, narcissistic admiration ("Admiration" henceforth) and narcissistic rivalry ("Rivalry" henceforth). According to the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC; Back et al. 2013), these forms are united by their motivation to establish and maintain a grandiose sense of self. Yet, they do so via distinct strategies, frequently resulting in divergent outcomes. Pertinent to the current research, Rivalry is negatively associated with communal orientations toward friendship, such as love, trust, and interpersonal closeness, whereas Admiration is positively associated with them (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020). Thus, given that individuals often give gifts for communal reasons (Cavanaugh, Gino, and Fitzsimons 2015; De Hooe 2017; Givi et al. 2023; Hyun, Park, and Park 2016), Admiration and Rivalry may differ in their relevance for gift giving, namely their influence on an individual's gift-giving likelihood.

Indeed, across multiple studies, we find that Admiration is positively, yet Rivalry is negatively, associated with a person's likelihood of giving a gift. We show that the disparate roles of Admiration and Rivalry in gift giving are explained by their divergent associations with communal motivations for gift giving. Further, we draw from narcissism (Back et al. 2013; Hyun, Park, and Park 2016; Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020; Wurst et al. 2017) and gift giving (Aknin and Human 2015; Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooe 2015; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011) theory to derive and test two key moderators: the social closeness of the gift recipient and the recipient-centricity of the gift. Consistent with the notion that Rivalrous<sup>2</sup> individuals are less likely to give gifts for communal reasons (i.e., to express warmth, love, and closeness) because they feel threatened by social closeness, we find that the negative association between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood attenuates when the gift recipient is more socially distant (vs. close). At the same time, gifts that are recipient-centric, such as a gift customized with a recipient's name, are less likely to foster social closeness because they disclose less about the giver (Aknin and Human 2015). Therefore, consistent with Admirative individuals' use of gift giving to promote themselves as a superior communal relationship partner, we find that the positive association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood is attenuated for gifts that are recipient-centric.

We contribute to the gift-giving literature and narcissism theory (Back et al. 2013; Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020; Sedikides and Campbell 2017) in multiple ways. First, we address the aforementioned gap in the literature's understanding of the relevance of personality traits, and in particular narcissism, for gift giving. Although preliminary work has identified differences between narcissism and self-esteem in romantic gift giving (Hyun, Park, and Park 2016), our research contributes knowledge above and beyond this work. Specifically, we document that Admiration and Rivalry diverge in their gift-giving patterns. Thus, we add to the growing body of knowledge that helps to untangle the often-enigmatic behavior of narcissists

through use of the Admiration and Rivalry conceptualization of grandiose narcissism (Back et al. 2013).

Second, whereas numerous experimental gift-giving articles have used *what* individuals gift as a dependent variable (Galak, Givi, and Williams 2016), we implement a dependent variable that has received little attention in the literature: *whether* individuals gift, that is, their gift-giving likelihood. Gift-giving likelihood is an important dependent variable. If narcissism contributes to a change in gift-giving frequency by even a fraction of 1%, this translates to millions of relationships altered (or not altered) by gifts, millions of recipients experiencing (or not experiencing) the potential happiness that stems from gift reception, and billions of dollars being spent (or saved) by givers. Third, even though the focus of our research is on gift-giving likelihood, we do examine type of gift as a potential moderator (Study 5 and Supporting Information Study SM1: Appendix S1), helping to connect our research to the literature (Aknin and Human 2015; Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooe 2015). In particular, we show that the positive association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood attenuates for recipient-centric gifts. Fourth, whereas the relevance of communal motivations in gift choice has been well-documented (Givi et al. 2023), we establish how these motivations are central drivers of a person's gift-giving likelihood. We also illustrate that communal motivations for gift giving differ based on personality. Lastly, we clarify the role that the giver-recipient relationship can have on gift giving, showing that the negative relation between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood attenuates for socially distant (vs. close) recipients.

In what follows, we provide theoretical background and develop hypotheses, including three pilot studies. Next, we present six studies (five preregistered) that test our hypotheses.<sup>3</sup> We conclude by considering theoretical implications of our findings, directions for future research, and practical implications for individuals.

## 1.1 | Conceptual Development

### 1.1.1 | Gift Giving

Gift giving has been garnering keen research attention (Givi et al. 2023; Gupta et al. 2023), and for good reasons. Gift giving has well-being (Givi and Galak 2022), social (Aknin and Human 2015), and identity (Ward and Broniarczyk 2011) ramifications for givers and recipients alike. It also has economic consequences, given the large amount of money that individuals devote to it (Raymond 2022) and its potential to be less economically efficient (i.e., there is often a gap between the value of a gift to the recipient and the amount spent by the giver) than cash (Waldfoegel 1993). However, the role of individual differences in gift giving remains relatively unexplored. Forays have been made into how emotional understanding influences gift spending (Ganesh-Pillai and Krishnakumar 2019), interpersonal orientation affects giver behavior (De Hooe 2017), envy influences gift choices (Givi and Galak 2019), and a recipient's level of pickiness impacts on givers' decision making (Cheng, Meloy, and Polman 2021). Communal motivations, defined as motivations to engage in behaviors that foster intimacy, warmth, and closeness (Back et al. 2013; Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020), are also well established as key for gift giving (Cavanaugh, Gino,

and Fitzsimons 2015; De Hooge 2017; Givi et al. 2023; Hyun, Park, and Park 2016). Therefore, understanding individual differences that relate to communal gift-giving motivations is timely and essential. Notably, an exception to the dearth of individual difference research in gift giving is an exploratory study by Hyun, Park, and Park (2016). These authors examined how narcissism and self-esteem relate to gift-giving motivations between romantic partners, namely, the (communal) motivation to maintain or fortify the giver-recipient relationship and the (instrumental) motivation to signal status or power. Unlike self-esteem, narcissism was positively associated with both a relationship-fortifying motivation and a status-signaling motive for gift giving.

We examine how two forms of narcissism, Admiration and Rivalry, are differentially associated with gift giving. Specifically, we test how, when, and why these forms of narcissism are related to a person's likelihood of giving a gift. We chose to study narcissism in the context of gift giving, as opposed to other individual differences, for several reasons. To begin, there is very little work on narcissism in gift giving, with the aforementioned exception of Hyun, Park, and Park (2016). Our research advances this prior investigation by zeroing in, via both cross-sectional and experimental designs, on two key forms of narcissism, Admiration and Rivalry. We also examine a different dependent variable (likelihood of giving a gift), additional gift recipients beyond romantic partners and, critically, the underlying mechanism responsible for the associations between the two forms of narcissism and gift-giving likelihood.

Moreover, narcissism is associated with a wide range of behaviors, such as prosocial and communally oriented (Konrath, Ho, and Zarins 2016), including gift giving. At the same time, narcissists are often socially hostile and eschew communal rewards (Campbell and Foster 2007). Thus, we reason that narcissism likely plays a role in gift-giving proclivity or disinclination. Further, we know from literature that communal motivations are central to gift giving (Givi et al. 2023) and that narcissism can be associated with these motivations (Hyun, Park, and Park 2016). Yet, we do not know what influence the combination of the two has on gifting-related outcomes, such as an individual's likelihood of giving a gift or the kind of gift narcissists might give. Stated otherwise, there is a clear gap in scholarly understanding of narcissism's role in gift giving that needs to be filled. Finally, Admiration and Rivalry diverge in their associations with communal motivations (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020), such as a desire to fortify the relationship (Hyun, Park, and Park 2016). As mentioned, these motivations are central to gift giving (Givi et al. 2023; Hyun, Park, and Park 2016), thus necessitating the investigation of the association between Admiration and Rivalry on the one hand and gift-giving motivations (and outcomes) on the other.

Our central thesis is that Admiration and Rivalry diverge in their associations with gift-giving likelihood. Further, we propose that this occurs because Admiration and Rivalry have disparate associations with communal gift-giving motivations: Admirative individuals are more motivated by communal gift-giving motivations, consistent with the findings of Hyun, Park, and Park (2016), whereas Rivalrous individuals are less motivated by them. We provide a pertinent rationale below.

### 1.1.2 | Narcissism

The term narcissism derives from the Greek-Roman myth of Narcissus, a youth who fell in love with his reflection in a pond (Ovid, 43 BC–17/18 AD). Narcissism is a multiform personality trait. Yet, all forms share two core characteristics (Sedikides 2021). The first is egocentric exceptionalism. Narcissists regard themselves as special, important, superior, and entitled and are highly motivated to maintain this grandiose sense of self (Grijalva and Zhang 2016; Morf, Horvath, and Torchetti 2011; Roberts, Woodman, and Sedikides 2018). The second characteristic is social selfishness. Narcissists are indifferent toward others at best and frequently manifest callousness, contempt, and even hostility (Foster and Brunell 2018; Kjærviik and Bushman 2021; Urbonaviciute and Hepper 2020). These two commonalities are also observed in consumer behavior. Narcissistic individuals prefer and often purchase products that they can customize to ensure their uniqueness (de Bellis et al. 2016), that are scarce (Lee and Seidle 2012), and that positively differentiate themselves from others (Lee, Gregg, and Park 2013). These include luxury brands (Sedikides, Hart, and Cisek 2018) and brands from prestigious stores (Naderi and Paswan 2016). In addition, narcissistic individuals become territorial and even hostile when they perceive that others are signaling ownership for a product they feel is “theirs” (Kirk, Peck, and Swain 2018).

Being grandiose and hostile, how are narcissists ever able to attract friends and relationship partners? Much research (see Table 1 for examples) has indicated that interpersonal relationships with narcissistic individuals are problematic. Narcissists are perceived as attractive, self-assured, and entertaining at first association, making them popular and sought-after as acquaintance partners (Back, Schmukle, and Egloff 2010). They can seem charming, attentive, and caring, often love-bombing their relationship partners with attention and flattery (Arabi 2023). Also, they appear to be motivated by social affinity with others (Benson et al. 2019), and sometimes are likely to behave prosocially by volunteering and engaging in a community (Martin et al. 2019).

However, narcissists' social hostility becomes more evident over time (Leckelt et al. 2015). They can be indifferent, selfish, and arrogant, gaslighting their relationship partners (Arabi 2023). They are quick to anger and aggress after experiencing social rejection (Twenge and Campbell 2003) even when unprovoked (Du, Miller, and Lynam 2022). Unwilling to forgive others for a transgression (Exline et al. 2004), they are also less likely to apologize for their own transgressions as they are less empathetic and guilt-prone (Leunissen, Sedikides, and Wildschut 2017).

### 1.1.3 | Admiration and Rivalry

A division of grandiose narcissism into Admiration and Rivalry (the NARC; Back 2018; Back et al. 2013) has helped to clarify the processes underlying some of these contradictory attributes or behaviors. The division is particularly useful in understanding narcissistic individuals' gift giving behaviors which, as illustrated in our opening quotes, can be enigmatic. Both Admirative

**TABLE 1** | Examples of social and hostile motivations, perceptions and behaviors associated with narcissism.

Construct	Socially adaptive perceptions and behaviors	Hostile perceptions and behaviors
Self-promotion and self-protection motivations	"Admiration is characterized by the narcissistic tendency to promote the positivity of one's self-view by seeking social admiration. Individuals high on Admiration strive for uniqueness, engage in thoughts about their own grandiosity, and show self-assured, dominant, expressive, and charming behaviors (= assertive self-enhancement)" (Wurst et al. 2017)	"Rivalry, by contrast, is characterized by the narcissistic tendency to protect oneself from a negative self-view by derogating others. Individuals high on Rivalry strive for supremacy by devaluing others and they engage in selfish, socially insensitive, arrogant, hostile, and aggressive behaviors that lack interpersonal warmth, trust, and forgiveness (= antagonistic self-protection)" (Wurst et al. 2017)
Romantic appeal and problems	Short term romantic appeal is attributable to Admiration (Wurst et al. 2017)	Long-term romantic problems are attributable to Rivalry (Wurst et al. 2017)
Love-bombing and gaslighting	Narcissism is positively associated with love-bombing, defined as bestowing on another person excessive attention and flattery (Arabi 2023)	Narcissism is positively associated with gaslighting, defined as questioning another's reality, perception, and memory (Arabi 2023)
Trait perceptions of a romantic partner	Admiration is positively associated with favorable trait perceptions of a former romantic partner (Seidman and Schlott 2022)	Rivalry is negatively associated with favorable trait perceptions of a former romantic partner (Seidman and Schlott 2022)
Perceived mate value	Admiration is positively associated with both perceived self and perceived mate value (e.g., attractive, ambitious, faithful, financially secure, generous, intelligent; Zeigler-Hill and Trombly 2018)	Rivalry is negatively associated with both perceived self and perceived mate value (Zeigler-Hill and Trombly 2018)
Agentic and communal orientations	Admiration is positively associated with self-perceptions of assertiveness, sociability, attractiveness, competence and likeability as well as with agentic behaviors (e.g., self-assured behaviors, expressiveness and engagement; Back et al. 2013)	Rivalry is negatively associated with qualities conducive to successful close social relationships, such as empathy, trust, forgiveness and gratitude (Back et al. 2013). Rivalry is negatively associated with communal behaviors (e.g., warmth, genuine smiling) (Back et al. 2013) and communal friendship orientation (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020)
Perceived intelligence of self and others	Admiration is positively associated with self-assessed intelligence (Zajenkowski et al. 2023)	Rivalry is negatively associated with assessment of others' intelligence (Zajenkowski et al. 2023)
Social identity and affiliation	Admiration predicts higher levels of social identity in response to ingroup success, regardless of individual performance (Benson et al. 2019)	Rivalry predicts more negative views of group ability, as well as a higher desire to abandon the group and expel group members in response to individual success combined with ingroup failure (Benson et al. 2019). Narcissists are more likely to prioritize self-interests over collective interests (Campbell et al. 2005)
Duration of relationship	Positive perceptions by others (e.g., dominant-expressive behavior; being seen as assertive) associated with narcissistic admiration decrease over time (Leckelt et al. 2015)	Negative perceptions by others (e.g., arrogant-aggressive behavior and being seen as untrustworthy) associated with Rivalry increase over time (Leckelt et al. 2015)
Prosocial behavior	Admiration is positively associated with prosocial behavior (Martin et al. 2019)	Rivalry is negatively associated with prosocial behavior (Martin et al. 2019)
Benign and malicious envy	Admir Admiration is positively associated with benign envy and social potency (e.g., getting compliments, being admired) (Lange, Crusius, and Hagemeyer 2016)	Rivalry is positively associated with malicious envy and social conflict (e.g., gossiping about others, schadenfreude) (Lange, Crusius, and Hagemeyer 2016)
Anger and aggression		Narcissists are more prone to aggression when provoked, and even when unprovoked (Du, Miller, and Lynam 2022; Kjærviik and Bushman 2021). Narcissists are angrier and more aggressive after experiencing social rejection (Twenge and Campbell 2003)
Jealousy and physical abuse		Narcissism is positively associated with jealousy and physical abuse (Arabi 2023)
Apologizing, forgiveness and revenge		Narcissism reduces willingness to apologize for an interpersonal transgression (Leunissen, Sedikides, and Wildschut 2017). Narcissists are less likely to forgive others for a transgression (Exline et al. 2004). Rivalry predicts unforgiving and revenge-oriented reactions to conflict in close social relationships (Back et al. 2013)

(Continues)



TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Construct	Socially adaptive perceptions and behaviors	Hostile perceptions and behaviors
Empathy		Narcissism is negatively associated with affective empathy (Hepper, Hart, and Sedikides 2014; Urbonaviciute and Hepper 2020)
Territoriality		Narcissism increases territorial behavior (e.g., perceived infringement, defensive behaviors, derogation of infringing other) for psychological possessions (Kirk, Peck, and Swain 2018)

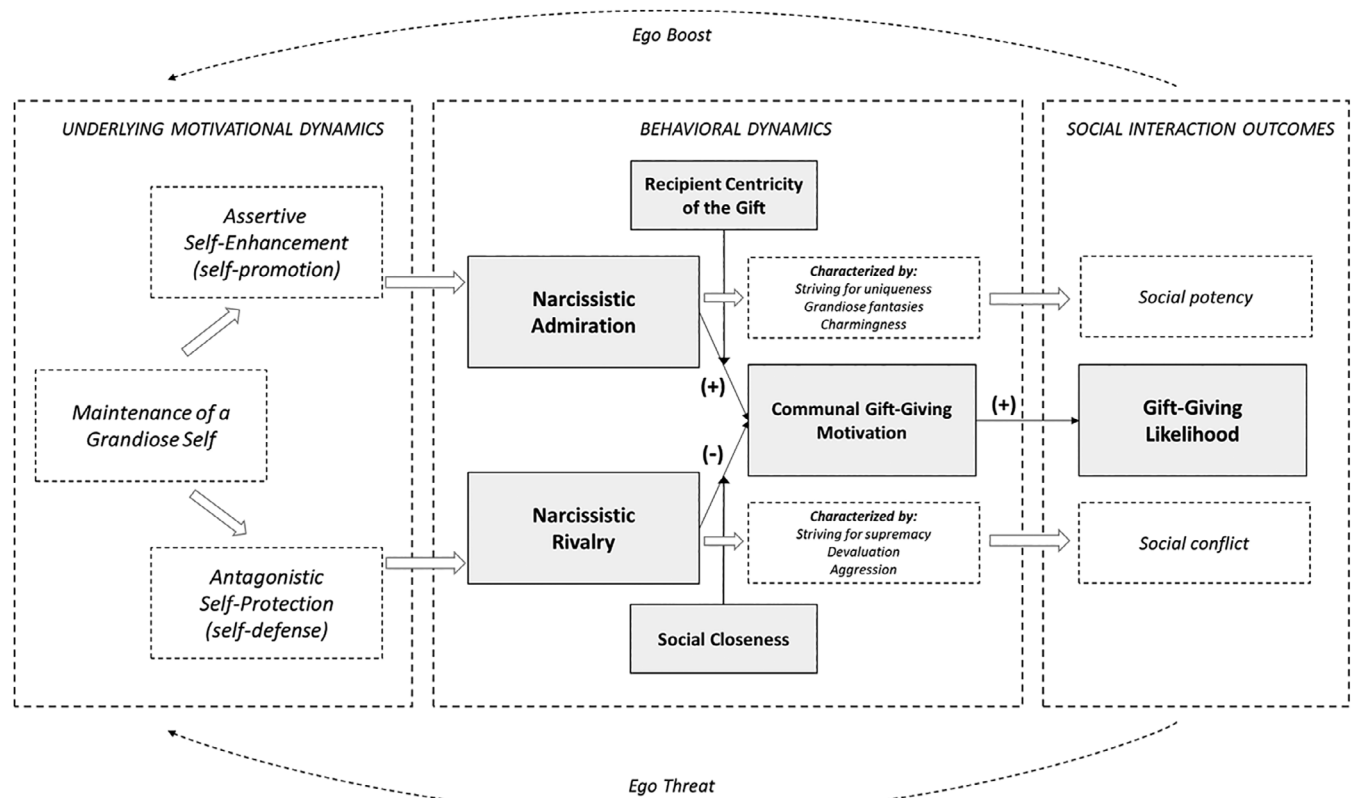


FIGURE 1 | The Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept with a summary of our hypotheses (in Gray).

and Rivalrous narcissists are motivated to create and maintain a grandiose and superior sense of self; however, they do so by implementing different strategies (Figure 1; Back et al. 2013). For example, both Admirative and Rivalrous persons believe they are luckier than others; yet, they differentially spread positive and negative word-of-mouth when they lose a luck-based promotional game (Kirk et al. 2022).

Admiration manifests through an inclination to enhance one's positive self-view by actively pursuing social approval (Wurst et al. 2017). Admirative individuals seek out and dwell on opportunities to assert their own sense of greatness, exhibiting self-assured, dominant, and charming behaviors (Wurst et al. 2017). Admiration is considered the bright side of narcissism due to its focus on promoting the self (assertive self-enhancement) rather than derogating others (Back et al. 2013). Thus, Admiration is positively associated with socially adaptive behaviors (Table 1) and self-esteem (Back et al. 2013). For example, many short-term positive qualities perceived by romantic partners, such as attractiveness and desirability, are

attributed to Admiration (Wurst et al. 2017), and Admirative narcissists perceive their romantic partners more positively (Seidman and Schlott 2022; Zajenkowski et al. 2023; Zeigler-Hill and Trombly 2018). Further, Admiration is positively linked to communal friendship orientations, and indirectly so to relationship investment and commitment (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020, note 4).

In contrast, Rivalry is marked by an inclination to shield oneself from a negative self-image through the derogation of others (Back et al. 2013). Those with a proclivity for Rivalry are vigilant for and respond to perceived threats to their superior self-image by engaging in self-protecting behaviors, often involving combativeness and other-diminishment (Lange, Crusius, and Hagemeyer 2016). Indeed, Rivalry is associated with arrogant, hostile, and aggressive behaviors (Back et al. 2013; Wurst et al. 2017). It is considered the dark side of narcissism due to its focus on belittling others for the purpose of raising the self ("antagonistic self-protection") and is negatively associated with self-esteem (Back et al. 2013). Rivalrous individuals also disdain communal values (Sauls and

Zeigler-Hill 2020). Unsurprisingly, the longer-term problems often evident in narcissists' interpersonal relationships are attributable to Rivalry (Wurst et al. 2017). Finally, Rivalry is negatively associated with prosocial (Martin et al. 2019) and communal behaviors (Back et al. 2013) and is positively associated with negative assessments of others (Zajenkowski et al. 2023) and inflammatory behaviors (Back et al. 2013).

As expected by their shared characteristics and strong motivation to create and maintain a grandiose sense of self, Admiration and Rivalry are not orthogonal. They are moderately positively correlated (e.g.,  $r = 0.30-0.60$ ; Wurst et al. 2017). Nonetheless, individuals can be high on one form, yet low on the other. Further, as described previously, the two narcissism forms are associated with distinct outcomes. To test whether they diverge with respect to gift giving as well, we conducted two pilot studies. In the first (Supporting Information Pilot Study 1: Appendix S1), we used thought-protocol analysis to assess how Admirative and Rivalrous individuals feel about giving gifts. Participants completed the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; Back et al. 2013; see Supporting Information for scales: Appendix S1) and then wrote about how they feel about giving someone a gift. We found that the valence of the comment became more positive with increased Admiration (e.g., "It usually makes me feel excited and happy"), but more negative with increased Rivalry (e.g., "I absolutely hate gift giving... I find it a hassle and stressful... It always feels like an obligation to me").

In a second pilot study (Supporting Information Pilot Study 2: Appendix S1), we sought evidence that, for individuals higher in narcissism, gift giving is a context that can offer both an opportunity for self-promotion and a self-threat. Two weeks after completing the NARQ, participants responded to measures of gift giving as self-promotion and self-threat. Self-promotion included such statements as "When thinking about giving my best friend a birthday gift, I feel like it is an opportunity to show them what a great friend I am/why they are lucky to have me as a friend." Self-threat included such statements as "When thinking about giving my best friend a birthday gift, I feel like my view of my 'self' is under attack/my identity is being threatened." We found that both Admiration and Rivalry were positively associated with gift giving as a self-promotion opportunity. In contrast, Admiration was negatively, but Rivalry positively, associated with gift giving as a self-threat. Further, the magnitude of the self-threat coefficient for Rivalrous participants was more than 50% larger than that for Admirative participants (and directionally opposite). These results are consistent with the NARC, in which both Admirative and Rivalrous narcissists are motivated to maintain a grandiose sense of self but employ distinct strategies to do so (Back et al. 2013).

## 1.2 | Hypotheses

Narcissists' motivation to create and maintain a grandiose sense of self, yet use divergent strategies to do so, lays the foundation for our hypothesizing. A prior study has reported that, when giving gifts, narcissistic individuals are motivated by both instrumental (e.g., status and power) and communal (e.g., closeness, warmth and relationship-maintenance) considerations (Hyun,

Park, and Park 2016). These findings are largely consistent with research documenting the relevance of these two motivational orientations in understanding narcissists' behaviors in interpersonal relationships (Back et al. 2013; Wurst et al. 2017). For example, whereas both Admiration and Rivalry are positively associated with instrumental orientations toward friendship, they diverge in their associations with communal orientations (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020). Although communal motivations are less often part of the narcissistic toolkit (Urbonaviciute and Hepper 2020), these individuals engage in communal behaviors when they help to satisfy their self-promotion motivations (Konrath, Ho, and Zarins 2016; Martin et al. 2019).

Admiration is characterized by assertive self-enhancement, in which individuals seek out and respond to opportunities for self-promotion. As shown in Pilot Study 2, gift giving affords such an opportunity, in which narcissistic individuals gift to promote themselves as a great friend. Narcissists need interpersonal relationships to support their inflated sense of self, and they sometimes behave prosocially for strategic reasons (Konrath, Ho, and Zarins 2016). We argue that, although individuals high in Admiration may not necessarily seek out genuine warmth, trust, and interpersonal closeness in a friendship, they recognize that others do. Being able to showcase what a loving friend and person they are by giving a gift to another individual offers value through self-promotion. In other words, gift giving helps ensure that others continue to acknowledge value in their relationship with the narcissist and will be available to provide the narcissistic gift-giver with the adulation they need. This argument aligns with prior findings, in which narcissism was associated with love-bombing (Arabi 2023) and giving gifts for relationship maintenance purposes (Hyun, Park, and Park 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H1a.** *Admiration (but not Rivalry) positively predicts gift-giving likelihood, and;*

**H1b.** *The positive association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood is mediated by an increase in communal gift-giving motivations.*

However, as evidenced in Pilot Study 2, individuals higher in Rivalry are more likely to perceive gift giving as a threat. Gift giving can be psychologically threatening in that individuals are expected to put someone else's desires ahead of their own (Ward and Broniarczyk 2011). It would be particularly threatening to narcissists who prioritize satisfying their own needs over the needs of others (Campbell et al. 2005). In addition, people may perceive gift giving as motivated by a desire for closeness and warmth in a relationship (Givi et al. 2023; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016), a communal value that is contrary to the identity of Rivalrous individuals (Back et al. 2013). Indeed, whereas Rivalry is positively associated with agentic orientations toward friendship, its association with communal orientations toward friendship is negative (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020). Not only do Rivalrous individuals disdain warmth or closeness in a relationship, but the idea that someone else might think they are trying to become more interpersonally close, as would likely be the case if a recipient were receiving a gift (Polman and Maglio 2017) from them, would be especially threatening to their agentic self-identity. Given that Rivalry is characterized by antagonistic self-protection, in which

one is vigilant for and responds to self-threats (Back et al. 2013), Rivalrous persons will attempt to lessen the threat posed by gift-giving opportunities (i.e., the possibility that a gift may suggest that the giver wants a closer relationship) by not giving a gift at all. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H2a.** *Rivalry (but not Admiration) negatively predicts gift-giving likelihood and;*

**H2b.** *The negative association between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood is mediated by a decrease in communal gift-giving motivations.*

### 1.2.1 | Social Closeness as a Moderator for Rivalry

We have argued that Rivalry is negatively associated with gift-giving likelihood because Rivalrous individuals disdain communal motivations and values, such as closeness and warmth, in relationships. Hence, they are less likely to give gifts to others. However, this logic also implies that, in situations where most people are less likely to desire a close relationship with the gift recipient, the association between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood will attenuate. Even those low in Rivalry will be unlikely to give a gift, as they will be less focused on communal motivations. This will be the case for gift recipients with whom individuals have a more distant social relationship, such as a typical acquaintance (vs. a best friend or close family member). That is, individuals may give a birthday gift for other reasons, such as a social norm or obligation (Givi et al. 2023) rather than their desire to foster a closer relationship. Regardless of whether one is high or low in Rivalry, for more socially distant potential recipients, communal motivations will receive less consideration. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H3.** *The negative association between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood will be attenuated for a recipient who is socially distant (vs. close).*

Note that we do not make this moderation hypothesis for Admiration, because Admirative individuals are not threatened by social closeness—indeed, even for more socially distant relationships, gift-giving is an opportunity for self-promotion.

### 1.2.2 | Recipient-Centricity of the Gift as a Moderator for Admiration

We have argued that Admiration is positively associated with gift-giving likelihood because Admirative individuals are motivated to use gift giving to foster closeness with others for self-promotion purposes. Prior research has documented that gift givers and receivers feel closer when givers choose gifts that are more giver (than recipient) centric. This is because giver-centric gifts, which reflect the giver's characteristics, interests, or passions (Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooge 2015), facilitate self-disclosure, thereby promoting intimacy (Aknin and Human 2015). This logic implies that recipient-centric gifts, such as those customized for the recipient, are less attractive

to Admirative gift-givers. Further, given their focus on themselves, Admirative individuals are unmotivated to purchase a gift for someone else that might enhance the recipient's own sense of self, thereby relatively diminishing focus on the giver's own ostensibly superior attributes. Given our proposal that Admirative individuals are motivated in gift-giving to foster social closeness, they will therefore be less likely to give a gift when the one they are considering is recipient-oriented. We hypothesize:

**H4.** *The positive association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood is attenuated for gifts that are more (vs. less) recipient-centric.*

In this case, we offer no moderation hypothesis for Rivalry, given that the type of gift (recipient-centric or not) should have less of an influence on the self-threat inherent in gift-giving among Rivalrous individuals.

## 1.3 | Overview

We report six studies, five of which were preregistered. Data and materials are available at [https://osf.io/v4fm3/?view\\_only=cc1bd04fbc3424a83b92b013aa1cbd9](https://osf.io/v4fm3/?view_only=cc1bd04fbc3424a83b92b013aa1cbd9). We examined both hypothetical gift-giving likelihood and actual gift-giving behavior with an incentive-compatible measure in Study 1. In all studies, we measured narcissism with the NARQ. It consists of 18 items—nine for Admiration and nine for Rivalry (1 = *not agree at all*, 6 = *agree completely*). To reduce the possibility that measuring narcissism might influence the dependent measures, in Studies 2–6, we implemented the NARQ—as well as alternative trait measures in Study 2—in a separate session more than 2 weeks in advance of the main studies.<sup>4</sup> Participants were precluded via the platform from taking part in more than one study. We experimentally manipulated both the social closeness of the gift recipient (best friend vs. typical acquaintance; Study 4) and the type of product under consideration as a gift (recipient-centric vs. control; Study 5). In Appendix S1, we provide descriptive statistics and correlations (Tables Supporting Information 1–6, 8, 9, 15, and 17; Appendix S1), additional methodological details, and ancillary analyses for each study. We established exclusion criteria a priori (a single multiple-choice question at the end or a nonsensical open-ended response, unless otherwise noted; see Appendix S1) and report all exclusions. Unless otherwise noted and reported in Appendix S1, we obtained no statistically significant interactions with gender or age and do not discuss these demographics further. We secured institutional review board approval for all studies from the first author's institution.

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we conducted a third pilot study (Supporting Information Pilot Study 3: Appendix S1). Participants completed the NARQ and indicated how likely they would be to give a birthday gift to their best friend and to a close family member. We found that for both the best friend and the close family member, Admiration was positively associated with gift-giving likelihood, whereas Rivalry was negatively associated with it. These results provide further evidence of differing gift-giving patterns between admiration and rivalry. We proceeded with systematically testing our hypotheses.

## 2 | Study 1: Admiration and Rivalry Are Differentially Associated With Gift Giving

In Study 1, we used a preregistered ([https://aspredicted.org/6MN\\_DJ7](https://aspredicted.org/6MN_DJ7)) incentive-compatible design (Givi and Galak 2019) to test the hypothesized associations between Admiration and Rivalry on the one hand and gift-giving likelihood on the other.

### 2.1 | Method

To determine the sample size for detecting true associations between Admiration/Rivalry and gift-giving behavior, we conducted a power analysis using G\*Power (logistic regression with two predictor variables). We aimed for 80% power and  $\alpha=0.05$ , with  $\Pr(H_0)$  taken from Pilot Study 3 (54.5% of participants were certain they would give their best friend a birthday gift) and an odds ratio of 1.4. This analysis yielded an  $N=329$ . We conservatively recruited 400 U.S. MTurk workers for a \$1.00 payment ( $N=399$  after exclusions;  $M_{\text{age}}=42.40$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}}=12.53$  years; 202 women, 193 men, 5 “other”).

#### 2.1.1 | Gift Card

We asked participants the first name of their best friend, followed by a binary choice question: “Imagine that [friend’s name]’s birthday is coming up soon. Would you be more likely to purchase a \$25 gift card as a gift for [friend’s name] or to keep the \$25 for yourself?” Participants then read: “On the following page, we will ask you to make a similar gifting decision. In this case, when this survey is finished, we will randomly select a subset of the people who complete it. That is, we will hold a ‘lottery.’ If you are randomly selected from this lottery, then in a couple of weeks your gifting decision will be carried out. Please indicate which of the following you wish to happen in the event that you win the lottery: (1) Please send [friend’s name] the \$25 Amazon card as a gift from me, or (2) Please send me the \$25 Amazon card.”

#### 2.1.2 | Crystal Drinking Glasses

Narcissistic individuals prefer and often purchase products that positively differentiate themselves from others (Lee, Gregg, and Park 2013), such as luxury brands (Sedikides, Hart, and Cisek 2018), customized goods (de Bellis et al. 2016), or brands from prestigious stores (Naderi and Paswan 2016). We wondered whether we might find the same diverging associations between Admiration/ Rivalry and gift giving for products that are splashier and more desirable than a simple gift card. Therefore, we added a second incentive-compatible measure to this study (preregistered on an exploratory basis), using a different, more prestigious product.

After making the gift card choice, participants read: “Imagine that [friend’s name]’s birthday is coming up soon. You are browsing online and you come across a pair of fine crystal drinking glasses (pictured below) at a reasonable price” (Appendix: Figure A1). “Would you be more likely to purchase these glasses as a gift for [friend’s name] or keep the money for yourself?” Participants then read: “We will also draw a

subset of participants for a second lottery. If you are selected in the second lottery, would you prefer to give the crystal drinking glasses to [friend’s name] as a gift? Or to receive a \$10.00 bonus yourself? (1) Please send me the crystal drinking glasses for me to give to [friend’s name]; (2) Please give me a bonus of \$10.00.” We conducted the lottery after data collection was complete (Appendix S1).

Next, participants completed the NARQ (Admiration  $\alpha=0.92$ , Rivalry  $\alpha=0.87$ ). Finally, for participants choosing the crystal glasses during their second decision involving the glasses, as a verification, we asked whether they would actually give the glasses to their friend or keep them for themselves (Givi and Das 2023).

### 2.2 | Results

#### 2.2.1 | Gift Card

We first conducted a logistic regression with the hypothetical binary gift card choice as the dependent variable (0 = keep \$25 for myself, 1 = purchase gift card for the friend) and Admiration and Rivalry as predictors (80.5% of participants indicated they would give their friend the gift card). Both Admiration and Rivalry were significantly associated with the likelihood of giving the gift card to their friend, but in opposite directions ( $\chi^2[2]=8.45$ ,  $p=0.015$ ). Admirative individuals were more likely to give the gift card to their friend (odds ratio = 1.34,  $\chi^2[1]=6.06$ ,  $p=0.014$ ), whereas Rivalrous individuals were less likely to do so (odds ratio = 0.76,  $\chi^2[1]=4.09$ ,  $p=0.043$ ). We repeated the analysis with the actual gift card choice as the dependent variable (47.6% of participants chose to give their friend the gift card). Once again, the results revealed that both Admiration and Rivalry were associated with giving the gift card to their friend, but in opposite directions ( $\chi^2[2]=7.27$ ,  $p=0.026$ ). Admirative individuals were more likely to give the gift card to their friend (odds ratio = 1.22,  $\chi^2[1]=4.74$ ,  $p=0.030$ ), whereas Rivalrous individuals were less likely to do so (odds ratio = 0.80,  $\chi^2[1]=3.98$ ,  $p=0.046$ ).

#### 2.2.2 | Crystal Drinking Glasses

Four participants indicated that they would actually keep the glasses for themselves instead of giving them to their friend; therefore, we removed these participants, leaving 395 participants for analysis.<sup>5</sup> We conducted a logistic regression with the hypothetical binary drinking glasses choice as the dependent variable (0 = keep \$10 for myself, 1 = send glasses to the friend) and Admiration and Rivalry as predictors (48.5% of participants indicated they would give their friend the crystal glasses). Both Admiration and Rivalry were associated with the likelihood of giving the crystal glasses to their friend, but in opposite directions ( $\chi^2[2]=9.16$ ,  $p=0.010$ ). Admirative individuals were more likely to give the crystal glasses to their friend (odds ratio = 1.26,  $\chi^2[1]=6.16$ ,  $p=0.013$ ), whereas Rivalrous individuals were less likely to do so (odds ratio = 0.78,  $\chi^2[1]=4.63$ ,  $p=0.031$ ). We repeated the analysis with the actual crystal glasses choice as the dependent variable (24.8% of participants chose to give their friend



the crystal glasses). The pattern of the results replicated our prior findings ( $\chi^2[2] = 6.19, p = 0.045$ ). Admirative individuals were nonsignificantly but directionally more likely to give the crystal glasses to their friend (odds ratio = 1.18,  $\chi^2[1] = 2.54, p = 0.111$ ), whereas Rivalrous individuals were less likely to do so (odds ratio = 0.75,  $\chi^2[1] = 4.46, p = 0.035$ ).

## 2.3 | Discussion

In Study 1, we provided initial support for H1a and H2a with a preregistered study and an incentive-compatible design involving real gift giving. The hypothetical and behavioral results with the gift card and the hypothetical results with the crystal glasses were consistent with our hypotheses. Although the behavioral result for Admiration with the crystal drinking glasses was not significant, the pattern was consistent with our prior findings. It is possible that participants thought they were being asked if they wanted to give their friend the glasses in addition to the gift card; thus, the nonsignificant result may be due to the secondary position of the glasses gift decision in the survey. We return to a discussion of the types of products that narcissistic individuals might give, or not give, to others in Study 5 and Supporting Information Study SM1: Appendix S1 (see General Discussion). We also did not specify a price for the crystal glasses, which might have influenced responses. Therefore, we included a price for the target gift in Study 2.

## 3 | Study 2: Self-Esteem and Socially Desirable Responding as Alternative Accounts

In Study 2 (preregistered [https://aspredicted.org/C3C\\_Z7D](https://aspredicted.org/C3C_Z7D)), we tested our hypotheses in another gift-giving context, a dinner party, with a different gift, a pot of plants. We also examined two explanations for the Study 1 findings. First, we considered self-esteem. Whereas narcissism involves the motivation to maintain an inflated sense of self compared with others, self-esteem refers to one's overall perception of their self-worth that does not necessarily entail a comparison with others (Brummelman, Thomaes, and Sedikides 2016; Brummelman et al. 2018). On the one hand, self-esteem might play a role in gift giving, as individuals higher in self-esteem might be more confident in their gift choices and therefore more likely to engage in gift giving. Further, Admiration and Rivalry diverge in their associations with self-esteem (Back et al. 2013). Therefore, differences in self-esteem might account for the Study 1 findings. On the other hand, in Hyun, Park, and Park's (2016) study, contrary to narcissistic individuals, those *lower* in self-esteem reported using gift giving for demonstrating status and fortifying relationships. This is in line with our conceptualization, namely, that the association between narcissism and gift giving is independent of self-esteem. In all, these two empirical lines suggest opposing hypotheses for self-esteem in gift-giving. We assessed self-esteem as an alternative explanation for the Study 1 findings.

Giving a gift is arguably a socially desirable behavior. Provided that narcissism is sometimes associated with impression management (Hart, Breeden, and Richardson 2019; Kowalski et al. 2018; but see Sedikides et al. 2004; Twenge et al. 2008), Admirative participants might be responding in a socially desirable manner.

Thus, we also assessed socially desirable responding as an alternative explanation for the Study 1 findings. As with Admiration and Rivalry, we measured self-esteem and socially-desirable responding more than 2 weeks prior to the main study.

## 3.1 | Method

We conducted a power analysis with three linear regression predictor variables, aiming for 80% power and  $\alpha = 0.05$ . We assumed moderate correlation between the variables ( $r = 0.25$ ) based on prior research (Hyun, Park, and Park 2016; Wurst et al. 2017). This analysis pointed to an  $N = 168$ . We conservatively recruited 200 U.S. and U.K. Prolific workers for \$1.00 payment. There were no exclusions ( $M_{\text{age}} = 41.64$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.02$  years; 116 women, 82 men). To begin, participants completed a survey comprising the NARQ (Admiration  $\alpha = 0.88$ , Rivalry  $\alpha = 0.84$ ), the impression management subscale of Paulhus's (1988) balanced inventory of desirable responding ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ), and the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ). We measured impression management on an 8-point scale (1 = *totally disagree*, 8 = *totally agree*). A sample item is "When I hear people talking privately, I avoid listening." We measured self-esteem on a 4-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 4 = *agree strongly*). A sample item is "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."

More than 2 weeks later, the same participants completed a survey. They provided the first name of their best friend. They then read: "Please imagine yourself in this scenario. You are going to [Friend]'s house next week for a casual dinner. A number of your mutual friends and [Friend]'s family members will also be there. Imagine that you are out running errands before the dinner, and you see this pot of plants in a store" (Appendix: Figure A2). They responded to the following gift-giving likelihood item: "How likely would you be to purchase this pot of plants and bring it to the dinner as a gift for [Friend's name]?" (1 = *unlikely*, *impossible*, *improbable*, 7 = *likely*, *possible*, *probable*;  $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

## 3.2 | Results and Discussion

We regressed gift-giving likelihood on Admiration and Rivalry. Replicating the results of Study 1, Admiration was positively ( $B = 0.29, SE = 0.13, t = 2.17, p = 0.032$ ), and Rivalry negatively ( $B = -0.53, SE = 0.15, t = -3.53, p < 0.001$ ), related to participants' likelihood of giving the pot of plants to their best friend for the dinner party.

To examine self-esteem and impression management as alternative explanations, we added both as predictors to the regression analysis along with Admiration and Rivalry. The relations between Admiration ( $B = 0.32, SE = 0.16, t = 2.05, p = 0.041$ ) and Rivalry ( $B = -0.44, SE = 0.18, t = -2.46, p = 0.015$ ) with gift-giving likelihood remained significant. However, the relations between self-esteem ( $B = -0.08, SE = 0.23, t = -0.33, p = 0.742$ ) and impression management ( $B = -0.13, SE = 0.12, t = 1.15, p = 0.251$ ) with gift-giving likelihood were not significant. Further, mediation analysis using Hayes (2018) PROCESS Model 4 confirmed null indirect effects of either Admiration or Rivalry on gift-giving

likelihood through either self-esteem or impression management ( $CI_{95\%}$  all included zero). In summary, Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 in a different context, a dinner party, with a different gift, a pot of plants. Critically, self-esteem and socially desirable responding did not adequately account for our findings.<sup>6</sup>

## 4 | Study 3: The Explanatory Potential of Diverging Communal Gift-Giving Motivations

We proposed that divergent associations between Admiration/Rivalry and communal gift-giving motivations underlie the disparate associations between Admiration and Rivalry with gift giving (H1a and H1b). We tested these hypotheses in preregistered Study 3 ([https://aspredicted.org/4G2\\_6DR](https://aspredicted.org/4G2_6DR)).

### 4.1 | Method

A power analysis with four predictor variables (Admiration, Rivalry, and communal and agentic gift-giving motivations) using the criteria from Study 2 resulted in  $N=264$ . We conservatively recruited 400 U.S. MTurk workers for a \$1.00 payment ( $N=398$  after exclusions;  $M_{age}=46.47$  years,  $SD_{age}=13.67$  years; 199 women, 197 men, 2 “other”). Participants first completed the NARQ (Admiration  $\alpha=0.92$ , Rivalry  $\alpha=0.88$ ). More than 2 weeks later, they completed a survey. They wrote the first name of their best friend and imagined the friend’s birthday was coming up.

We measured birthday gift-giving likelihood as in Study 2 ( $\alpha=0.96$ ). We created a communal ( $\alpha=0.87$ ) gift-giving motivation measure by adapting Sauls and Zeigler-Hill’s (2020) communal orientation toward friendship scale. Specifically, participants indicated their level of agreement with each of the following statements: “If I gave [friend’s name] a gift for their birthday, I would do so because...” “Loyalty/Love/Trust/Closeness/Honesty/Respect/Happiness are important to my view of friendship” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).<sup>7</sup>

### 4.2 | Results and Discussion

A regression analysis confirmed that Admiration was positively ( $B=0.29$ ,  $SE=0.07$ ,  $t=4.10$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and Rivalry negatively ( $B=-0.25$ ,  $SE=0.09$ ,  $t=-2.92$ ,  $p=0.004$ ), associated with the likelihood of giving a birthday gift to a best friend, as in prior studies.<sup>8</sup> We then conducted a regression analysis with Admiration and Rivalry as predictors, and communal gift-giving motivation as the dependent variable. Admiration was positively associated with communal gift-giving motivation ( $B=0.15$ ,  $SE=0.04$ ,  $t=3.74$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), whereas Rivalry was negatively associated with it ( $B=-0.25$ ,  $SE=0.05$ ,  $t=-4.93$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Communal gift-giving motivation was also positively associated with gift-giving likelihood ( $B=0.88$ ,  $SE=0.08$ ,  $t=11.81$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Next, we tested for mediation using Hayes (2018) PROCESS model 4 (10,000 bootstrapping samples), first with Admiration as predictor, gift-giving likelihood as dependent variable, communal gift-giving motivation as mediator, and Rivalry as a covariate.

Supporting H1b, the indirect association of Admiration with gift-giving likelihood was positive and significant through communal motivation ( $B=0.13$ ,  $SE=0.03$ ,  $CI_{95\%}=[0.07, 0.20]$ ). We repeated the analysis with Rivalry as predictor and Admiration as a covariate. Supporting H2b, the indirect effect of Rivalry was negative and significant through communal motivation ( $B=-0.21$ ,  $SE=0.04$ ,  $CI_{95\%}=[-0.30, -0.13]$ ; Figure 2). The non-significant direct effect suggested full mediation.

Study 3 once again replicated our prior results with a pre-registered design. Further, consistent with H1b and H2b, communal gift-giving motivation explained the divergent associations between the two forms of narcissism and gift-giving likelihood.

## 5 | Study 4: The Association Between Rivalry and Gift-Giving Likelihood Is Attenuated for Socially Distant (Vs. Close) Recipients

We have advocated that Rivalry is negatively associated with gift-giving likelihood because Rivalrous individuals disdain communal motivations and values. We have also argued that this association will be attenuated in situations where most individuals will be less likely to desire a close relationship with the gift recipient and thus communal motivations will receive less consideration. We tested this hypothesis (H3) in Study 4 by manipulating the social closeness of the gift recipient (i.e., best friend vs. typical acquaintance).

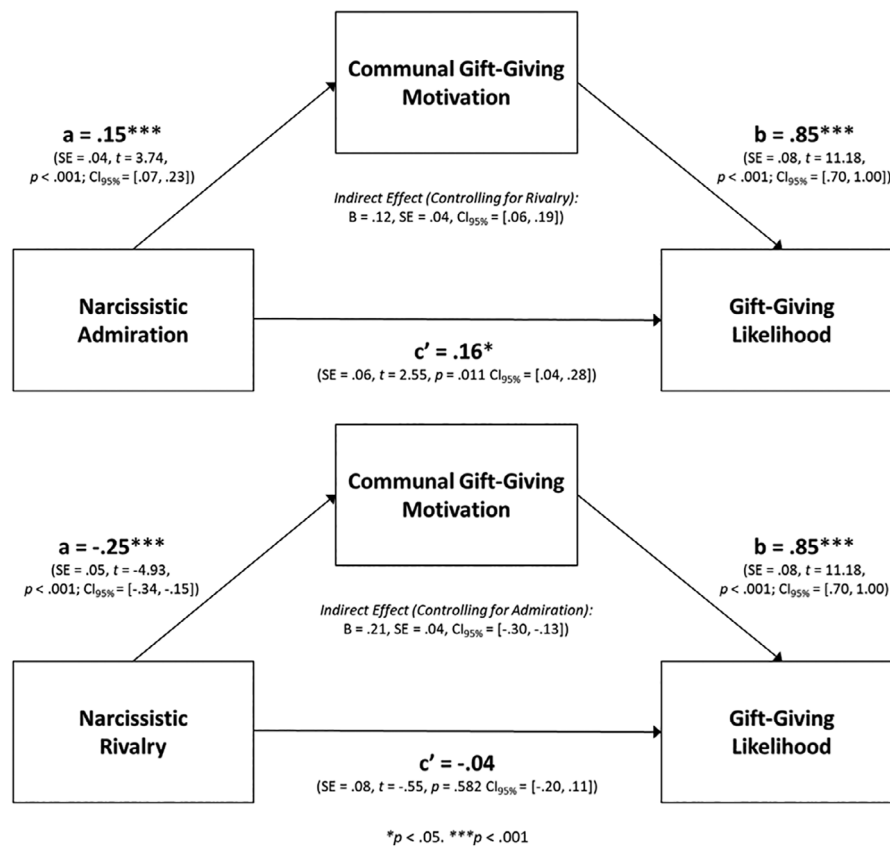
### 5.1 | Method

We used a single factor (recipient social closeness: close vs. distant) between-subjects design, with Admiration and Rivalry measured as continuous factors. A power analysis with four predictor variables using the criteria from Study 2 resulted in  $N=264$ . We conservatively recruited 407 U.S. MTurk workers for a \$1.00 payment ( $N=402$  after exclusions;  $M_{age}=44.92$  years,  $SD_{age}=13.31$  years; 193 women, 207 men, 2 “other”).

Participants first completed the NARQ (Admiration  $\alpha=0.93$ , Rivalry  $\alpha=0.89$ ) and, more than two weeks later, a survey. They wrote the first name either of their best friend (close) or a typical acquaintance (distant). We measured gift-giving likelihood with three items: “Imagine that [first name]’s birthday is coming up soon. How likely are you to give [first name] a gift for their birthday?” (1 = *unlikely, improbable, impossible*, 7 = *likely, probable, possible*;  $\alpha=0.96$ ). We measured social closeness with a single item as a manipulation check: “How connected do you feel to [first name]?” (1 = *not at all connected*, 7 = *very connected*).

### 5.2 | Results and Discussion

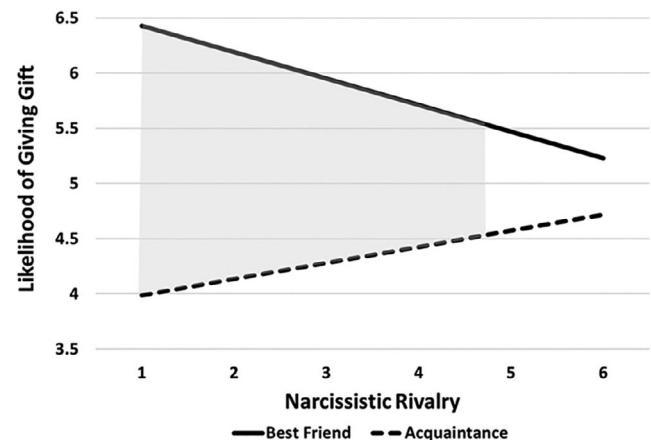
Regression analysis (Hayes 2018; Model 2) with the first name manipulation (best friend = 0, typical acquaintance = 1), Admiration, Rivalry, and their interactions on social closeness confirmed that the manipulation was effective ( $M_{BestFriend}=6.24$



**FIGURE 2** | Results of study 3 mediation analyses.

vs.  $M_{\text{Acquaintance}} = 4.09$ ;  $B = -3.27$ , SE = 0.44,  $t = -7.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). There were no significant interactions on social closeness.

Regression analysis (Hayes 2018; Model 2) with Admiration, Rivalry and social closeness as independent variables, along with their interactions indicated that the interaction between Admiration and social closeness on gift-giving likelihood was not significant ( $p = 0.763$ ). Many researchers argue against including untheorized interactions in a regression model due to risks of loss of power and model overfitting (McClelland and Judd 1993). Therefore, we collapsed across conditions on Admiration.<sup>9</sup> To test H3, the moderating effect of social closeness on the association between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood, we conducted a regression analysis (Hayes 2018; Model 1) with gift-giving likelihood as dependent variable; Rivalry, social closeness (0 = best friend, 1 = typical acquaintance); and their interaction as predictors; and Admiration as covariate. Participants overall were more likely to give a gift to their best friend than to a typical acquaintance ( $M_{\text{BestFriend}} = 6.13$  vs.  $M_{\text{Acquaintance}} = 4.19$ ;  $B = -2.77$ , SE = 0.42,  $t = -6.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). As before, we obtained a positive association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood ( $B = 0.34$ , SE = 0.08,  $t = 4.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Critically, the interaction between Rivalry and social closeness was also significant ( $B = 0.37$ , SE = 0.18,  $t = 2.05$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ; Figure 3). The association between Rivalry and gift-giving likelihood was significantly negative when the recipient was a best friend ( $B = -0.25$ , SE = 0.12,  $t = -2.02$ ,  $p = 0.044$ , CI<sub>95%</sub> = [-0.49, -0.01]), but not significant when the recipient was a typical acquaintance ( $B = 0.12$ , SE = 0.14,  $t = 0.89$ ,  $p = 0.374$ , CI<sub>95%</sub> = [-0.15, 0.39]; Johnson-Neyman point of significance: Rivalry = 4.80 out of 6).



**FIGURE 3** | Association between rivalry and gift-giving likelihood as a function of social closeness (Study 4).

In Study 4, we replicated our prior findings, again with temporally removed independent and dependent measures. Importantly, consistent with our proposition that the association between rivalry and gift-giving likelihood should attenuate when most individuals would be less likely to be motivated by communal considerations, increasing the social distance of the gift recipient attenuated the negative influence of Rivalry on gift giving (H3). Taken together, whereas individuals higher (vs. lower) in Admiration were more likely to give birthday gifts irrespective of social closeness, those higher (vs. lower) in Rivalry were less likely to give a birthday gift to their best friend, but equally likely to give it to a typical acquaintance.

## 6 | Study 5: Admirative Individuals Are Less Likely to Give Recipient-Centric Gifts

We have proposed that being able to showcase what a loving friend they are by giving a gift to another person offers value to Admirative narcissists through self-promotion. If so, then gifts that reflect more on the recipient than on the giver (i.e., recipient-centric gifts; Aknin and Human 2015; Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooze 2015) will be less attractive to Admirative gift-givers. Therefore, the association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood will be attenuated for recipient-centric gifts (H4). We tested this hypothesis in Study 5 with a preregistered design ([https://aspredicted.org/3SW\\_GXD](https://aspredicted.org/3SW_GXD)).

### 6.1 | Method

We used a single factor (gift being considered: recipient-centric vs. control) between-subjects design, with Admiration and Rivalry measured as continuous factors. A power analysis with four predictor variables using the criteria from Study 2 pointed to an  $N = 264$ . We conservatively recruited 400 U.K. Prolific workers for a \$1.00 payment. There were no exclusions ( $M_{\text{age}} = 45.28$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.15$  years; 247 women, 152 men, 1 “other”).

Participants completed the NARQ (Admiration  $\alpha = 0.88$  and Rivalry  $\alpha = 0.85$ ) and, more than 2 weeks later, a survey. They wrote the first name and last initial of their best friend. They then read: “Please imagine that [first name]’s birthday is coming up soon. You are browsing online, and you come across a pair of fine crystal drinking glasses (pictured below) at a reasonable price.” In the recipient-centric condition, they also read: “These glasses can be customized for free with [first name]’s initial.” Next, they saw a picture of the customized or standard glasses (Appendix: Figure A3). A pretest with 80 Prolific participants confirmed that customized crystal glasses ( $M = 5.35$ ) are regarded as more recipient-centric than standard glasses ( $M = 3.80$ ;  $F(1, 78) = 23.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). We measured gift-giving likelihood as in previous studies ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

### 6.2 | Results and Discussion

Replicating our prior findings, a regression analysis revealed a significant positive association between gift-giving likelihood and Admiration ( $B = 0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t = 3.91$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a trending negative association between gift-giving and Rivalry ( $B = -0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = -1.77$ ,  $p = 0.077$ ). We used PROCESS model 2 to test simultaneously for interactions of recipient-centricity with both Admiration and Rivalry. The interaction between Rivalry and recipient-centricity of the gift on gift-giving likelihood was not significant (Hayes 2018; PROCESS Model 2,  $p = 0.656$ ). Therefore, we collapsed across conditions on Rivalry.<sup>10</sup>

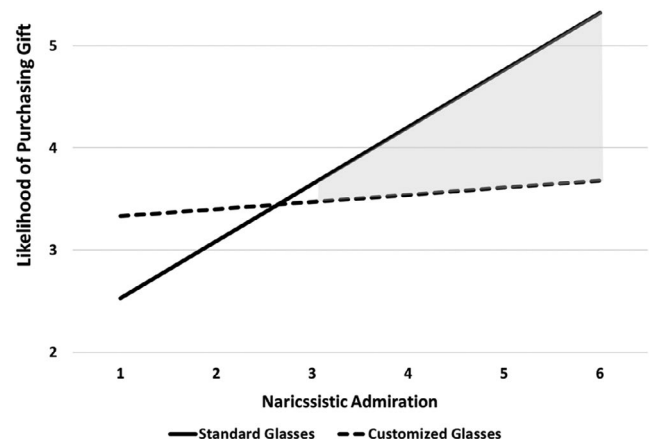
To test H4, the moderating effect of recipient-centricity on the association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood, we conducted a regression analysis (Hayes 2018; Model 1) with: gift-giving likelihood as the dependent variable; Admiration, recipient-centricity (0 = standard, 1 = recipient centric), and their interaction as independent variables; and Rivalry as a covariate. Results again revealed a significant positive association of Admiration

( $B = 0.54$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t = 4.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a trending negative association of Rivalry with gift-giving likelihood ( $B = -0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = -1.69$ ,  $p = 0.091$ ). Importantly, supporting H4, we found a significant interaction between Admiration and recipient-centricity of the product ( $B = -0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ ,  $t = -2.16$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ). The association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood was positive and significant for the standard glasses ( $B = 0.54$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t = 4.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $CI_{95\%} = [0.29, 0.79]$ ), but not for the customized (recipient-centric) glasses ( $B = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t = 1.15$ ,  $p = 0.251$ ,  $CI_{95\%} = [-0.11, 0.41]$ ; see Figure 4; Johnson-Neyman point: Admiration = 3.10 out of 6).

In Study 5, we replicated the results of our prior studies. Importantly, however, consistent with our theorizing, the positive association between Admiration and gift-giving likelihood was attenuated when the gift being considered was customized with the recipient’s initial (a recipient-centric gift; Aknin and Human 2015; Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooze 2015). We have advocated that gifts which are more focused on the recipient are intrinsically less self-promoting for the gift-giver. Accordingly, we found that individuals higher in Admiration are less likely to give a recipient-centric gift than a standard gift.

## 7 | General Discussion

Across six studies (five preregistered) and three pilot studies, we demonstrated that, despite being positively correlated, Admiration and Rivalry diverged in their associations with gift-giving likelihood. Whereas Admiration was positively associated with gift-giving likelihood, Rivalry was negatively associated with it, whether measured with hypothetical (Studies 2–5 and SM1) or actual (Study 1) gift-giving outcomes. These associations were explained by divergent communal gift-giving motivations: Admiration was positively linked to communal gift-giving motives, whereas Rivalry was negatively linked to them (Study 3). Consistent with Rivalrous individuals’ disdain for communal values, the negative association between Rivalry and gift giving was attenuated when most individuals would be less focused on communal gift-giving motivations, such as when gift giving to a more socially distant acquaintance rather than a best friend (Study 4). Further, consistent with the notion that



**FIGURE 4** | Association between narcissistic admiration and gift-giving likelihood as a function of recipient centricity of the product (Study 5).



Admirative individuals use gift giving to promote their communal values (Hyun, Park, and Park 2016), the association between Admiration was attenuated when the gift under consideration is recipient-focused rather than a standard gift (Study 5). The hypothesized pattern of results emerges even when narcissism was measured more than 2 weeks in advance (Studies 2–5 and SM1) and was not accounted for by self-esteem or socially-desirable responding. Further, the behaviors observed in Study 1 were replicated by our hypothetical measures; therefore it is unlikely that participants simply were skeptical that the researchers would deliver the gifts to the intended recipient.

## 7.1 | Theoretical and Practical Implications

Contributing to the burgeoning literature on Admiration and Rivalry (Back 2018; Back et al. 2013), our research illustrated the association of a key personality trait, narcissism, with likelihood of giving gifts to others. Moreover, our work contributed to the notion of divergent strategies being associated with Admiration and Rivalry (Back et al. 2013) by documenting the differing links of Admiration and Rivalry with individuals' propensity for gift giving. Our studies also extended the literature on narcissists' friendships (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020) and romantic relationships (Campbell 1999; Wurst et al. 2017) by providing evidence that discrepant communal gift-giving motivations underlie the associations between Admiration and Rivalry and gift giving.

Additionally, our research contributed to the gift-giving literature by increasing understanding of the relevance of personality traits in gift giving (Givi et al. 2023). In particular, we identified narcissism as a crucial personality trait that has complex and sometimes surprising associations with gift giving. For example, for many people, it would be hard to imagine ignoring a close family member or best friend's birthday; yet our findings indicated that Rivalrous individuals are prepared to do so. Gift giving also enhances psychological and emotional well-being (Givi et al. 2023), and our findings suggested that Rivalrous individuals are less likely to derive these benefits. Also, we added to the gift-giving literature by providing further evidence of the role that communal motivations play in gift giving (Cavanaugh, Gino, and Fitzsimons 2015; De Hooe 2017). Specifically, we illustrated that these motivations have diverging associations with personality traits that either spur (Admiration) or deter (Rivalry) gift giving. Finally, by illustrating how our findings are influenced by the recipient centrality of the gift (Aknin and Human 2015; Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooe 2015) and the social distance between the giver and recipient, we showcased the need to consider the specific gift-giving context when studying gift-giving phenomena (Givi et al. 2023).

Understanding the motivations behind a gift-giver's actions, such as ignoring a special birthday or love-bombing with gifts, may help individuals who are in a relationship with a narcissist. For example, gift recipients might be better able to consider givers' underlying motivations for excessive gift giving, or givers' focus on gifts that match their own, rather than recipients' characteristics. Individuals may also learn to regard lack of gift giving as the self-defensive act of a Rivalrous partner based on their disdain for communal motivations, rather than a reflection of the potential gift recipient's value in the relationship. The findings we presented in Study 2 and Supporting Information Study

SM1: Appendix S1 (discussed below) clarify that it is unlikely a Rivalrous friend who is averse to gifting lacks confidence in choosing an appropriate gift.

Individuals typically spend from 11% to over 50% of their wages on gifts (Raymond 2022), amounting to close to a trillion dollars annually (Mantz 2023). Therefore, studying whether individuals are likely to give gifts at all, and who are more or less likely to do so, has substantial practical implications. By understanding narcissistic individuals' self-enhancement motivations, companies can better tailor their marketing campaigns and product development initiatives to meet the needs and preferences of their target audience. Finding out whether their target individuals purchase gifts, what kind of gifts they purchase (e.g., recipient-centric or not), and for whom (e.g., socially close vs. more distant recipients) can aid organizations to time their promotions more effectively. Providing opportunities for a positive gift-giving experience, for example, by building self-promotion opportunities into a social media campaign, can help to leverage the gift-giving motivations of Admirative individuals and build brand loyalty.

## 7.2 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our work has limitations. For example, although one of our studies used actual gift giving, the remainder used hypothetical scenarios (albeit with the names of real friends). Further, whereas we experimentally manipulated situational factors (gift type and social closeness), as with most narcissism research, the links between Admiration and Rivalry on the one hand, and the dependent measures on the other, were correlational rather than causal. Gift-giving traditions vary widely across cultures (Shen, Wan, and Wyer Jr 2011). Our participants were located in the U.S. or U.K., and our findings might differ by culture. Lastly, we recruited participants from online platforms. Despite the popularity of such platforms (Peer et al. 2021), it is preferable to vary participant sources. Future investigations could address these limitations.

Although we showed in Study 2 that Rivalrous individuals' low self-esteem is unlikely to account for our findings, we opted to run an experiment to test a fear of failure account in which Rivalrous individuals might be less likely to give gifts due to a lack of confidence in choosing a desired gift. In this preregistered experiment (Supporting Information Study SM1: Appendix S1), we manipulated whether the participant's best friend had an available Amazon wishlist. If the negative association between Rivalry and gift giving were due solely to fear of failure, this association should be attenuated when the prospective gift-giver had access to a wishlist, thus ensuring that the gift would be well-liked by the recipient. However, this is not what we found. Instead, we observed no significant attenuation when a wishlist was present. Therefore, a fear of a failed or unwanted gift choice is unlikely to be solely responsible for our findings.

Our work opens empirical avenues. Narcissism has attracted intense interest due in part to its growing relevance for society (Sedikides and Campbell 2017; Williams et al. 2018) and its complexity (Miller et al. 2021; Sedikides 2021). At their core, narcissistic individuals are motivated to seek social status (Benson and Giacomini 2020; Grapsas et al. 2020; Kroencke et al. 2023; Mahadevan, Gregg, and Sedikides 2019; Zeigler-Hill et al. 2019).

Both Admiration and Rivalry are positively associated with agentic friendship orientations, such as self-absorption and influence (Sauls and Zeigler-Hill 2020), and so the social status of a gift recipient might moderate our findings. Further, Admiration might be more salient in narcissists than Rivalry, and Rivalry might emerge particularly when status cannot be increased through self-promotion (Grapsas et al. 2020). These processes might be evinced in gift-giving contexts, especially in individuals higher in both Admiration and Rivalry. For example, in situations where a group of colleagues contribute anonymously to a joint gift, self-promotion opportunities are more limited. In this situation, Rivalry may become more salient. Rivalrous gift-givers might thus respond with hostile behaviors, such as derogating the gift recipient or contributing little or nothing to the joint gift. At the same time, our Pilot Study 2 results indicate that even Rivalrous individuals recognize the potential for using gift giving for self-promotion purposes, and when self-promotion opportunities are strong, Rivalry might take a back seat to Admiration (Grapsas et al. 2020). For example, a picture frame with a photo of the giver (vs. a photo of the recipient) might be selected by gift-givers high in both Admiration and Rivalry when a gift is required. Indeed, giver-centric gifts are common (Aknin and Human 2015; Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooze 2015).

Narcissistic individuals purchase products that positively distinguish themselves (Lee, Gregg, and Park 2013), such as luxury goods (Cisek et al. 2014; Sedikides, Cisek, and Hart 2011). However, we have shown that, although they prefer customized goods for themselves (de Bellis et al. 2016), Admirative individuals are less likely to give others a customized gift. Future research could examine other types of gifts that Admirative individuals might give. For example, any kind of gift that matches the characteristics of the giver (Paolacci, Straeter, and De Hooze 2015), such as something related to a special skill of the giver or an attribute that narcissists might perceive to be unique to themselves would likely be preferred by Admirative individuals as a way to promote themselves. Examples could include gifts that can signal the narcissist's ostensibly superior ability to assess quality, such as a fine but obscure bottle of wine. Another example might include hard-to-get tickets to a sporting or entertainment event, which require specialized access and can signal status. On the other hand, Rivalrous individuals might find it threatening to give another individual a gift that is unique and special, as this could be a product that they might own themselves (Givi and Galak 2020). If they give a gift, it may be one that is prosaic or even derogative to the recipient, such as a product that is damaged or regifted. Given narcissists' inflated self-views, they may also assume that recipients would prefer gifts for which narcissists have a sense of ownership (Kirk, Peck, and Swain 2018) rather than something that the recipient would feel is uniquely theirs. Narcissists might even believe that they know the gift recipient's tastes better than others do, even the recipient themselves, and thus are plainly qualified to choose a gift that the recipient would like (even when they do not; Cohn 2016; Ward and Broniarczyk 2016).

Further, follow-up investigations would do well to address parent-child gift giving or gift giving between a narcissist and their romantic partner. Admiration is responsible for many of the positive views of narcissists early in romantic relationships, whereas narcissists' behaviors turn darker as the relationship progresses (Czar

et al. 2022; Wurst et al. 2017). Therefore, consistent with the notion of love-bombing (Arabi 2023), narcissists may be more likely to give gifts earlier than later in a relationship. Age and gender have also been associated with differences in narcissism (Weidmann et al. 2023) and should be investigated. Different products and different cultures might additionally elicit varying responses. For example, rounded shapes, such as in the Study 5 crystal glasses, are associated with femininity (Stroessner et al. 2020), possibly explaining the gender interaction we found in Study 5.

### 7.3 | Concluding Remarks

This research highlights the importance of considering the role of grandiose narcissism in shaping gift-giving behaviors. The diverging patterns observed for narcissistic admiration versus narcissistic rivalry underscore how a giver's personality can profoundly influence their propensity to bestow gifts upon others. In the end, this research suggests that, whether a lavish display of generosity or a conspicuous lack thereof, a narcissist's gift-giving reveals more about their own self-serving motivations than it does about the recipient's inherent worthiness. So, the next time someone close to you gives (or does not give) you a gift, consider that their gift-giving behaviors might have nothing at all to do with you, and everything to do with them.

#### Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Colleen P. Kirk, Constantine Sedikides, and Julian Givi. Data curation: Colleen P. Kirk. Formal analysis: Colleen P. Kirk. Funding acquisition: N/A. Investigation: Colleen P. Kirk, Constantine Sedikides, Julian Givi. Methodology: Colleen P. Kirk, Constantine Sedikides, Julian Givi. Project administration: Colleen P. Kirk. Resources: Colleen P. Kirk. Software: Colleen P. Kirk. Supervision: Colleen P. Kirk, Constantine Sedikides, Julian Givi. Validation: Colleen P. Kirk. Visualization: Colleen P. Kirk. Writing – original draft: Colleen P. Kirk. Writing – review and editing: Colleen P. Kirk, Constantine Sedikides, Julian Givi.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> We refer to narcissism as a trait in the general population, not as a personality disorder (Thomaes, Brummelman, and Sedikides 2018). Also, we often use the terms “high versus low narcissism” to denote higher versus lower levels of the trait, and we use the terms “narcissist” and “narcissistic” to refer to individuals higher on the trait.
- <sup>2</sup> We use the adjectives Admirative and Rivalrous to refer to people higher in narcissistic Admiration and narcissistic Rivalry, respectively.
- <sup>3</sup> We describe the sixth study (Study SM1) in the General Discussion (under Limitations and Future Research Directions); see also Supporting Information Study SM1: Appendix S1.
- <sup>4</sup> In Studies 3 and 4, we also measured Admiration and Rivalry after the dependent variable to assess test–retest reliability. The measures were correlated (Study 3: Admiration:  $r = 0.86$ , Rivalry:  $r = 0.81$ ; Study 4: Admiration:  $r = 0.84$ , Rivalry:  $r = 0.79$ ). Results with admiration and rivalry measured after the dependent variable did not differ and are not discussed further.

- <sup>5</sup> As we had preregistered the crystal glasses as exploratory, we did not preregister this measure and associated exclusions.
- <sup>6</sup> We replicated the results of this study with expensive fine crystal glasses (Supporting Information, Study 2 Replication: Appendix S1).
- <sup>7</sup> We also measured agentic gift-giving motivations. Controlling for agentic motivations did not change the results. We report the agentic motivations measure and associated analyses in Supporting Information.
- <sup>8</sup> We found a significant interaction between Rivalry and age on gift-giving likelihood (but not communal motivations; Table Supporting Information 7: Appendix S1). Controlling for age did not change the results, which we report in Appendix S1.
- <sup>9</sup> See Appendix S1, including Tables Supporting Information 10–14 and 16: Appendix S1, for analyses controlling for the untheorized interactions in Studies 4–6.
- <sup>10</sup> In Study 4, we obtained a significant three-way interaction among Admiration, gender, and recipient centrality of the gift on gift-giving likelihood. Therefore, we repeated the preregistered analyses including gender as a control variable and report the results in Supporting Information. The coefficient for rivalry became significant in all analyses when we controlled for gender; otherwise, the results did not change.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

## Appendix

*The classic, timeless lines of the Sven collection, designed by Fuma Albinoni, features a 2-piece set, made of high-quality crystal.*



**FIGURE A1** | Crystal drinking glasses used in Study 1.

*Crafted by the masterful hands of Enzo Bellavista, this captivating ceramic vessel showcases a living fusion of nature's color. Easy to maintain, it is a stunning addition to any discerning home.*



**FIGURE A2** | Pot of flowering plants used in Study 2.

*The classic, timeless lines of the Oren collection, designed by Fuma Albinoni, features a 2-piece set, made of high-quality crystal.*

**Recipient-Centric:**



**Control:**



**FIGURE A3** | Crystal drinking glasses used in Study 5.