



## Young adult narcissism: A 20 year longitudinal study of the contribution of parenting styles, preschool precursors of narcissism, and denial

Phebe Cramer

Department of Psychology, Williams College, Williamstown, MA 01267, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 11 November 2010

#### Keywords:

Narcissism  
Parenting styles  
Longitudinal study  
Defense mechanisms

### ABSTRACT

The role of parenting styles in the development of young adult narcissism is investigated with individuals from the Block and Block (1980) longitudinal study. At age 3, participants were assessed for the presence of narcissism precursors, and mothers and fathers provided information about their parenting styles. At age 23, the presence of both healthy and maladaptive narcissism was assessed, along with the use of denial. The results showed that parenting styles had a direct effect on the development of healthy narcissism, but the effect on the development of maladaptive narcissism depended on the child's initial proclivity towards narcissism. Also, the use of denial was positively associated with the presence of maladaptive narcissism, but not with healthy narcissism.

© 2010 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

Narcissists are characterized as being excessively focused on having their own needs met – especially the need for admiration. As part of their egocentric focus, they often fail to form caring, lasting relationships with others, as has been demonstrated in the research of Campbell and Foster (2002) and in the clinical writings of Kernberg (1998), although narcissists have an extreme need for admiration from others.

The question arises as to the origin of the extreme need for admiration. One common assumption is that the adult narcissist was a spoiled child, having been overly indulged by parents who offered excessive gratification. Having grown up with this background of indulgence, the individual continues to expect and to demand this kind of gratification as an adult (cf. Millon, 1990).

A different explanation for the origin of narcissism assumes that narcissism results not from excessive gratification, but rather from insufficient early gratification (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977; Miller, 1981). The adult who has experienced insufficient gratification as a child will be the one who demands excessive admiration from others, to compensate both for the lack of that psychological support when a child and for the continuing expectation that needs will not be met.

In contrast, the person who has experienced having his/her physical and emotional needs adequately met as a child, has little anxiety about having needs met as an adult. From this point of view, it is the individual who has experienced ample gratification as a child who will go on to have a positive, healthy sense of self,

expecting but not demanding approval and admiration from others.

For these reasons, significant relations between early child-rearing styles and subsequent narcissism should be found. Parenting that is responsive to the child's needs is expected to predict subsequent healthy, adaptive narcissism. Parenting that is unresponsive is expected to predict subsequent maladaptive narcissism. It is the purpose of the present study to investigate these hypotheses.

#### 1.1. Adult narcissism

In adults, narcissism may be adaptive or maladaptive (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Russ, Shedler, Bradley, & Westen, 2008; Wink, 1992). Adaptive narcissism is characterized by healthy ambitions, energy, creativity, and empathy, supported by an underlying sense of self that is firm and cohesive (Russ et al., 2008; Kohut, 1971; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Wink, 1992). Adaptive narcissists may be overly ambitious, but they have sufficient interpersonal sensitivity so that they do not suffer the eventual rejection that is often experienced by maladaptive narcissists. Wink (1991) has characterized this type of narcissism as "Autonomous". Although Autonomous narcissism and genuine self-esteem share some characteristics, they also differ in some important ways. The concept of Autonomous narcissism includes high ambition, a preference to function without collaboration with others, and idiosyncratic thought processes (Wink, 1991), characteristics that are not an integral part of the concept of self-esteem.

In contrast to adaptive narcissism, maladaptive narcissism is characterized by self-aggrandizement, power seeking and condescension (Raskin et al., 1991) in which an inflated sense of self

E-mail address: [phebe.cramer@williams.edu](mailto:phebe.cramer@williams.edu)

masks underlying feelings of vulnerability and insecurity (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1976). Maladaptive narcissism may be divided into two types – overt and covert (Wink, 1991). In the present paper, we focus on *overt* or *grandiose* narcissism, characterized by an open expression of grandiosity, self-confidence, and condescension, in which there is willful manipulation and exploitation of others (Wink, 1992; Ziegler-Hill, Clark, & Pickard, 2008). This is the type of narcissism that is assessed by the self-report Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988).

### 1.2. Precursors of narcissism in childhood

In school age children, clinical study has identified certain characteristics that lead to a diagnosis of childhood narcissism. These include an excessive need for attention and admiration, exhibitionism, impulsivity, aggression, and chronic violation of rules (Berren, 1998; Kernberg, 1998; Weise & Tuber, 2004). Although there is no evidence that narcissism as a psychological disorder exists in 3 years old children, it is possible to identify precursors of narcissism at this young age. Based on Q-sort ratings provided by multiple observers of children's behavior (Block & Block, 1980), Carlson and Gjerde (2009) developed scales assessing five components, or precursors, of narcissism in preschool children. These scales demonstrated good reliability and were shown to predict an independent measure of narcissism (10 CAQ items highly correlated with the NPI) at ages 14, 18, and 23.

### 1.3. Parenting styles

The child development literature has identified four different styles of parenting (Baumrind, 1971). The *Authoritarian/Autocratic* parent tries to shape, control and evaluate the behavior of the child according to a set standard. Obedience to authority is stressed; orders are expected to be obeyed without explanation. Punitive measures are favored to bring about compliance. This type of parenting is demanding, but not responsive. The *Authoritative/Responsive* parent provides clear standards for the child's conduct, and uses reasoning and explanation to influence the child's behavior. These parents are assertive but not intrusive. They consider the child's point of view, and assume that the child has rights. Discipline is supportive rather than punitive. This type of parenting is both demanding and responsive. The *Indulgent/Permissive* parent expresses affection easily, is lenient, finds it difficult to punish the child, and does not require mature behavior. This parent is more responsive than demanding. The *Indifferent/Uninvolved* parent is neither demanding nor responsive. S/he expects the child to handle problems alone, encourages the child to be independent of the parent, is not supportive, and expects the child to take responsibility for his/her own life (Baumrind, 1971, 1980, 1991a, 1991b).

### 1.4. Parenting styles and narcissism

It is the thesis of the present paper that the type of parenting style the child experiences will influence the development of his/her sense of self, which will in turn be related to the development of narcissism. In this regard, the dimensions of 'responsive' and 'demanding' are especially important. Too much or too little Demandingness, without being Responsive to the child's legitimate needs (i.e., Authoritarian or Indifferent) leaves the child feeling incompetent, either because the child is not allowed to develop his/her own skills, or because, without needed assistance and guidance, the child is left vulnerable to mishap and trauma (Kernberg, 1998). In contrast, Demandingness that at the same time recognizes and is Responsive to the child's needs – i.e., Authoritative parenting – supports competent skill building and self-regulation, thus supporting autonomy (George & Solomon, 1989; Main, Kap-

lan, & Cassidy, 1985). Likewise, parenting that conveys warmth and affection, without being demanding (Indulgent) supports a sense of being a person who is respected by, and desirable to others (George & Solomon, 1989).

This thesis, however, should be qualified by the assumption that the effect of parenting style may differ at different developmental periods. Whereas indulgence during infancy and very early childhood is expected to support positive development, indulgence during the adolescent period may result in an attitude of entitlement. This is because the needs – both physical and emotional – of a very young child are different from those of a late adolescent. The infant and young child are almost entirely dependent on the parent to provide physical and emotional gratification, and require the support and encouragement of the parent in order to develop new capacities and skills, which is not true of the late adolescent. The parent who provides this support influences the development of "mastery skills, the capacity for affective involvement, and a sense of confidence . . . [In the preschool period] the child will be confident, skilled and positive in dealing with peers and other tasks" (Sroufe, 1979, p. 837). Responsive parenting thus supports a positive model of the self, based on the parent's belief that the child can acquire a level of competence appropriate to his/her developmental level.

Parenting styles that do not provide this responsiveness and support for cognitive and physical development are likely to interfere with positive development, with the child developing a sense of inadequacy (Kernberg, 1998), and a model of the self that is deemed unworthy of support (Bowlby, 1969; George & Solomon, 1989).

To expand on these ideas: What does it mean to be "indulged" as a 3-year-old? To be given as much food as desired, an excessive number of toys, too many hugs and kisses? What does the 3-year-old learn from this? Something like, although I am not able to provide these things for myself, I believe that others will take care of me and meet my needs, *because* I am young and have not yet developed the capacities to provide these things for myself. For the late adolescent, parental "indulgence" is not required for survival. When the late adolescent is indulged (excessive allowance, too many fancy clothes, expensive car, no curfew, excessive non-containing praise, etc.) s/he learns "I deserve to be given whatever I want, despite my own ability to work and provide these things for myself, because I am special and should be admired". The *presence* of Indulgence in *adolescence* may result in maladaptive narcissism.

While the *presence* of indulgence in *very early childhood* may have positive results, the *absence* of indulgence may create a sense of neediness and an expectation that others will not naturally be responsive to those needs. To obtain this gratification, the child may develop compensatory defensive behaviors, including the development of a "grandiose self" (Kernberg, 1998), in which the self is aggrandized, needs are met through wishful thinking, and relations with others (who do not meet the child's needs) are disregarded (i.e., behaviors we characterize as narcissistic). The absence of indulgence in late adolescence, when coupled with minimal demandingness (Indifferent parenting) is also likely to have negative effects, including antisocial behavior and illicit drug use (Baumrind, 1991a; Kernberg, 1998) but is unlikely to produce a sense of personal inadequacy (Levy-Warren, 1998).

Similarly, it is suggested that whether "demandingness" is a positive or negative factor in development depends on the developmental level of the child. What are the effects of experiencing a demanding Authoritarian parental style as a 3-year-old? Authoritarian parents tend to be over-controlling, taking over the child's activities and requiring obedience to their way of doing things (Baumrind, 1971). Excessiveness demandingness interferes with the child developing his/her own skills and with recognizing

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات