

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GRANDIOSE AND VULNERABLE NARCISSISM: SELF-ESTEEM, EMOTION DYSREGULATION, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Audri Shabrina Fadhila

Correspondence: audreydhila@student.ub.ac.id

Internship Doctor Program (medical doctor) Misi Lebak Hospital, Banten, Indonesia.

REVIEW

OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

Introduction – Narcissism is most often associated with someone arrogant, domineering, and conceited which is captured in the term grandiose narcissism. However, it is agreed that there are two different dimensions of narcissism which are grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. Manifestations of the two dimensions are differently affecting one's self-esteem and interpersonal relationships.

Methods – The researcher used several journals and literature discussing grandiose and vulnerable narcissism including assessment, self-esteem, emotion dysregulation, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, and parenting about grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Results – Narcissism is an effort to protect one's self-concept which is characterized by an intense need for validation and admiration that pushes them to seek self-enhancements. There are two types of narcissism which are grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism is associated with lower self-esteem than grandiose narcissism and in turn, has a more positive association with difficulties in regulating negative emotions than grandiose narcissism.

Discuss – The assessment of grandiose narcissism is less of a challenge because of the overt presentation of grandiosity. On the other hand, the assessment of vulnerable narcissism is tricky. The entitlement is usually hidden in these individuals with the overt presentation being fearful, cautious, and easily threatened.

Conclusion – Vulnerable narcissists tend to develop social avoidance to cope with their vulnerabilities in a relationship, while grandiose narcissist tends to say positive things about themselves.

Keywords: grandiose, narcissism, self-esteem, emotion dysregulation, interpersonal relationship.

Article History:

Received: May 5, 2021.

Accepted: September 19, 2022.

Published: March 31, 2024.

Cite this as: Fadhila, A.S. Differences between Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism: Self-esteem, Emotion Dysregulation, and Interpersonal Relationship. *Journal of Psychiatry Psychology and Behavioral Research*; 2024.5:1. p31-33.

INTRODUCTION

Narcissism is a most often associated with someone who is arrogant, domineering and conceited which is captured in the term grandiose narcissism.¹ However, narcissism is highly variable in its manifestation and its severity that characterize narcissistic pathology which cause confusion in its diagnosis.² Based on the general consensus regarding recent studies of narcissism, it is agreed upon that there are two different narcissism types of which are grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.³ Both dimensions of narcissism – grandiose and vulnerable narcissism- is a byproduct to protect one's self-concept through a variety of self-regulation, affect regulation and interpersonal processes, which is caused by an intense need for validation and admiration that pushes them to seek self-enhancements.⁴ Both dimensions of narcissism share the same characteristics such as an exaggerated sense of self-importance, like to be praised, do not like to be criticized, disagreeableness, self-centeredness, have low empathy for

others, and a tendency to interact with others in an antagonistic manner.²

Both dimensions have it's own characteristics. Individuals with grandiose narcissism tend to think of themselves as special, underestimate others, tend to show off, stubborn, tend to dominate their environment, and have impolite behavior. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism always want to be more than others and tend to feel less, often feel anxious, complain, are suspicious, fierce, and worry excessively, tend to be defensive and withdrawn..^{2,3} This article discusses the differences between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism in terms of self-esteem, emotion dysregulation and difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

METHOD

The researcher used 14 journals and literature discussing grandiose and vulnerable narcissism including assessment, self-esteem, emotion dysregulation, difficulties in

interpersonal relationships, and parenting about grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

RESULT

Narcissism is an effort to protect one's self-concept which is characterized by an intense need for validation and admiration that pushes them to seek self-enhancements. There are two types of narcissism which are grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism is associated with lower self-esteem than grandiose narcissism and in turn, has a more positive association with difficulties in regulating negative emotions than grandiose narcissism. Narcissism has a strong relationship with self-esteem. Addiction to self-esteem is one of the characteristics of narcissism. The assessment of grandiose narcissism is less of a challenge because of the overt presentation of grandiosity. On the other hand, the assessment of vulnerable narcissism is tricky. The entitlement is usually hidden in these individuals with the overt presentation being fearful, cautious, and easily threatened.

Interpersonal relationships are dysfunctional grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. The Core element of narcissism is entitled expectations and exploitative motives which is present in both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. However, the way grandiose and vulnerable narcissists deal with unmet expectations in relationships, disappointment, and vulnerability are different. Grandiose narcissists are self-enhancing and tend to dismiss personal or interpersonal difficulties. Whereas vulnerable narcissists have higher scores on measures of personal and interpersonal difficulties.

DISCUSS

Assessment of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism

The diagnosis of a patient with a personality disorder like this begins with the doctor asking about the patient's history, his family's upbringing, and the patient's relationship with his family and environment. Doctors can use a Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) questionnaire, which lists 40 questions that measure things that lead to narcissism, such as how much a person needs attention or how much a person is power-hungry. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) has become one of the most utilized tools to measure the non-clinical levels of trait narcissism. NPI was developed in 1979 by Raskin and Hall. In the early stage of its validation.⁴

However, NPI is associated strongly with the more grandiose form of narcissism, therefore, other assessment instruments such as the Narcissism Hypersensitivity Scale (HSNS) and the Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory (MMPI) developed by Hendin and Cheek (1997) can be used. The instrument was associated with the big five factors of neuroticism, openness, extraversion, and agreeableness.⁴ The challenge of diagnosing this subtype is differentiating the vulnerability in vulnerable narcissism from overt vulnerability presentation in other personality types.⁵

Emotion dysregulation and self-esteem in grandiose and vulnerable narcissism

Emotion dysregulation is defined as one's inability to regulate negative emotions and maladaptive behaviors could develop to escape, avoid, or regulate unwanted emotional states. Different personality types influence how one adapts to certain demands and difficulties from their environment and thus manages their emotional states in particular ways. When someone finds it

difficult to regulate their emotions, it could lead to suicide ideation or even a suicide attempt. Emotion dysregulation has often been tied to personality disorders. However, research on the connection between the two dimensions of narcissism and emotion dysregulation is lacking.⁶⁻⁸ Differences in emotional reactions between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism were reported by several studies. The study looked at emotional reactions to threats of failure and environmental rejection.⁹ Both types of narcissism are positively associated with negative emotional reactivity associated with the threat of certain situations. The inability to emotional regulation has a negative relationship with grandiosity and a positive relationship with vulnerable narcissism.¹⁰

Differences in self-esteem between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism were reported by several studies.^{7,8} Individuals with high grandiose narcissism tend to have higher self-esteem, while people with vulnerable narcissism tend to have lower self-esteem. Grandiose narcissism is linked to lower negative emotions (depression and anxiety), high extroversion and openness, and higher happiness, whereas vulnerable narcissism is associated with low happiness, high neuroticism, and negative emotions (depression and anxiety).⁷, shame and suicide ideation.⁸

Interpersonal relationship difficulties in grandiose and vulnerable narcissism

Grandiose narcissism presents interpersonal problems in maintaining control in relationships and having issues with detachment all the while needing social affirmation to be secure. In contrast to its more grandiose counterpart, interpersonal problems in vulnerable narcissists present as socially detached, socially anxious, and distrustful.^{5,11}

Individuals with grandiose narcissism have characteristics of tend to be self-indulgent, vindictive, aggressive, exhibitionistic, and exploitative, and they tend to deny emotional or interpersonal stress. These people will say positive things about themselves and ignore their weaknesses. Individuals with grandiose narcissism view themselves positively, deeming others inferior.^{5,11}

Individuals with vulnerable narcissism tend to lack self-confidence, tend to have fears in dealing with other people, as well as the inability to start or maintain relationships, and fear of being disappointed or embarrassed by others. These individuals also tend to withdraw from the social community. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism are aware of their expectations of others but have a fear that others will fail to meet those expectations. This makes them embarrassed to have interpersonal relationships. In interpersonal relationships, they are highly aware of their vulnerability therefore these individuals reported a great amount of interpersonal distress. They are also aware of their unrealistic expectations of others that they uphold to be met and have a fear that they will fail to meet those expectations, when the latter happens they would be ashamed of their needs in relationships.^{5,11}

Parenting and Narcissism

Conclusive evidence of the origins of narcissism is lacking. Based on theory and research, the development of narcissism is related to early childhood experiences and parenting styles. Overprotection is associated with the development of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Overprotection might cause someone to limit their abilities to learn from their experiences and make them more reliant on someone else's guidance or feedback. Overparenting is negatively related to

coping skills and self-efficacy. Limited learning from own experience is negatively related to self-confidence, autonomy, and independence.¹²

Psychodynamic and social learning theories highlight the association between overvaluation and grandiose narcissism. Parents, in an effort to increase their child's self-esteem, might shower them with unconditional praise. Children who are praised excessively become more afraid of failure and are more likely to use negative ways to avoid failure, such as cheating. When children are seen as more special and more entitled than other children, they may internalize that they are superior individuals, which is the core of narcissism.^{12,13}

On the other hand, maternal leniency is related to vulnerable narcissism. Lenient parenting limits the ability to learn from one's own experience. Parenting styles especially overprotection, overvaluation, and leniency limit the ability for autonomy in self-regulation.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Grandiose narcissistic individuals are defined as people who are grandiose, arrogant, and exhibitionistic whereas vulnerable narcissistic individuals are avoidant, insecure, and hypersensitive to criticism. The two dimensions generally have the same characteristics, namely, they are prone to criticism, namely, they like to be praised, do not like to be criticized, have low empathy for others, and tend to interact with others in an antagonistic manner. However, the two dimensions of narcissism, in general, have some differences. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism are not visible in their attitudes and behavior, while grandiose narcissism is seen in attitudes and behavior. The two narcissistic dimensions generally have some differences in terms of self-esteem, emotion dysregulation, and interpersonal relationships.

In terms of self-esteem, individuals with vulnerable narcissism want to always be more than others and tend to feel less, while Individuals with grandiose narcissism tend to think of themselves as special and underestimate others.

In terms of emotion dysregulation, the two dimensions have different characteristics. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism are more likely to feel anxious, complaint, suspicious, fierce, and worry too much. On the other hand, Individuals with grandiose narcissism feel excessively proud of themselves, tend to show off, and are stubborn.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, Individuals with vulnerable narcissism is more likely to be defensive and withdrawn. On the other hand, Individuals with grandiose narcissism tend to dominate their environment and have impolite behavior.

Parenting styles especially overprotection, over-indulge, overvaluation and overindulgence, and lack of praise and affection during childhood are associated with the development of narcissistic traits in young children. Vulnerable narcissists tend to develop social avoidance to cope with their vulnerabilities in a relationship, while grandiose narcissist tend to say positive things about themselves to hide their imperfections.

REFERENCES

1. Zajenkowski, M., Maciantowicz, O., Szymaniak, K., & Urban, P. (2018). Vulnerable and Grandiose Narcissism Are Differentially Associated With Ability and Trait Emotional Intelligence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9.
2. Caligor, E., Levy, K. N., & Yeomans, F. E. (2015). Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Diagnostic and Clinical Challenges. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 172(5), 415–422. doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.14060723
3. Kaufman, S. B., Weiss, B., Miller, J. D., & Campbell, W. K. (2020). Clinical correlates of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism: a personality perspective. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 34(1), 107-130.
4. The handbook of narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder : theoretical approaches, empirical findings, and treatments. (2011). Campbell, W. Keith., Miller, Joshua D. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.
5. Dickinson, K. A., & Pincus, A. L. (2003). Interpersonal analysis of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. *Journal of personality disorders*, 17(3), 188-207.
6. Buckholdt, K. E., Parra, G. R., Anestis, M. D., Lavender, J. M., Jobe-Shields, L. E., Tull, M. T., & Gratz, K. L. (2014). Emotion Regulation Difficulties and Maladaptive Behaviors: Examination of Deliberate Self-harm, Disordered Eating, and Substance Misuse in Two Samples. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 39(2), 140–152. doi:10.1007/s10608-014-9655-3
7. Zhang, H., Luo, Y., Zhao, Y., Zhang, R., & Wang, Z. (2017). Differential relations of grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism to emotion dysregulation: Self-esteem matters. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 20(3-4), 232–237.
8. Ponzoni, S., Beomonte Zobel, S., Rogier, G. & Velotti, P. (2021). Emotion dysregulation acts in the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and suicidal ideation. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*.
9. Besser, A. & Priel, B. (2010). Grandiose narcissism versus vulnerable narcissism in threatening situations: Emotional reactions to achievement failure and interpersonal rejection. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 29, 874–902.
10. Zhang, H., Wang, Z., You, X., L  u, W., & Luo, Y. (2015). Associations between narcissism and emotion regulation difficulties: Respiratory sinus arrhythmia reactivity as a moderator. *Biological Psychology*, 110, 1–11.
11. Given-Wilson, Z., McIlwain, D., & Warburton, W. (2011). Meta-cognitive and interpersonal difficulties in overt and covert narcissism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 50(7), 1000-1005.
12. Van Schie, C. C., Jarman, H. L., Huxley, E., & Grenyer, B. (2020). Narcissistic traits in young people: understanding the role of parenting and maltreatment. *Borderline personality disorder and emotion dysregulation*, 7, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40479-020-00125-7>.
13. Brummelman, E., Thomaes, S., Nelemans, S. A., De Castro, B. O., Overbeek, G., & Bushman, B. J. (2015). Origins of narcissism in children. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(12), 3659-3662.
14. Norton, R. S. (2011). Parenting as a cause of narcissism: Empirical support for psychodynamic and social learning theories. *The Handbook of Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Theoretical Approaches, Empirical Findings, and Treatments* Chapter 16. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118093109.ch16>.