

Adolescent Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism: Associations with Perceived Parenting Practices

Kristen L. Mechanic · Christopher T. Barry

© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014

Abstract The present study examined the relation between adolescent and parent reports of parenting practices and adolescent grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Participants were 300 adolescents (257 males, 43 females) who were enrolled in a short-term residential program. Findings linked grandiose narcissism to adolescent reports of positive parenting practices and poor monitoring and supervision. Vulnerable narcissism was significantly positively correlated with inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring and supervision with inconsistent discipline predicting unique variance in adolescent vulnerable narcissism. The hypothesized interaction between positive reinforcement and poor monitoring and supervision in predicting grandiose narcissism was not supported. The implications of these findings as well as limitations and directions for further research on parenting and adolescent narcissism are discussed.

Keywords Grandiose narcissism · Vulnerable narcissism · Parenting practices · Adolescent

Introduction

Psychologists have long theorized about environmental factors that could contribute to the development of narcissism, especially the role that parents may play. Two dimensions of narcissism that have been the focus of fairly recent empirical attention are known as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Pincus et al. 2009). Grandiose

narcissism includes characteristics such as exploitativeness and personal fantasies of admiration and power. Individuals with grandiose narcissism tend to feel an unfounded sense of self-importance. They may flaunt these traits behaviorally or express them covertly (Pincus et al. 2009). On the other hand, vulnerable narcissism is characterized by an idealized self along with struggles with self-doubt and shame. Vulnerable narcissism is related to social withdrawal in the face of perceived threats to ideal self-portrayal or a lack of appreciation from others and includes feelings of anger when the positive regard to which one feels entitled is not received (Wright et al. 2010). Research has delineated some of the intrapersonal and interpersonal correlates of these forms of narcissism in adults (see Maxwell et al. 2011; Pincus et al. 2009), but it remains unclear what contextual factors might be associated with grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, particularly prior to adulthood.

Empirical evidence speaks to the relevance of narcissism to adolescent behavioral and social functioning (e.g., Barry et al. 2007; Barry and Wallace 2010). Nevertheless, research is relatively lacking on the developmental precursors and contextual factors, including parenting, that are associated with the display of narcissistic features in childhood and adolescence. The present study attempted to address this gap in the literature, particularly as it pertains to grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Clinical theories offer varying explanations on the role that parenting plays in youth narcissism. Specifically, Kohut (1971, 1977), Kernberg (1975) and Millon (1981) have offered somewhat contradictory, yet groundbreaking, theories on how parenting contributes to the development of narcissism. Kohut (1977) focused on the parents' failure to foster a healthy sense of self in their children. This problem can occur because the parent is too lenient which

K. L. Mechanic · C. T. Barry (✉)
Department of Psychology, The University of Southern
Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, USA
e-mail: christopher.barry@usm.edu

encourages the child's primitive sense of grandiosity or because the parent is too controlling to allow for a healthy, independent formation of self. Inconsistent parents or those lacking in empathy may also contribute to the child's development of a narcissistic self. Such parenting may inhibit the child from idealizing the parent as a role model for a healthy development of the self, instead arresting his/her development of the self in an earlier, less appropriate phase of narcissistic development (Kohut 1971). In support of Kohut's theory, Trumpeter et al. (2008) found that parental empathy and inconsistency were both related to narcissism based on the reports of college undergraduates. Parental empathy was positively associated with adjusted narcissism (i.e., narcissism consisting of adaptive traits such as leadership) and higher self-esteem and negatively correlated with maladjusted narcissism (i.e., narcissism consisting of maladaptive traits such as entitlement) and depression. Parental inconsistency, however, was related to higher levels of maladaptive narcissism (Trumpeter et al. 2008).

Kernberg (1975) attributes narcissism to a disorganized sense of self that is created by demanding parents who lack warmth. He theorized that such parents place high expectations in order to live vicariously through their offspring's success. Because such parents seem to place their offspring on a pedestal, the child is on constant display; therefore, the child may internalize the value of exhibitionistic tendencies as a result of this continuous attention. Furthermore, from this perspective, the parents themselves represent a disorganized sense of self and tend to only reward their child based on certain valued traits or skills while ignoring or disapproving of others. This parental inconsistency may contribute to the child developing a sense of grandiosity about the honored traits but a core of personal insecurity (Kernberg 1975). In a study based off of Kernberg's theory, Otway and Vignoles (2006) found that both parental overevaluation (i.e., high praise and low criticism) and coldness correlated positively with both covert and overt forms of narcissism based on adult retrospective reports of parenting.

In contrast, Millon's social learning theory asserts that permissive parents who spoil their children may foster narcissism, causing the child to feel entitled and superior to others (Millon 1981). Thus, parenting that provides a great deal of praise without consistent monitoring or expectations may foster grandiose features of narcissism in children. Capron (2004) found evidence that supports Millon's theory by linking overindulgence and constant gratification without expectation of reciprocity or effort to narcissism in adults.

In general, there has been a fairly recent increase in actual empirical investigations of the association between youth narcissism and parenting factors. Two issues that

have challenged this research have been the reliance on adult retrospective reports of their parents' parenting and the lack of consistency in the operationalization of the parenting construct across studies (Horton 2011). Existing empirical research on the relation between narcissism and parenting primarily has examined parenting in accordance with Baumrind's conceptualization of parenting styles. These styles include different combinations of the parenting dimensions warmth and control (Baumrind 1971). For example, in a study of college undergraduates, Watson et al. (1992) investigated Kohut's theory of the self and found through retrospective reports that those who perceived their parents as permissive expressed a sense of narcissistic grandiosity that was not reflected in those who felt that their parents were more authoritative (Watson et al. 1992).

Horton et al. (2006) found support for a relation between parental warmth and two forms of narcissism, one normal (healthy) and one controlling for self-esteem (unhealthy). Additionally, they discovered a positive correlation between parental control and unhealthy narcissism using both adult and adolescent informants (Horton et al. 2006). Similarly, Cramer (2011) found in a longitudinal study that the presence of healthy, adaptive narcissism at age 23 was associated with the use of responsive parenting styles (i.e., parenting that is high in warmth) early in the child's life and negatively predicted by parenting that was unresponsive but demanding (i.e., high in control). Maladaptive narcissism was predicted by intrapersonal precursors of narcissism at age 3 in combination with developmentally inappropriate parenting, such as parenting in early childhood that was unresponsive but demanding and parenting during adolescence that was more indulgent (Cramer 2011). In addition, psychopathy-linked narcissism has been connected to lower reports of parent attachment (Fite et al. 2008). Academic entitlement, a characteristic potentially connected to narcissism, among college-age students has been positively associated with parental control, as participants exhibiting academic entitlement reported higher perceptions of parental achievement pressure (Greenberger et al. 2008).

These studies link different forms of narcissistic presentations to elements of parental control and warmth across different age groups. However, little attention has been given to adolescents, and none of the studies focus on the dimensions of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Additionally, with the emphasis on parenting styles, there has been limited research on narcissism in terms of adolescents' perceptions of individual parenting practices (i.e., perceptions of specific acts) and parent reports of these same practices. Such parenting acts include positive reinforcement such as parental praise and use of rewards, as well as parental involvement such as doing activities

together. In addition, parenting practices can be undesirable, including inconsistent discipline (e.g., backing out of punishments or lack of punishment) and poor monitoring/supervision (e.g., being unaware of the child's whereabouts; Shelton et al. 1996). Barry et al. (2007) found that maladaptive narcissism (i.e., entitlement, exploitativeness, exhibitionism) was positively associated with negative parenting (i.e., inconsistent discipline, poor monitoring/supervision); however, that study did not address the possible associations between parenting practices and adolescent grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

The differing theories and previous evidence offer a way of looking at the development of narcissism in relation to parenting as an equifinal process, in which different developmental factors may lead to a similar outcome. However, parenting practices may have specific implications for the development of specific aspects of narcissism such as grandiose or vulnerable. Both parents who are rigid and lack empathy and parents who overindulge, overvalue, and excessively praise their children may cultivate a tendency for the child to rely on external validation to maintain feelings of being special (Thomaes et al. 2009). Therefore, the use of different parenting practices may foster the development of vulnerable or grandiose narcissism. For example, high use of positive reinforcement and parental involvement may correspond to the exaggerated sense of self-worth and the desire to maintain fantasies of superiority that are characteristic of grandiose narcissism. Furthermore, frequent application of these positive parenting practices in the presence of poor monitoring/supervision may form the type of parental overindulgence that Millon (1981) felt would contribute to narcissism, as the adolescent in such a situation would be the recipient of frequent praise and presumably would not have to modify his or her behavior in response to close parental supervision.

Alternately, low use of positive reinforcement and parental inconsistency may be associated with shame and doubt and fragile sense of self-worth in the child that are indicative of vulnerable narcissism. This possibility falls in line with Kohut's (1971) idea that parents lacking in empathy may produce narcissistic offspring, as well as Kernberg's (1975) theory that parents who reward and punish their children discrepantly based on desired traits may cause the child to experience internal shame while still being driven to protect an inflated ego. To compensate for the lack of parental warmth, the child may develop narcissistic tendencies to gain approval from others given his/her experiences in an unreliable environment (Kernberg 1975; Kohut 1977). Because of this growing, but still limited, empirical evidence on parenting and narcissism in youth to date, the possibilities raised by these theories were explored in the present study in the context of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

There were no distinctions made regarding informant (i.e., adolescent vs. parent) influences in the development of our hypotheses, as past studies on adolescent narcissism have typically not examined multiple informants of parenting practices in the same sample. However, it should be noted that because narcissism was obtained via adolescent self-report only, it might be expected for there to be greater convergence between narcissism and adolescent-reported parenting than for parent reported parenting. First, it was predicted that grandiose narcissism would be significantly positively correlated with reports of parental involvement and parental use of positive reinforcement (Hypothesis 1). It was also hypothesized that vulnerable narcissism would be significantly positively correlated with parental inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring/supervision and significantly negatively correlated with use of positive reinforcement (Hypothesis 2). Additionally, it was predicted that poor monitoring and supervision would moderate the relation between positive reinforcement and grandiose narcissism such that grandiose narcissism would be greatest in the presence of high reports of positive reinforcement along with poor monitoring/supervision (Hypothesis 3). Finally, it was proposed that the combination of low use of positive reinforcement and high inconsistent discipline would predict the highest levels of vulnerable narcissism (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Participants

Participants were 300 adolescents (257 males, 43 females), ranging in age from 16 to 17 ($M = 16.59$, $SD = .49$), who had dropped out of high school and were voluntarily enrolled in a 22-week residential intervention program designed to foster academic, behavioral, and self-help skills. The participants in this study were recruited from two cohorts attending the residential program, but parent report data were collected from consenting parents in only one of the cohorts ($n = 106$). Participants had been living at home at the time of their enrollment and were brought to the program by a parent/guardian. The sample was 71.9 % Caucasian and 26.1 % African American, whereas 2.0 % of participants were from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Measures

Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton et al. 1996)

The APQ consists of 42 items with possible answers ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 4 (*Always*). Four subscales were

used to assess parenting practices in the present study: Positive Reinforcement (6 items), Parental Involvement (10 items), Inconsistent Discipline (6 items), and Poor Monitoring and Supervision (i.e., poor monitoring/supervision; 10 items; Shelton et al. 1996). The current study used the Child Global Report which asks adolescents questions regarding the general frequency of practices their parents use, as well as the Parent Global Report which obtains parent reports on their use of the same practices (Shelton et al. 1996). Barry et al. (2008) found that the Child Global Report is useful in measuring the child's perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship and that child reports of parenting practices are related to both child internalizing and externalizing problems, with parent reports also being related to such problems. For the current study, internal consistencies of the adolescent-reported Parental Involvement ($\alpha = .86$) and Positive Reinforcement ($\alpha = .80$) scales were good. Internal consistency was somewhat lower for the adolescent-reported Inconsistent Discipline ($\alpha = .66$) and Poor Monitoring and Supervision ($\alpha = .76$) scales. For parent reports, the internal consistency of the Parental Involvement ($\alpha = .81$), Positive Reinforcement ($\alpha = .80$), Inconsistent Discipline ($\alpha = .74$), and Poor Monitoring and Supervision ($\alpha = .83$) subscales were all acceptable.

Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al. 2009)

The PNI consists of 52 items with answer choices on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). Within the PNI are seven subscales that measure components of narcissistic grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability. Contingent Self-Esteem (12 items; i.e., unstable self-esteem with a reliance on external sources), Hiding the Self (7 items; i.e., avoidance of revealing personal faults and interpersonal needs to others), Entitlement Rage (8 items; i.e., anger due to unmet expectations), and Devaluing Others and Need for Others (7 items; i.e., lack of interest in others who do not provide admiration combined with shame for seeking this interpersonal appreciation) comprise the Vulnerable Narcissism scale. Exploitativeness (5 items; i.e., manipulation of others), Grandiose Fantasy (7 items; i.e., personal fantasies of success, adoration, and acknowledgment), and Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement (6 items; i.e., prosocial acts aimed at heightening self-image) make up the Grandiose Narcissism scale (Wright et al. 2010). In the current sample, both the Vulnerable Narcissism scale ($\alpha = .92$) and the Grandiose Narcissism scale ($\alpha = .84$) had good internal consistency. The internal consistency coefficients of each subscale were as follows: Grandiose Fantasy ($\alpha = .81$), Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement ($\alpha = .68$), Exploitativeness ($\alpha = .70$),

Contingent Self-Esteem ($\alpha = .90$), Entitlement Rage ($\alpha = .77$), Hiding the Self ($\alpha = .69$), and Devaluing Others and Need for Others ($\alpha = .78$).

Procedure

Upon approval by the university Institutional Review Board, parental consent and parent reports on the APQ were obtained at the time of adolescent enrollment into the residential program. Adolescents who agreed to participate provided assent and completed the PNI and APQ, as well as a battery of measures for a larger research project. Participation was completely voluntary and did not affect the adolescents' status in the residential program. Data were collected from adolescent participants in a classroom setting in 3–4 45 min sessions across approximately 2 weeks.

Results

All study variables were approximately normally distributed and represented a wide range of possible scores (see Table 1). Cross-informant correlations on the parenting dimensions are shown in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the reports of parenting practices from parents and their adolescents were generally unrelated. In light of these findings, it did not make sense to combine reports of parenting across informants for subsequent analyses. Therefore, analyses were conducted separately for adolescent and parent reports of parenting practices.

Gender was associated with vulnerable narcissism, $r = .16$, $p = .004$, such that female participants tended to report higher vulnerable narcissism than males. Consequently, gender was controlled for in subsequent analyses predicting vulnerable narcissism. Gender was unrelated to any of the parenting dimensions across both informants.

Adolescent Perceptions of Parenting

Correlations between narcissism and adolescent reports of parenting are shown in Table 3. Hypothesis 1 was supported, as grandiose narcissism was significantly positively related to parental involvement and positive reinforcement (see Table 3). Grandiose narcissism was also significantly correlated with adolescent reports of inconsistent discipline. A simultaneous regression analysis was conducted with all parenting scales from adolescent informants as predictors to determine which predicted unique variance in grandiose narcissism. The only unique effect in this model was for positive reinforcement, $\beta = .22$, $p = .004$, R^2 for model = .08.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for study variables

Variable (possible range)	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
<i>Adolescent report</i>						
Positive Reinforc. (0–4)	2.50	.87	.00	4.00	–.51	.21
Poor Monitoring (0–4)	2.05	.76	.00	4.00	.01	–.28
Inconsistent Discipline (0–4)	1.71	.77	.00	4.00	.04	–.22
Parental Involvement (0–4)	2.15	.88	.00	4.00	–.39	–.08
Vulnerable Narcissism (0–5) ^a	1.92	.85	.00	4.55	.13	–.26
Grandiose Narcissism (0–5) ^a	2.58	.84	.00	4.58	–.37	–.02
<i>Parent report</i>						
Positive Reinforc. (0–4)	3.21	.56	1.83	4.00	–.35	–.77
Poor Monitoring (0–4)	1.26	.72	.00	3.90	.78	1.03
Inconsistent Discipline (0–4)	1.59	.70	.00	3.83	.18	.21
Parental Involvement (0–4)	2.98	.61	1.40	4.00	–.22	–.59

Positive Reinforc. = Positive Reinforcement, Poor Monitoring = Poor Monitoring and Supervision

^a Possible range is determined by the mean item score

Table 2 Cross-informant correlations on dimensions of parenting practices

	Parent report			
	Parental Involvement	Positive Reinforcement	Inconsistent Discipline	Poor Monitoring
<i>Adolescent report</i>				
Parental Involvement	.10	.13	–.07	–.04
Positive Reinforcement	.03	.17*	–.04	–.01
Inconsistent Discipline	.08	.18*	.22**	.13
Poor Monitoring	.03	.09	.20*	.20*

Coefficients in bold are cross-informant correlations for the same APQ subscale

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3 Correlations between narcissism and adolescent report of parenting practices

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Grandiose Narcissism	–	.59***	.18***	.25***	.17**	.13**
2. Vulnerable Narcissism		–	–.01	.04	.23***	.15**
3. Parental Involvement			–	.67***	.01	–.14**
4. Positive Reinforcement				–	.08	–.12*
5. Inconsistent Discipline					–	.56***
6. Poor Monitoring						–

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

Hypothesis 2 predicted that reports of vulnerable narcissism would be significantly negatively correlated with parental use of positive reinforcement and significantly positively associated with perceptions of both parental inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring/supervision. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis was partially supported. Vulnerable narcissism was significantly positively correlated with inconsistent discipline. However, the other hypothesized correlations involving vulnerable narcissism

were not significant. A simultaneous regression analysis was also conducted to determine which parenting scales predicted unique variance in vulnerable narcissism. Inconsistent Discipline was the only scale to demonstrate a significant unique effect, $\beta = .24$, $p = .001$, R^2 for model = .05. When gender was included in the model, inconsistent discipline again was the only parenting dimension that predicted unique variance in vulnerable narcissism, $\beta = .23$, $p = .001$, R^2 for model = .07, with a main effect also present for gender (i.e., females scoring higher), $\beta = .16$, $p = .006$.

Hypothesis 3 was tested via multiple regression analysis, with centered scores for positive parenting and poor monitoring/supervision entered as predictors of grandiose narcissism in the first step and their interaction entered in the second step. In this model, there was a significant main effect for positive reinforcement in the first step, $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$, R^2 for model = .07, but there was no significant interaction between poor monitoring/supervision and positive reinforcement in predicting grandiose narcissism, $\beta = –.05$, $p = .40$, in the next step. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the combination of low use of positive reinforcement and high inconsistent discipline would predict the highest levels of vulnerable narcissism. However, this hypothesis was not supported, as there was

Table 4 Correlations between adolescent report of parenting practices and PNI subscales

PNI subscales	Parental involvement	Positive reinforcement	Inconsistent discipline	Poor monitoring
Grandiose Fantasy	.16**	.22***	.08	.04
Self-Sac. Self-Enhan.	.16**	.24***	.05	.02
Exploitativeness	.08	.11*	.26***	.25***
Hiding the Self	-.08	-.05	.09	.17**
Devaluing	.07	.09	.17***	.07
Conting. Self-Esteem	.03	.04	.18***	.05
Entitlement Rage	-.05	.07	.30***	.20***

Pos. Reinf. = Positive Reinforcement, Poor Mon. = Poor Monitoring and Supervision, Par. Involv. = Parental Involvement, Incon. Disc. = Inconsistent Discipline, Devaluing = Devaluing Others and Need for Others, Conting Self-Esteem = Contingent Self-Esteem, Self-Sac. Self-Enhan. = Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement

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

no significant interaction, $\beta = .03$, $p = .86$, in the regression model testing for that possibility. Controlling for gender did not alter the pattern of these results.

Correlational analyses were conducted between adolescent-reported parenting practices and the seven PNI subscales to examine which aspects of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism specifically related to adolescent perceptions of the different parenting dimensions. The results are shown in Table 4. Positive reinforcement was significantly positively correlated with Grandiose Fantasy and Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement. The same was true for parental involvement which also had a small negative correlation with the Hiding the Self subscale. Inconsistent discipline was significantly positively correlated with three out of four vulnerable narcissism subscales: Contingent Self-Esteem, Devaluing Others and Need for Others, and Entitlement Rage. It was also positively correlated with Exploitativeness. Poor monitoring/supervision was significantly positively correlated with Exploitativeness, Hiding the Self, and Entitlement Rage.

Parent Perceptions of Parenting

The above analyses were repeated using parental reports of parenting practices as predictors of adolescent-reported narcissism. Unlike the results from adolescent reports, parental reports of parenting generally did not relate to adolescent grandiose or vulnerable narcissism. There was a significant positive correlation between involvement and grandiose narcissism, $r = .20$, $p = .04$. The above regression analyses were repeated for parental reports of parenting. In the simultaneous regression model predicting grandiose narcissism, there was a unique main effect for involvement, $\beta = .29$, $p = .04$, R^2 for model = .05. Otherwise, there were no significant main effects or interactions from the regression models. Controlling for

gender in the prediction of vulnerable narcissism did not yield any significant effects for parent-reported parenting practices. Lastly, correlational analyses involving the PNI subscales and parent-report APQ scales revealed that adolescent reports of Contingent Self-esteem were negatively correlated with parental reports of poor monitoring/supervision, $r = -.23$, $p = .02$. Parental reports regarding their own involvement with their adolescent were positively correlated with adolescent reports on the Grandiose Fantasy, $r = .21$, $p = .03$, and Exploitativeness, $r = .22$, $p = .02$, subscales of the PNI.

Discussion

The present study attempted to extend previous research on the association between adolescent narcissism and parenting in two ways. First, the grandiose and vulnerable dimensions of narcissism that have been the focus of recent research were investigated. Second, both parent and adolescent perspectives on their interactions with each other were obtained. The predicted correlations between positive parenting practices and grandiose narcissism were present but only for adolescent perceptions of parenting. This association is not surprising, as grandiose narcissism is characterized by inflated self-perception and desire for dominance, regardless of personal achievements or abilities (Pincus et al. 2009). Thus, it is possible that overuse of positive parenting practices, such as positive reinforcement, may foster a sense of superiority and grandiose fantasies of adoration and perfection, as the child perceives that he or she is worthy of rewards, praise, and attention from others. These findings seem to be consistent with Millon's social learning theory that parents who excessively reward and praise their children foster feelings of entitlement and superiority. Alternatively, youth who

present with a grandiose self-view may elicit/solicit praise from parents or may wish to portray that they receive, and are worthy of, positive parental attention. In light of the cross-sectional nature of this study, these potential parent-child transactions could not be directly examined.

In the present study, vulnerable narcissism was significantly correlated with adolescent reports of inconsistent discipline. Perceptions of inconsistent discipline were specifically correlated with the vulnerable narcissism dimensions indicative of contingent self-esteem, entitlement, and a tendency to devalue the need to be close to others. A connection between parental inconsistency and the fragile self-esteem and diminished need to be close to others that are hallmarks of vulnerable narcissism seems intuitive. Another possibility is that adolescents who exhibit a narcissistic sense of entitlement yet self-esteem that is highly contingent on environmental feedback may perceive more inconsistency than actually exists. Alternatively, such adolescents may elicit a variety of parental responses on the part of the caretakers who become uncertain as to the most appropriate discipline for an adolescent with an inconsistent self-presentation. This last possibility seems unlikely, as parental reports of their own inconsistency were not related to adolescent vulnerable narcissism.

Interestingly, adolescent reports of parental inconsistency were also related to reports of their own tendency to exploit others. Exploitativeness is a grandiose narcissism subscale that involves manipulating others (Pincus et al. 2009). It is possible that adolescents with these tendencies report parental inconsistent discipline because they feel they are able to manipulate their parents into altering punishments to suit their goals. Many of the items on the APQ that comprise the Inconsistent Discipline scale can be seen as the adolescent having an upper-hand in a disciplinary situation, such as when parents do not capitalize on threats of punishment, decide to let the adolescent out of a punishment early, or simply give up on trying to get the adolescent to obey (Shelton et al. 1996). Therefore, it makes sense that adolescents who self-report as high in exploitativeness would also report a tendency for their parents to be high in inconsistent discipline, as they may feel that they are able to influence their parents' disciplinary actions against them to ultimately being in their favor.

In interpreting the results of the present study, it is important to recognize that the relations obtained between parenting and adolescent narcissism may simply be based on what the adolescents perceive, rather than what the parents actually do. However, based on the present results, if the adolescents feel that their parents are heaping praise upon them (i.e., positive reinforcement), are highly engaged in their activities (i.e., parental involvement), and

letting them out of punishment early (i.e., inconsistent discipline), a grandiose sense of self-worth and a sense of power/superiority could be present beyond what is developmentally appropriate for an adolescent. Alternatively, adolescents with grandiose narcissistic tendencies may view themselves as worth positive reinforcement and parental involvement and as good at getting parents to relent on the negative consequences of their behavior. Further, adolescents who perceive inconsistency on the part of their parents may also self-perceive an inconsistent, fragile self-view that pervades their interactions with, and response to feedback from, others.

Components of Kohut's and Kernberg's theories link parental inconsistency and lack of empathy and warmth to narcissism in children (Kernberg 1975; Kohut 1971). These assertions have been supported by studies that link adult maladaptive narcissism to unresponsive parenting in early childhood (Cramer 2011) and to self-reports of parental inconsistency (Trumpeter et al. 2008). Inconsistent discipline as measured in the present study may serve as a reflection of the parental inconsistency discussed in these theories. For example, the way parents use discipline may be indicative of varying moods when interacting with their children by going between the kinds of parenting extremes of leniency and control that Kohut (1971) discussed. Furthermore, mood-based punishment, a practice captured on the Inconsistent Discipline scale of the APQ, may also reflect the disorganized sense of self in Kernberg's theory (1975) that involves parents who foster narcissism by discrepantly conditioning their children based on desired traits.

Poor monitoring/supervision was the only adolescent-reported dimension of parenting not associated with grandiose or vulnerable narcissism. This finding may be an artifact of the poor monitoring/supervision construct itself and our approach to measuring it. Presumably, parents vary in meaningful ways on the degree of monitoring they use, but it should be expected that levels of monitoring and supervision would normatively decline later in adolescence. Past research has shown that levels of parental monitoring and supervision seem to decrease as the age of the child increases (Frick et al. 1999). With the present sample consisting of 16- to 17-year olds, low levels of monitoring and supervision may not necessarily be indicative of problematic personality tendencies on the part of the adolescent. Moreover, poor monitoring/supervision on the APQ includes some child behaviors (e.g., leaving a note to let parents know where they are going). Therefore, reports on this dimension seem to require the respondent to consider a different array of behaviors that involve parent-child interactions than other APQ dimensions.

It should be noted that the role of informant appears to be quite important in understanding the meaning of the

present findings. Parents' reports of their own parenting practices were not only generally unassociated with adolescent narcissism, but they were only weakly correlated with adolescents' reports of the same parenting dimensions. Thus, parents and adolescents in the present sample clearly viewed their interactions differently, particularly in regards to the parenting behaviors assessed. It is possible that the lack of associations involving parental informants reflect a lower awareness of the impact of parenting behaviors among parents whose adolescents are higher in narcissism. Aside from that possibility, it appears that the adolescent's self-perception and perception of his/her interactions with parents are particularly relevant. However, parental involvement from the perspective of adolescent and parent informants was associated with adolescent grandiose narcissism. These findings indicate that more work is needed to understand the developmental connection between parental involvement and maladaptive forms of adolescent self-perception. For instance, parental involvement may have different effects on narcissism depending on the age and development of the child, where highly responsive parenting is desired for young children but may be viewed as indulgent for older adolescents (Cramer 2011). A specific issue to be investigated is whether this relation holds for younger children or adolescents or whether it may be an indicator of atypical patterns of parent-adolescent interactions later in development.

There were several limitations of the current study that should be noted. Because participants were all attending a residential program, the specialized nature of the sample may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the sample was largely White and overwhelmingly male which limited diversity and potential generalizability. Furthermore, almost all of the findings of note involved adolescent report of parenting and of narcissism. Therefore, shared source variance may have contributed to some of the relations detected. The present study was also cross-sectional in nature, so the developmental and temporal connections between parenting, the emergence of narcissism, and subsequent parenting could not be investigated. Future studies should address the limitations of the current study by testing the relation between parenting practices and grandiose and vulnerable narcissism with a more general, diverse sample and with more varied methods (e.g., longitudinal). The correlational nature of the current study imposes limits on the conclusions that can be drawn regarding the precise developmental precursors to grandiose and vulnerable narcissism.

Longitudinal research may provide a clearer understanding of these developmental factors, as well as a more distinct view of the bidirectional influence of parenting and adolescent narcissism. For example, genetic influences on

parenting may account for some eventual child characteristics, the child/adolescent's personality characteristics could evoke certain parental responses (see Klahr and Burt 2014), or potential bidirectional processes could be influential in certain developmental periods (e.g., early childhood; during transitions to adolescence; during transitions to adulthood; see Schulenberg et al. 2004).

Despite its limitations, the present study represents an initial attempt to examine associations between parenting practices and adolescent grandiose and vulnerable narcissism—a new area of empirical inquiry with a longstanding theoretical history. The present study was able to shed light on possible parenting links to adolescent narcissism. More specifically, findings of this study imply that grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are associated with adolescent perceptions of different parenting practices. Because the parenting practices of the APQ are based on direct, observable parenting behaviors (Hawes and Dadds 2006), they may hold practical value in developing intervention techniques for preventing grandiose and vulnerable narcissism or other unhealthy self-perceptions in adolescents. Ultimately, understanding the role of contextual factors such as parenting in the emergence and/or maintenance of youth narcissism may provide an avenue for addressing it.

References

- Barry, C. T., & Wallace, M. T. (2010). Current considerations in the assessment of youth narcissism: Indicators of pathological and normative development. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 32, 479–489. doi:10.1007/s10862-010-9188-3.
- Barry, C. T., Grafeman, S. J., Adler, K. K., & Pickard, J. D. (2007a). The relations among narcissism, self-esteem, and delinquency in a sample of at-risk adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 30, 933–942. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.12.003.
- Barry, C. T., Frick, P. J., Adler, K. K., & Grafeman, S. J. (2007b). The predictive utility of narcissism among children and adolescents: Evidence for a distinction between adaptive and maladaptive narcissism. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 16, 508–521.
- Barry, C. T., Frick, P. J., & Grafeman, S. J. (2008). Child versus parent reports of parenting practices: Implications for the conceptualization of child behavioral and emotional problems. *Assessment*, 15, 294–303. doi:10.1177/1073191107312212.
- Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns in parental authority. *Developmental Psychology*, 4, 101–103. doi:10.1037/h0030372.
- Capron, E. W. (2004). Types of pampering and the narcissistic personality trait. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 60, 76–93.
- Cramer, P. (2011). Young adult narcissism: A 20 year longitudinal study of the contribution of parenting styles, preschool precursors of narcissism, and denial. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 45, 19–28. doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2010.11.004.
- Fite, P. J., Greening, L., & Stoppelbein, L. (2008). Relation between parenting stress and psychopathic traits among children. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 26, 239–248. doi:10.1002/bsl.803.
- Frick, P. J., Christian, R. E., & Wootton, J. M. (1999). Age trends in association between parenting practices and conduct problems.

- Behavior Modification*, 23, 106–128. doi:[10.1177/0145445599231005](https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445599231005).
- Greenberger, E., Lessard, J., Chen, C., & Farruggia, S. P. (2008). Self-entitled college students: Contributions of personality, parenting, and motivational factors. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37, 1193–1204. doi:[10.1007/s10964-008-9284-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9284-9).
- Hawes, D. J., & Dadds, M. R. (2006). Assessing parenting practices through parent report and direct observation during parent-training. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 15, 554–567. doi:[10.1007/s10826-006-9029-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-006-9029-x).
- Horton, R. S. (2011). On environmental sources of child narcissism: Are parents really to blame? In C. T. Barry, P. K. Kerig, K. K. Stellwagen, & T. D. Barry (Eds.), *Narcissism and Machiavellianism in youth: Implications for the development of adaptive and maladaptive behavior* (pp. 125–143). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Horton, R. S., Bleau, G., & Drwecki, B. (2006). Parenting narcissus: What are the links between parenting and narcissism? *Journal of Personality*, 74, 345–376. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00378.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00378.x).
- Kernberg, O. F. (1975). *Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Klahr, A. M., & Burt, A. S. (2014). Elucidating the etiology of individual differences in parenting: A meta-analysis of behavioral genetic research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140, 544–586.
- Kohut, H. (1971). *The analysis of the self: A systematic approach to the psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic personality disorders*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Kohut, H. (1977). *The restoration of the self*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.
- Maxwell, K., Donnellan, M. B., Hopwood, C. J., & Ackerman, R. A. (2011). The two faces of Narcissus? An empirical comparison of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 50, 577–582.
- Millon, T. (1981). *Disorders of personality: DSM-III, Axis II*. New York: Wiley.
- Otway, L. J., & Vignoles, V. L. (2006). Narcissism and childhood recollections: A quantitative test of psychoanalytic predictions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 104–116. doi:[10.1177/0146167205279907](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205279907).
- Pincus, A. L., Ansell, E. B., Pimentel, C. A., Cain, N. M., Wright, A. C., & Levy, K. N. (2009). Initial construction and validation of the Pathological Narcissism Inventory. *Psychological Assessment*, 21, 365–379. doi:[10.1037/a0016530](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016530).
- Schulenberg, J. E., Sameroff, A. J., & Cicchetti, D. (2004). The transition to adulthood as a critical juncture in the course of psychopathology and mental health. *Development and Psychopathology*, 16, 799–806. doi:[10.1017/S0954579404040015](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579404040015).
- Shelton, K. K., Frick, P. J., & Wootton, J. (1996). The assessment of parenting practices in families of elementary school-aged children. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 25, 317–327. doi:[10.1177/0145445599231005](https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445599231005).
- Thomaes, S., Bushman, B. J., de Castro, B., & Stegge, H. (2009). What makes narcissists bloom? A framework for research on the etiology and development of narcissism. *Development and Psychopathology*, 21, 1233–1247. doi:[10.1017/S0954579409990137](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579409990137).
- Trumpeter, N. N., Watson, P. J., O’Leary, B. J., & Weathington, B. L. (2008). Self-functioning and perceived parenting: Relations of parental empathy and love inconsistency with narcissism, depression, and self-esteem. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology: Research and Theory on Human Development*, 169, 51–71. doi:[10.3200/GNTP.169.1.51-71](https://doi.org/10.3200/GNTP.169.1.51-71).
- Watson, P. J., Little, T., & Biderman, M. D. (1992). Narcissism and parenting styles. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 9, 231–244. doi:[10.1037/h0079344](https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079344).
- Wright, A. C., Lukowitsky, M. R., Pincus, A. L., & Conroy, D. E. (2010). The higher order factor structure and gender invariance of the Pathological Narcissism Inventory. *Assessment*, 17, 467–483. doi:[10.1177/1073191110373227](https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191110373227).