

The Impact of Parenting on Later Development of the Narcissistic Trait

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Abstract. As people with narcissistic traits increased markedly in population, the researchers focused on the impact of parents' genetics of narcissism, parenting styles, parenting behaviors of overprotection, gender of parents, children's abnormal internal like perfectionism and shame, and children's emotion dysregulation. All of these factors can directly or indirectly lead to the development of narcissistic traits. These factors all influence mutually and contribute to the development of narcissistic traits. Parental genes related to narcissism can be inherited to children, and different parenting styles can orientate the development of different types of narcissistic traits in children. Overprotection of parental behavior leads to positively proportional growth in narcissistic traits of children. Internal emotion dysregulation in children is related with an increased risk of developing narcissistic traits. One of the limitations is that previous studies mainly focused on the influences of these factors individually. Future studies should investigate their impacts more systematically. Future treatment should integrate these influencing factors to develop individualized and comprehensive intervention plans for patients, and the public also needs to be aware of these influencing factors to ensure the psychological health of children. This review can provide some suggestions to the prevention and intervention programs for at-risk children and adolescents at schools.

Keywords: narcissism; parenting; overprotection; emotion dysregulation.

1. Introduction

As society develops, people had a further understanding of mental disorders and their presence in the social world. Researchers had long been investigating narcissism as a personality disorder. Plus, they recently observed a tendency with increasing groups showing narcissistic traits in adolescence. Many studies focused on parenting, as one key factor influencing the development of narcissistic traits in adolescence. Narcissism is presently considered to be a concept of having too much interest in and admiration for one's own physical appearance and/or one's own abilities [1]. Clinically, it is divided to two types. Grandiose narcissism is represented by feelings, behaviors, and thoughts of over-positive self, vanity, self-repression, and aggressiveness. However, vulnerable narcissism is represented by feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of flinch, objection, hatred, and shame. With contrary features to distinguish, grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism provide psychiatrists with two directions to treat narcissism towards different social and functional roles played by grandiosity and vulnerability. The reason why narcissism or narcissistic traits are so important and worth research for is that it is omnipresent in all people. Narcissism appears in people first in the form of abnormal traits, then in the form of abnormal personality, and finally in the most serious form of pathological narcissistic personality disorder. This characteristic of narcissism is different from classical mental disorders. It is also the reason for the necessity to prevent people from this extreme personality disorder as early as possible. Furthermore, there is still a doubt in diagnosing narcissism and researchers disagree on each other about the core features of narcissism. In an aim to reach a consensus about narcissism not only in public but also in sub-disciplines of psychology, the discussion connecting different factors influencing narcissism is significant to enable deep investigation into the relatively new field of narcissism.

Turning to another key point in this review paper, parenting is long been known to be significantly related to growth of children. In general, parenting is defined to be the process of caring for the child or children. The different processes of caring would be classified to the corresponding parenting style [2]. Parents' process of caring is measured by two standards: warmth and control. Marccoby and

Martin concluded the four parenting styles recognized today, according to the two standards. Firstly, authoritative style is marked by sufficient warmth and control from parents. Secondly, authoritarian style is characterized by sufficient control and scarce warmth from parents. Thirdly, permissive style has features of sufficient warmth and scarce control, and fourthly neglectful style is tied with scarce warmth and control. Simultaneously, parenting control is partitioned into five categories: proactive behavioral control, reactive behavioral control, psychological control, over-control, and anatomy granting.

Previous studies mainly focused on the diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder. This research area included debate between researchers about the definition of narcissism, specific features of narcissism, measurement methods best used to judge the level of narcissism, and remaining questions needed to solve to reach a consensus. Before taking parenting account for development of narcissistic traits, researchers studied parenting mainly as a factor in children's growth. For instance, theories about the correlation between parenting and academic performance of children were proposed by previous studies, and they suggested that parenting styles are not one of the most vital factors to influence academic achievement. With attention to both narcissism and parenting, this review aims to examine the relationship between parenting and development of narcissistic traits as the new focus. Factors like parenting styles, gender, and emotions were also considered to be influencer in this relationship. This paper evaluated the combined environmental and genetic factors in narcissism to have a better understanding of its etiology and intervention. With consideration to the impact of parenting and combination of diverse factors to narcissism, this article can some suggestions to prevent the development of narcissistic traits as early as possible.

2. The Specific Relationship between Parenting and Narcissistic Trait

2.1 The Impact of Environmental and Genetic Factors

Although the center of this article is the influencing factor of parenting, parenting is also based on biological composition in parents and genes related to narcissism is worth mentioning. On one hand, outside behaviors shown by parents are one primary angle to interpret different parenting styles. Monitoring and rewarding are as important as warmth and control in parenting styles to predict the development of narcissistic traits in children. Self-concept and diverse parenting styles were discussed in the study by Farzand et al. to relate and predict narcissism differently in a sample of 629 adults aged between 21 to 50 [3]. Self-concept is demonstrated to have a positive correlation with narcissism. Diverse perceived parenting styles are mediating the positive effect from self-concept to narcissism and predicting varied characteristics of narcissism (perceived parenting styles explain 28% variation). Parenting style of authoritativeness predicts less narcissistic maladjustment, permissiveness parenting predicts immature grandiosity in narcissism, and style of authoritarianism predicts inadequate idealization of self in narcissism. The relation between parenting styles and narcissism characteristics revealed another association that monitoring from parents associated positively with parental authority and adolescents' exploitativeness -which is a feature of grandiose narcissism. At the same time, the social learning theory interprets relations between parenting styles and narcissism: excessive praise and reward from parents would develop entitlement and superiority in adolescents, then adolescents with such positive idealization would further elicit positive attention and praise from parents. In this sample, the parenting styles in the form of behavior eventually lead to a set of observable child behaviors, and such environmental factors continue to interact with and complement the resulting outcomes. Therefore, children are fully capable of feeling deep meaning of their parent's behaviors. They will become self-abased under parents' excessive control, but also become arrogant under parents' excessive praise.

On the other hand, inside genetics related to narcissism of parents are linked to different parenting styles, indirectly influencing children to react differently to parents. Based on the large sample group of fourth and fifth-grade primary students, the study by Coppola et al. substantiated the presence of narcissistic traits in children from mothers and fathers [4]. Parental warmth is known to have a

positive impact on children's self-esteem. For the kind of children with high self-esteem, more praise from parents also means more thoughts of extraordinary self in their minds. Parental overvaluation is a positive predictor of parental narcissistic traits. Fathers' narcissistic traits and mothers' narcissistic traits are both positively associated with children's narcissistic traits, but fathers' narcissistic traits are mediated by fathers' overvaluation. This association provides evidence of the relationship that parental psychopathology is negatively related to children's mental health (mediated by both gene transmission and environmental factors). Differences between maternal and paternal parenting influence children too in this association. Fathers' narcissistic traits transfer a positive view of self and thus predict grandiosity in children while mothers' narcissistic traits negatively affect children on well-being, security, and attunement needs. Simultaneously, gender impacts narcissistic traits to some extent. Female children are reported to have lower levels of narcissism and are influenced more by the negative parenting of their mother, but male children are more likely to be narcissistic and they view themselves more favorably and socially dominant. The possession and expression of parents' narcissistic traits will be passed on to their offspring, which will make their offspring have the potential tendency to some personality traits. This is why some children's narcissistic traits are so easily motivated while others will get adaptive growth from the same poor parenting styles.

2.2 Overprotection and Narcissistic Trait

In parenting styles, one kind of qualities of parents is the most solely investigated by researchers, and this kind is also confirmed to be closely related to the development of narcissistic traits. This kind of qualities can be summed up simply as overprotection, and other qualities like overvaluation and leniency are all in this kind. The type of parent to which these qualities correspond is generally permissive. In the study by Schie et al., the difference between maternal and paternal parenting styles wasn't substantiated by the large sample of young people (age range: 17-25) to influence narcissism [5]. It was indicated that maternal parenting has a stronger association with both types of narcissism - vulnerable and grandiose. Maternal overprotection is reported to have a positive relationship with grandiose narcissism while paternal overprotection would have a positive influence on grandiose narcissism only when it is with paternal care and leniency. Maternal overvaluation could strengthen the effect of maternal overprotection on grandiose narcissism. Similarly, for vulnerable narcissism, maternal overprotection, leniency, and overvaluation are all direct positive contributors, but paternal overprotection needs paternal care and overvaluation to relate positively to vulnerable narcissism. At the same time, the report shows that care and childhood maltreatment are just risk factors to develop narcissism instead of specific factors relating to narcissism. The results testified to the explanation that overvaluing and lenient parenting styles can cause the characteristic of entitlement in both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. This style of over-positive evaluation of the child by the parents will subconsciously mold the child into a person with an over-confident and over-positive personality. In the development of narcissistic traits, an excessively positive self-image is always the most central and typical quality, no matter what type of narcissism is.

Similarly, in the remembered experiences of childhood, overall family functioning (mainly involving parenting styles) also plays an important role in development of narcissistic traits. The emergence of overprotection, overvaluation, and leniency in the family stands out from many positive and negative family experiences, directly correlating with narcissism. According to the statistical population of all 20-45 years old males and females in Tehran referring to psychological clinics in 2018 and 2019, the study by Kermanian et al. investigated the relationship between family function, perfectionism, and narcissism [6]. Perfectionism is positively related to narcissism and itself could be caused by negative family functions and specific family parenting styles like an authoritarian. Nevertheless, positive family function like family efficiency causes positive perfectionism. Within the negative family function, childhood traumatic experiences are a worth-mentioning part to have an indirect positive effect on narcissism through perfectionism. The childhood experiences of overprotection, overvaluation, and leniency in the discipline in family function are positively predicting pathological narcissism while family support, abuse, and neglect are not specifically

related to narcissism. All the results emphasized the role of perfectionism to mediate between family function and narcissism. The sample also demonstrated that narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability are related to self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism. Regardless of the mediating factors between parenting styles and narcissism, overprotection is the kind of parental qualities that consistently accurately motivate personality traits that are risk factors for narcissism. Overprotection can not only affect children to have the feeling of entitlement to form a positive self, but also may trigger the habit of perfectionism of children to deepen the contradiction of self-cognition.

The gender of parents and gender of children may cause some differences in the relationship between parenting styles and the development of narcissistic traits, but the impact of overprotection of parents on children would not change at all in this relationship. The study by Green et al. utilized a large sample size of online participants aged between 18 to 64 and determined the role that gender plays in forming narcissistic traits [7]. Males are found to have higher scores on NPI and are up to 75% more likely to be diagnosed with NPD. On the other side, females are reported to have significantly higher scores on overall narcissism scores. The overall participants showed a higher score on grandiose narcissism than vulnerable narcissism. Gender differences contribute to parenting as well. Maternal parenting is related to vulnerable narcissism and paternal narcissism is related to grandiose narcissism. Overprotection by the father itself is a positive predictor of male children's grandiosity while overprotection by the father with warmth by the mother becomes the positive predictor of male children's vulnerability. Children with differentiated gender are unconsciously influenced more by a different parents. For instance, psychological control and overprotection by both parents have a positive relationship with the vulnerable narcissism of female children, and psychological control and overprotection by the father are positively related to the vulnerable narcissism of male children. Warmth by both parents is still an efficient parenting function to reduce grandiose and vulnerable narcissism in both male and female children. The overprotection of either parent has great power over both boys and girls. Parental overprotection is really a non-neglectful factor that makes children's narcissistic traits develop. Gender only affects the extent to which children are affected but not the abnormal personality traits brought by parents' overprotection of children.

3. Relevant Factors to the Development of Narcissistic Trait

In addition to negative parenting qualities, negative feelings, thoughts, and confusion from children themselves are very likely to be indicators of narcissism. Emotions, for instance, are the traits that many people with narcissistic traits fail to manage on their own. In a large sample of active WoW players aged 18 years old or older, the study by Blasi et al. showed that vulnerable narcissism is significantly positively correlated to problem gaming [8]. Vulnerable narcissism is found to have a positive correlation with problem gaming with the mediation of emotion dysregulation and escapism. Emotion dysregulation is the inability to differentiate, recognize, flexibly adjust to and manage emotions, and its certain parts like limited access to emotion regulation strategies are pivotal in boosting problem gaming. Escapism, as another mediation, is a need to play for relaxing or escaping from real-life problems and is also the main reason for high emotion dysregulation people to play games. However, another type of narcissism grandiose is related neither to problem gaming nor to emotion dysregulation and escapism. Instead, grandiose narcissism positively predicts adaptive emotion regulation. Children with emotion dysregulation often experience a lack of emotion controlling skills, lack of parental care, and are trapped between expressing emotions and shutting themselves down. This disorder is a symptom that captures the inferiority and timidity of vulnerable narcissistic patients so that an overly positive self-image cannot be established in the child's mind.

If a child is diagnosed to have cognitive dysregulation and emotional dysregulation at the same time, then a concept that represents a weaker social skill - invalidation - would be born in him/her. People with invalidate are easy to be negatively influenced by environment. In the study by Huxley et al., the large sample from Australian social media and university search sites indicated a system of

relationships from invalidation to narcissism and then to well-being [9]. Invalidation in this study was defined to be the abnormal socialization of cognition and emotion, which means emotion and cognition socialization receive an inappropriate or extreme response in the communication of private experiences. Invalidation was directly related to negative personality characteristics: invalidation reduces opportunities for children to practice emotion regulation and problem-solving skills and thus the personality would be shaped to depend on the social environment for cues about how to think and behave. Invalidation is reported to be positively related to vulnerable narcissism with its functional impairment. Vulnerable narcissism and dysfunction in the next step are negatively related to well-being. Pathological narcissism positively predicts invalidation, distress, and self/relational dysfunction. On contrary, grandiose narcissism is positively related to well-being since its entitlement predicts high self-esteem and low distress and its grandiosity predicts high self-functioning, quality of life, self-esteem, and low distress. Besides, age and gender play a role between narcissism and well-being - age is negatively related to pathological narcissism and distress; males generally possess more grandiose characteristics. The negative guidance of the parents in the family leads to the invalidation result of the child, which will further lead to the child's failure in the social world. Such a failure could turn out to be one of the most important things that trigger vulnerable narcissism because children would have difficulties to get along with themselves and with others.

Shame is one of the most unusual examples of unmanageable negativity. In such a emotion, children would feel so bad about themselves in reality that the discrepancy between their inside positive self and real self would be indicated. The disconnect between selves emphasized by shame is the key to strengthening children's narcissistic traits. In the report of a large sample of young people in the study by Schie et al., it is assessed that shame has a significant positive association with narcissism even with pathological narcissism [10]. Patients with narcissism are found to possess characteristics of difficulties in both self and social interaction: positive yet fragile self-portrait, impairment to very relationships due to prioritizing self-affirmation, and realization of a discrepancy between the actual self and ideal self. The negative emotion of shame and experiences of shame are discovered to play a role in causing the characteristics of narcissism. Shame constantly highlights the discrepancy between the actual self and ideal self in adolescents, further impeding adolescents to do self-integration and self-improvement towards their ideal self and interrupting functions in social interactions. In addition, hostile attitudes to facing shame emotion are associated with worse performance in self and interpersonal functioning of adolescents with narcissism. According to the results of the study, Schie et al. expressed that fear and compassion may appear in patients with narcissism due to the shame effect, which is worthy of notice in narcissism treatments. Shame can also be classified as emotion dysregulation. The influence of the social world, including parenting's inappropriate caring, can turn into a vicious cycle in children. The failure in their relationships with themselves and others makes these children afraid of the outside world, so they further recognize the discrepancy between selves, then resist improving themselves, and finally plunge into the abyss of narcissistic traits.

4. Conclusion

As the tendency for adolescents to develop narcissistic traits increases, parenting has been raised as a major factor influencing narcissism. Parents' narcissism genes can be passed to their children and make them similarly narcissistic. Different parenting styles also resulted in the development of different types of narcissistic traits (vulnerable and grandiose), because of the degree of warmth and control that were given. Overprotective parenting behavior is one of the parenting behaviors that have a significant impact on narcissism. It has a much greater impact on children compared to those more negative family experiences. In addition to overprotection of parents, children's internal emotion dysregulation can greatly increase the risk of developing narcissistic traits or cause children to develop more serious narcissistic traits. One of the limitations of previous studies is that the proportion of each factor influencing narcissism is still unclear. Future studies should systematically

examine the relationship between all these influencing factors. This review can provide some guidance to the family intervention studies and practices for at-risk children and adolescents.

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