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## On the Relation Between Parenting Practices and Pathological Narcissism In Adolescents

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The University of Southern Mississippi

ON THE RELATION BETWEEN  
PARENTING PRACTICES AND PATHOLOGICAL  
NARCISSISM IN ADOLESCENTS

by

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A Thesis  
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## **Abstract**

The present study examined the relation between parenting practices and grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. The study used the self-report data of 407 adolescents (348 males, 57 females, 2 unreported) who were enrolled in a residential program in the summer and fall of 2011 and 2012. Participants completed a battery of surveys, including the Pathological Narcissism Inventory and the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire. Findings link grandiose narcissism to positive parenting practices and poor monitoring and supervision, with positive reinforcement and poor monitoring and supervision predicting unique variance in adolescent grandiose narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism was significantly positively correlated with the negative parenting practices of 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; however, this interaction was significant for predicting vulnerable narcissism. Implications of these findings as well as limitations and directions for further research on parenting and adolescent pathological narcissism are discussed.

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## **Introduction**

Adolescence can be an emotionally confusing time in which individuals may become preoccupied with their perceived personal shortcomings, social status, and image. In light of this preoccupation, narcissistic tendencies such as self-centeredness and vulnerability to the perception of others may be simply part of typical developmental processes; however, for some adolescents, these traits may be less normative and more pathological (Bleiberg, 1994). Psychologists have long theorized about environmental factors that could contribute to the development of narcissism, especially the role that parents may play. Kernberg (1975), Kohut (1971, 1977), and Millon (1981) have offered somewhat contradictory, yet groundbreaking theories on how parenting contributes to the development of narcissism. However, there have been relatively few empirical studies in this area, and there is a lack of consistency in the operationalization of the parenting construct among those that do exist (Horton, 2011). In addition, past research in this area has largely centered on retrospective reports from adults rather than on adolescents.

The present study will examine the relation between parenting practices and pathological narcissism, specifically the subtypes of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism, in adolescents. This study extends previous research by assessing parenting practices rather than parenting styles because they are operationalized based on actual parenting behaviors (Lee, Daniels, & Kissinger, 2006) that may be relevant for adolescent narcissism. Additionally, the study will examine the grandiose and vulnerable dimensions of narcissism which are composed of separate combinations of pathological narcissistic traits, rather than the more commonly used normal characteristics of narcissism (Pincus et al., 2009). It is hoped that by considering these empirically supported pathological

components, the study can provide additional insight into how parenting practices may be associated with narcissistic characteristics among adolescents.

## **Literature Review**

### **Defining Narcissism**

Narcissism is a personality pattern that is characterized by a lack of empathy, inflated self-worth, and need to uphold a positive social image (Otway & Vignoles, 2008). Past studies on narcissism have suggested a divide in presentation between normal narcissism which is more often examined in a social-personality context and pathological narcissism which is of particular interest in clinical research and practice (Maxwell, Donnellan, Hopwood, & Ackerman, 2011). Researchers have also begun to view narcissism as being on a continuum ranging from normal to pathological presentations (Miller & Campbell, 2008) rather than considering it a categorical construct.

The social-personality literature views narcissism as a largely normal personality dimension in that it does not necessarily reach clinical or pathological levels (Miller & Campbell, 2008). The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) is a commonly used measure that assesses this form of narcissism through scales that include adaptive and maladaptive narcissistic-related traits such as self-sufficiency, exploitativeness, and superiority (Pincus et al., 2009). These NPI dimensions may be indicative of more grandiose aspects of narcissism; however, they are not thought to express the full range of narcissistic presentations (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008). The Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI) which includes grandiosity and vulnerability subscales was developed to assess narcissism that may be indicative of problematic social and behavioral functioning to the point of possible pathology (Pincus et al., 2009). A



recent study by Maxwell and colleagues (2011) found that the NPI and PNI do not correlate with one another but instead measure different aspects of narcissism, lending support to the idea that the PNI evaluates a different form of narcissism entirely. The present study focuses on the subscales of vulnerability and grandiosity included in the PNI with an at-risk population of adolescents, as such features of narcissism have largely remained unexplored in adolescents.

Cain and colleagues (2008) suggest that throughout different disciplines of psychological inquiry, there are two distinct presentations of narcissism—Grandiose-Exhibitionism and Vulnerable-Sensitivity-Depletion. 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. (Pincus et al., 2009). Using the Vulnerability scale of the PNI, Bresin and Gordon (2011) found significant correlations between narcissistic vulnerability and higher emotionality, lower agreeableness, and lower extraversion. Moreover they found that grandiose narcissism was related to higher extraversion; however, this relation was only found upon controlling for vulnerable narcissism (Bresin & Gordon, 2011).

### **Narcissism in Adolescents**

Research in the area of narcissism has largely been conducted with adult participants. However, the area of youth narcissism has seen a recent expansion in

research with attention focused on many of the behavioral and social tendencies seen in adult literature (Barry & Wallace, 2010). Studies of adolescent narcissism have been shown to mirror adult literature with findings that link narcissism to conduct problems such as delinquency (Barry, Grafeman, Adler, & Pickard, 2007) proactive aggression (Seah & Ang, 2008; Washburn, McMahon, King, Reinecke, & Silver, 2004), and relational aggression (Golmaryami & Barry, 2010) as well as internalizing problems (Washburn et al., 2004). Issues of particular interest from this research are the stability of narcissistic traits from childhood to adulthood and whether narcissism found in adolescents is predictive of adult narcissism or is unique to this period of development (Barry, Wallace, & Guelker, 2011). Some narcissistic tendencies may simply occur naturally in this period, but there is support to suggest that adolescents can exhibit more exaggerated, pathological forms of narcissism, especially in terms of narcissistic vulnerability (Bleiberg, 1994). Additionally, studies with adolescents such as those mentioned above have not typically measured correlates of pathological narcissism. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine adolescents through a questionnaire that measures more pathological narcissism and how it relates to parenting practices.

### **Parenting and Narcissism**

Clinical theories offer varying explanations on the role that parenting plays in contributing to narcissism. Kohut (1977) focused on the parents' failure to foster their children in creating a healthy sense of self. This problem can occur because the parent is too lenient which 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 (Kohut, 1971). Kernberg (1975) attributes pathological narcissism to a disorganized sense of self that is created by demanding parents who lack warmth. He theorizes that these parents place high expectations in order to live vicariously through their offspring. Because they place their offspring on a pedestal, the child is on constant display; therefore, the child may internalize the exhibitionist tendencies from this continuous attention. Furthermore, 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 lead to the child developing a sense of grandiosity about the honored traits but overall personal insecurity (Kernberg, 1975). Additionally, 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). Capron (2004) found that such overindulgence and constant gratification without expectation of reciprocity or effort were the types of pampering that most consistently and significantly related to NPI-measured narcissism in adults. Thus, this particular parenting may relate to grandiose narcissism in children.

Despite many theories, there exists a limited amount of empirical research on the relation between parenting and narcissism, particularly in adolescents. Watson, Little, and Biderman (1992) focused on Kohut's theory of the self and found through retrospective reports from 324 male and female undergraduate participants 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). Otway and Vignoles (2006) developed their own questionnaire for measuring adult

participants' recollections of their parents that included dimensions such as parental indifference, overevaluation, and rejection. They found that both parental overevaluation (i.e., high praise and low criticism) and coldness correlated positively with both covert and overt forms of narcissism. On the other hand, a study by Horton, Bleau, and Drwecki (2006) found support for a relation between parental warmth and two forms of NPI-measured narcissism, one normal (healthy) and one controlling for self-esteem (unhealthy). Additionally, they discovered a positive correlation between parental control and unhealthy narcissism with both adult and adolescent informants (Horton et al., 2006).

All of these studies have examined the link between parenting and narcissism through different approaches to defining both constructs and have thus produced varying results that shed light on unique aspects of the relation but lack consistency. As stated earlier, one reason such inconsistency exists is because of the varied approaches used in examining parenting. Some studies have used Baumrind's parenting styles. These include different combinations of the parenting dimensions warmth and control (Baumrind, 1971). Instead of focusing on combinations, other studies have examined the parenting style dimensions of warmth, monitoring, and control separately (see Horton, 2011). However, narcissism has yet to be researched in terms of adolescents' perceptions of individual parenting practices which could be useful because practices revolve around actual parenting behaviors that could influence narcissistic features in offspring (Lee et al., 2006). These practices include positive reinforcement such as parental praise, as well as reward and parental involvement such as doing activities together and asking questions. In addition, parenting practices can be undesirable, including inconsistent discipline (e.g., backing out of punishments or lack of punishment) and poor monitoring

and supervision (e.g. being unaware of the child's whereabouts; Shelton, Frick, & Wootton, 1996).

Based on clinical theories, both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism may relate to these parenting practices. High use of positive reinforcement and parental involvement may correspond to the exaggerated sense of self-worth characteristic of grandiose narcissism. Additionally, frequent application of these positive parenting practices in the presence of poor monitoring and supervision may form the type of parental overindulgence that Millon (1981) felt would contribute to narcissism. Alternately, low use of positive reinforcement coupled with parental inconsistency may be associated with shame and doubt in the child that is 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 within an unreliable environment (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977).

Additionally, by focusing on adolescents, this study also hopes to overcome one of the more common limitations of studies on the association between parenting and narcissism that largely have been conducted with adults. When assessing parenting, adult participants are typically asked to rely on recollections. Because adolescents tend to be under the current custody of their parents, the use of adolescent participants eliminates some of the errors that may occur through retrospective reports.

## **Value to Academic Discipline**

Overall, this project may contribute valuable information to an area that has seen relatively little research while at the same time expanding on the literature that has pointed to the importance of youth narcissism for behavioral and social functioning. Examining the influence of parents may be of great significance to understanding the development of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. In addition, the study may aid in understanding why clinical theories have differed in their explanations of narcissistic development. It could imply that the divergence within these theories occurs because different parenting attributes relate to different forms of narcissism. The present study also seeks to measure the parenting construct by using dimensions that are based on specific parenting behaviors. Finally, the use of an adolescent, rather than adult, sample may help shed light on how early some of the traits of pathological narcissism may appear and also allow for a concurrent evaluation of parenting rather than one based on retrospective reports.

## **Predictions for the Present Study**

Hypotheses for this study were based on the parenting practices measured in the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ) developed by Frick and colleagues (1996). The dimensions of parenting assessed by the APQ that were relevant to the current study include Positive Reinforcement, Parental Involvement, Inconsistent Discipline, and Poor Monitoring and Supervision (Shelton, Frick, & Wootton, 1996). It was predicted that the reports of 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 reports of vulnerable narcissism would be significantly positively

correlated with parental inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring and 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, so that measures of grandiose narcissism would be greatest in the presence of high reports of positive parenting and poor monitoring and supervision (Hypothesis 3). Finally, it was proposed that there would be an interaction between low use of positive reinforcement and high inconsistent discipline for predicting vulnerable narcissism (Hypothesis 4).

## **Method**

### **Overview**

The goal of this study was to examine the relation between parenting practices and the grandiose and vulnerable subtypes of narcissism within an adolescent population. Self-report data from 190 adolescents were analyzed. In the summer and fall of 2011, adolescent participants completed a measure of pathological narcissism and a questionnaire regarding their perception of their parents'/guardians' parenting practices as part of a battery of measures. Data was collected in person at different time points as part of a larger research project.

### **Participants**

Participants were 407 adolescents (348 males, 57 females, 2 unreported), ranging in age from 16 to 19 ( $M = 16.98$ ,  $SD = .81$ ), who had dropped out of high school and were voluntarily enrolled in a 22-week residential intervention program in the summer and fall of 2011 and 2012. The sample was 56.9% Caucasian and 33.5% African American, while 3.2% of participants were from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

## Materials

**Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton, Frick, & Wootton, 1996; see Appendix C).** The APQ consists of 42 questions with possible answers ranging from *Never* (0) to *Always* (4). These questions measure parenting practices using of the following scales: Positive Reinforcement (6 questions), Parental Involvement (10 questions), Inconsistent Discipline (6 questions), Poor Monitoring and Supervision (10 questions), and Harsh Discipline (3 questions; Shelton et al., 1996). The three Harsh Discipline items were excluded from the present study, as they were not central to the study's hypotheses. The psychometric properties of the APQ have been established through many studies that have found good internal consistency for its subscales (Dadds, Maujean, & Fraser, 2003; Essau, Sasagawa, & Frick, 2006; Shelton et al., 1996). Dadds and colleagues (2003) also found that the APQ had good test-retest reliability over a two-week period. In addition, Hawes and Dadds (2006) tested the validity of the APQ in terms of observational data of parents and children and discovered that the data matched parent reports on the APQ well, supporting its validity as a measure of parenting behaviors. The current study uses the Child Global Report which asks the adolescents questions regarding the practices their parents use (Shelton et al., 1996). Barry, Frick, and Grafeman (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 can be a reliable assessment. For the current study, internal consistencies of the Parental Involvement ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and Positive Reinforcement ( $\alpha = .80$ ) scales were good but internal consistency was somewhat lower for the Inconsistent Discipline ( $\alpha = .66$ ) and Poor Monitoring and Supervision ( $\alpha = .76$ ) scales.



**Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus, et al., 2009; see Appendix**

**B).** 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*). Higher scores indicate greater levels of pathological narcissism. Within the PNI are seven subscales that measure components of narcissistic grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability. Contingent Self-Esteem (12 items; e.g., unstable self-esteem with a reliance on external sources), Hiding the Self (7 items; e.g., avoidance of revealing personal faults and interpersonal needs to others), Entitlement Rage (8 items; e.g., anger due to unmet expectations), and Devaluing Others and Need for Others (7 items; e.g., 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; e.g., manipulation of others), Grandiose Fantasy (7 items; e.g., personal fantasies of success, adoration, and acknowledgment), and Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement (6 items; e.g., prosocial acts in order to heighten self-image) make up the Grandiose Narcissism scale (Pincus et al., 2009; Wright, Lukowitsky, Pincus, & Conroy, 2010).

The PNI has been described as a valid measure of the pathological narcissism construct (Pincus et al., 2009) that is unique from measures of normal narcissism (Maxwell, Donnellan, Hopwood, & Ackerman, 2011). Pincus and colleagues (2009) used confirmatory factor analysis to validate the structure of the PNI. They also determined that the grandiose scales were positively correlated with spiteful, invasive, and domineering interpersonal problems, and the vulnerable scales were positively correlated with social avoidance and coldness (Pincus et al., 2009). Results of measurement invariance tests have shown that the PNI operates comparably for large groups of male

and female participants (Wright et al., 2010). When controlling for variance between the subscales, Bresin and Gordon (2011) found that the PNI scales were correlated with corresponding characteristics of vulnerability (i.e., high emotionality, low agreeableness and extraversion) and grandiosity (i.e., high extraversion, low emotionality and agreeableness). In the current sample, 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 ( $\alpha = .78$ ). For the present sample, both the Vulnerable Narcissism composite ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and the Grandiose Narcissism composite ( $\alpha = .84$ ) had good internal consistency.

### **Procedure**

Upon approval by the university Institutional Review Board, data collection began with informed consent for adolescents over the age of 18 and informed assent by the minor adolescents. Participation was completely voluntary and did not affect the adolescent's status in the residential program. Adolescent participants were asked to complete a battery of measures that contained demographic information, the PNI, and the APQ. Data were collected in person within the classrooms at the residential program during several intervals that took place one to two times a week for approximately forty-five minutes each session until the participants completed the full battery of the measures.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The statistical software SPSS was used. Data for hypotheses 1 and 2 were analyzed via correlations. Hypothesis 3 was analyzed using multiple regression to examine the role of poor monitoring and supervision in the relation between positive

parenting and grandiose narcissism. Specifically, the main effects for poor monitoring and supervision and positive parenting were entered on the first step to predict scores on grandiose narcissism, followed by the interaction term for these two dimensions of parenting on the second step. Hypothesis 4 was also analyzed using multiple regression.

## Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the main variables of the current study. Additionally, it includes the seven subscales of the Grandiose Narcissism and Vulnerable Narcissism scales of the PNI. All study variables were normally distributed and represented a wide range of possible answers (see Table 1).

Correlations between main study variables are shown in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 was supported, as grandiose narcissism was significantly positively related to positive reinforcement,  $r = .25, p < .001$  and parental involvement,  $r = .18, p < .001$ , though this would be considered a small association (see Table 2). A multiple regression analysis was run with all parenting scales to determine which predicted unique variance in grandiose narcissism. There were no unique effects for parental involvement,  $\beta = .04, p = .55$ , and inconsistent discipline,  $\beta = .10, p = .14$ . However, there were significant unique effects for positive reinforcement,  $\beta = .22, p < .001, R^2$  for model = .09, and poor monitoring and supervision,  $\beta = .45, p = .05$ . That is, positive reinforcement and poor monitoring and supervision predicted unique variance in grandiose narcissism.

Hypothesis 2 stated 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 and supervision. As shown by data in Table 2, this hypothesis was partially

supported. Vulnerable narcissism was significantly positively correlated with inconsistent discipline,  $r = .23, p < .001$ , and poor monitoring and supervision,  $r = .15, p < .01$ , though the strength of this association was not large. The hypothesized correlation between vulnerable narcissism and parental use of positive reinforcement was not significant,  $r = -.01, p > .10$  (see Table 2). A multiple regression analysis was also run to determine which parenting scales predicted unique variance in vulnerable narcissism. Inconsistent Discipline was the only scale to demonstrate a significant unique effect,  $\beta = .23, p = .001, R^2$  for model = .06.

As noted above Hypothesis 3 was tested via multiple regression analyses. There was no significant interaction between poor monitoring and supervision and positive parenting in predicting grandiose narcissism,  $b = .02, se = .05, p = .63$ . However, there were significant main effects for both positive reinforcement,  $\beta = .25, p < .001, R^2$  for model = .09, and poor monitoring and supervision,  $\beta = .18, p = .001$ . Therefore, there was little room for the proposed interaction to explain any unique variance in grandiose narcissism beyond the already associated main effects variables. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Interestingly, an interaction was evident when it was explored with vulnerable, rather than grandiose, narcissism,  $b = .10, se = .05, p = .048, R^2$  for model = .04. Additionally, there was a significant main effect for poor monitoring and supervision,  $\beta = .17, p = .002, R^2$  for model = .03, in the model predicting vulnerable narcissism. The pattern of the interaction between positive reinforcement and poor monitoring and supervision in predicting vulnerable narcissism is shown in Figure 1 and was such that the highest levels of vulnerable narcissism were evident for those

adolescents who reported high levels of parental positive reinforcement while also perceiving a relative lack of monitoring and supervision.

Hypothesis 4 stated 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 no significant interaction,  $b = .01$ ,  $se = .05$ ,  $p = .86$ , in that model.

*Post-hoc* correlational analyses were conducted to examine relations between parenting practices and the seven PNI subscales that comprise the grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism scales. The results are shown in Table 3. Positive reinforcement was significantly positively correlated with all three of the grandiose narcissism subscales (i.e., Grandiose Fantasy,  $r = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ , Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement,  $r = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ , and Exploitativeness,  $r = .11$ ,  $p = .02$ ) and none of the vulnerable narcissism subscales. Similarly, parental involvement showed a slight significant association with both Grandiose Fantasy,  $r = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ , and Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement,  $r = .16$ ,  $p < .01$  and none of the vulnerable narcissism scales. Inconsistent discipline was significantly positively correlated to varying degrees of strength with three out of four vulnerable narcissism subscales, Contingent Self-Esteem,  $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ , Devaluing Others and Need for Others,  $r = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ , and Entitlement Rage,  $r = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ . It was also positively correlated with Exploitativeness,  $r = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ . Poor monitoring and supervision was significantly positively correlated with Exploitativeness,  $r = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hiding the Self,  $r = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ , and Entitlement Rage,  $r = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## **Discussion**

The present study used an adolescent sample to explore the association between perceived parenting practices and pathological narcissism. In this way, the study attempted to reconcile different theories about how parenting may foster youth narcissism. Hypotheses 1 and 3 examined the grandiose category of pathological narcissism and were inspired by Theodore Millon's social learning theory that linked permissive and indulgent parenting to narcissism in children, as well as Kohut's theory that parental leniency may lead to narcissistic grandiosity (Kohut, 1977; Millon, 1981). The predicted correlations between positive parenting practices and grandiose narcissism were present. This supports Millon's theory by suggesting that an abundance of positive, rather than negative, parenting practices may play a role in the development of narcissism in youth.

More specifically, positive parenting practices were significantly related to grandiose narcissism, a subtype of pathological narcissism that is characterized by inflated self-perception and desire for dominance regardless of personal achievements or abilities (Pincus et al., 2009). Thus, overuse of positive parenting practices, such as positive reinforcement, may foster a sense of superiority and grandiose fantasies of adoration and perfection because the child may learn to expect rewards, praise, and attention from everyone, not just his or her parents. However, it is important to note that positive parenting practices alone are not complex enough to capture fully the kind of permissive parenting discussed in Millon's and Kohut's theories, which link narcissism not just to indulgence but also to leniency. Hypothesis 3 served as an attempt to examine grandiose narcissism in a more directly permissive context by examining poor monitoring and supervision as a moderator acting to strengthen the relation between parental use of

positive reinforcement and grandiose narcissism. Although this interaction was not supported, the significant correlations between grandiose narcissism and negative parenting practices (i.e., inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring and supervision) as well as the main effects for positive parenting and poor monitoring and supervision add some support to the idea that grandiose narcissism may be fostered by permissive parenting.

Because the results of the present study were obtained through adolescent report, it is important to recognize that these relations may simply be based on what the adolescents perceive, rather than what the parents actually do. Therefore, if the adolescents feel that their parents are heaping praise upon them (i.e., positive reinforcement), not supervising them (i.e., poor monitoring and supervision), 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 fostered beyond what is developmentally appropriate for an adolescent.

Components of Heinz Kohut's and Otto Kernberg's theories link parental inconsistency and lack of empathy and warmth to narcissism in children (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971). Hypothesis 2 examined negative parenting practices similar to these traits in relation to the vulnerable category of pathological narcissism. Both inconsistent discipline and, to a lesser strength, poor monitoring and supervision were significantly positively related to vulnerable narcissism. The parenting practice of inconsistent discipline as measured in the present study may serve as a reflection of the parental inconsistency discussed in these theories. More specifically, they describe parenting that is marked by inconsistent rewarding and expectations of the child (Kernberg, 1975) or

parenting that is either too lenient or demanding to allow for development of an organized sense of self (Kohut, 1977) as important in the development of narcissism. The way parents use discipline may serve as a way for them to express varying moods when interacting with their children by going between the kinds of parenting extremes of leniency and control that Kohut (1971) discussed as involved in the development of narcissism in children.

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. In addition, in the present study, inconsistent discipline was significantly related to the PNI Contingent Self-Esteem subscale, which is marked by unstable self-esteem that is dependent on external validation (Pincus et. al., 2009). One possibility is that this association demonstrates the effects of inconsistent discipline, as it implies that the parents were the unstable external source that originally fostered such an externally reliant, unsteady self-esteem in the adolescent. This potential link to inconsistent discipline holds practical value because it offers insight into a particular parenting practice that may cultivate this form of unstable sense of self as an aspect of pathological narcissism.

The association between poor monitoring and supervision and vulnerable narcissism has interesting implications, though it is important to note that the strength of the correlation was not high. Poor monitoring and supervision could serve as a reflection of parents who lack warmth or empathy. Certain items on the APQ, such as parents being so busy that they forget about the adolescent, could entail parenting that is neglectful



rather than permissive. Of course, parents of youth who are the age of the participants in this study may be expected to have varying levels of monitoring and supervision based on a number of considerations. However, in terms of the questions addressed in this study, parents who are particularly low in monitoring and supervising because they are unconcerned about their child or too focused on their own needs could foster a sense of vulnerability rather than grandiosity in the adolescent because the adolescent may feel helplessness, rather than superiority, a characteristic that is associated with vulnerable narcissism (Pincus et al., 2009). In addition poor monitoring and supervision was also significantly linked to the vulnerable narcissism subscale Entitlement Rage. Entitlement Rage, which describes anger over desires that are not met (Pincus et al., 2009), could also be seen as a reaction against parents who practice poor monitoring and supervision and are inattentive or unavailable in fulfilling expected parental duties such as setting up rules and boundaries.

Although the expected interaction between poor monitoring and supervision and positive reinforcement for predicting grandiose narcissism was not supported, this interaction was significant in predicting vulnerable narcissism. Reports of vulnerable narcissism were highest in the presence of both positive parenting and poor monitoring and supervision. As discussed above, poor monitoring and supervision may reflect inattentive parenting, and perceptions of such parenting practices could contribute to a sense of helplessness in the adolescent. However, this possibility would seem to contradict the findings that positive reinforcement strengthens this relation. Therefore, this interaction may be indicative of the idea that vulnerable narcissism is in itself is a paradoxical construct. Parents who, on the one hand, are thought of as providing a great

deal of positive reinforcement but who, on the other hand, provide limited monitoring and supervision, may help foster the sense of entitlement and contingent self-esteem that are part of vulnerable narcissism.

More specifically, on the surface, vulnerable narcissism appears to be a contradiction due to conflicting traits such as self-idealization versus self-doubt (Pincus et al., 2009). It would be reasonable to conclude the individual fragility associated with vulnerable narcissism could arise from parental inconsistency, a conclusion that is consistent with the correlational results of the present study that link inconsistent discipline to vulnerable narcissism. However, parental inconsistency may also be represented in the interaction between poor monitoring and supervision and positive reinforcement due to the apparent incongruity between simultaneously disregarding and praising one's child. Additionally, poor monitoring and supervision may be a practice that is encouraged by the adolescent. Social withdrawal is characteristic of vulnerable narcissism, especially in situations in which ideal self-presentation and admiration from others is not able to be achieved (Pincus et al., 2009). Therefore, adolescents may report their parents as being high in praise and attention, while the adolescent also avoids them during times when positive reinforcement is not issued. The interaction between positive reinforcement and poor monitoring and supervision may detail the internal struggle present in vulnerable narcissism between seeking attention and socially withdrawing.

There were several limitations to the current study that should be noted. Because participants were all high school dropouts, the specialized quality of the sample may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the sample was largely White and overwhelmingly male which limited diversity and prevented a reliable examination of

possible gender differences in narcissistic presentation. Furthermore, the study was entirely self-report and therefore susceptible to self-report limitations such as socially desirable response sets. This shared source variance may have also contributed to some of the relations detected. Because findings are based only on the adolescents' perceptions, the obtained differences between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism may be due less to the actual parenting environment and more to differences between subtypes that might lead individuals with grandiose narcissistic tendencies to over-report positive parenting or those with vulnerable narcissistic tendencies to under-report it. Despite these limitations, the present study represents an initial attempt to examine associations between parenting practices and adolescent pathological narcissism—a new area of empirical inquiry with a longstanding theoretical history.

### **Conclusions**

The present study was able to shed light on possible parenting links to adolescent pathological narcissism. More specifically, findings of this study imply that the pathological narcissism subtypes of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism may be fostered by different types of parenting. Vulnerable narcissism was linked to overall negative parenting practices that may detail unpredictable or inattentive parenting, whereas grandiose narcissism was related to these negative parenting practices, as well as positive parenting practices, suggesting a potentially permissive parenting style. Because the parenting practices of the APQ are based on direct, observable parenting behaviors (Hawes & Dadds, 2006), they may hold practical value in developing intervention techniques for preventing grandiose and vulnerable narcissism or other unhealthy self-perceptions in adolescents.

Future studies could address the limitations of the current study by testing the relation between parenting practices and pathological narcissism with a more general, diverse sample and with more varied methods for collecting data (e.g., parental reports). Additionally, future studies could continue to expand upon youth narcissism literature by examining the relation between pathological narcissism and parenting using parenting styles instead of practices. Having both a direct, specific (i.e., practices) and an indirect, global (i.e., styles) representation of parenting would allow for a more thorough investigation of this relation.

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Table 1.

*Descriptive statistics for study variables.*

Variable (possible range)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Positive Reinforc. (0 to 4)	2.50	.87	.00	4.00	-.51	.21
Poor Monitoring (0 to 4)	2.05	.76	.00	4.00	.01	-.28
Inconsistent Discipline (0 to 4)	1.71	.77	.00	4.00	.04	-.22
Parental Involvement (0 to 4)	2.15	.88	.00	4.00	-.39	-.08
Vulnerable Narcissism (0 to 5)	1.92	.85	.00	4.55	.13	-.26
Devaluing Others (0 to 5)	1.63	1.05	.00	4.57	.32	-.56
Cont. Self-Esteem (0 to 5)	1.57	1.07	.00	5.00	.44	-.52
Hiding the Self (0 to 5)	2.55	1.04	.00	5.00	-.02	-.23
Entitlement Rage (0 to 5)	1.94	1.03	.00	4.75	.06	-.65
Grandiose Narcissism (0 to 5)	2.58	.84	.00	4.58	-.37	-.02
Exploitativeness (0 to 5)	2.47	1.08	.00	5.00	-.05	-.33
Grandiose Fantasy (0 to 5)	2.58	1.21	.00	5.00	-.23	-.59
Self-Sacr. Self-En. (0 to 5)	2.69	.98	.00	5.00	-.26	-.15

*Note:* Possible range is determined by the mean item score. Positive Reinforc. = Positive Reinforcement, Poor Monitoring = Poor Monitoring and Supervision, Cont. Self-Esteem = Contingent Self-Esteem, Self-Sacr. Self-En. = Self-Sacrificing, Self-Enhancement

Table 2.

*Correlations between main variables.*

	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						—

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

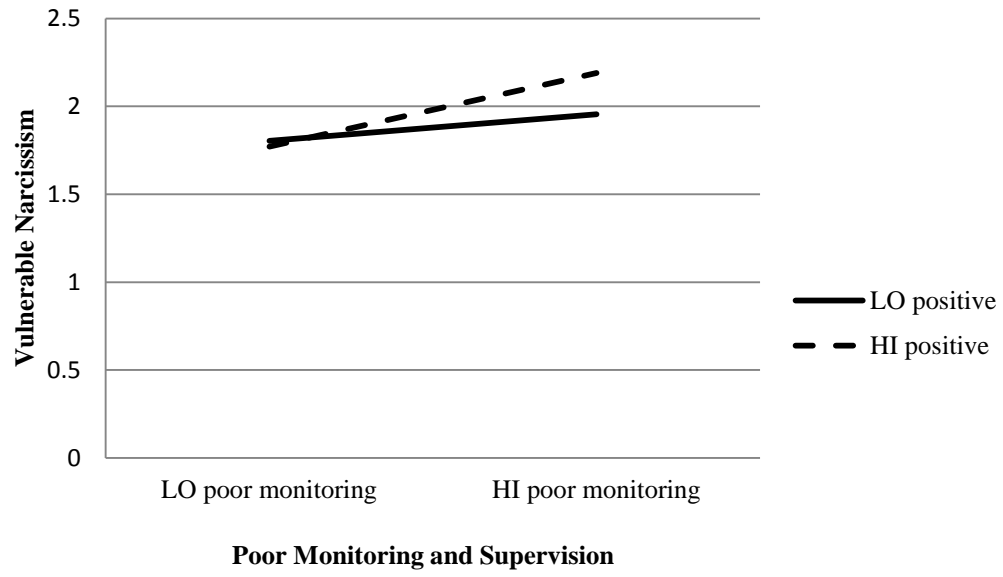
Table 3.

*Correlations between parenting practices and PNI subscales*

PNI Subscales	Par. Involv.	Pos. Reinf.	Incon.Disc.	Poor Mon.
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***

*Note:* 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

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



*Figure 1.* Interaction between positive reinforcement and poor monitoring and supervision for predicting vulnerable narcissism