

## **Parenting Behaviors as Predictors of Narcissism**

**Barbin, Jan Alyanna N.  
Ocampo, Rodelando**

*The present research determined the relationship of perceived parenting to narcissism and which among these perceived parenting behaviors best predicts narcissism. In this study, the participants were from a private college in Manila City and were randomly selected 217 college students (16-24 years old) both male and female. The data were gathered in a form of survey and results revealed that respondents have low levels of parental coldness and an average level of parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, and narcissism. Parental overindulgence and parental overvaluation were correlated with narcissism; and perceived parental overvaluation was the best predictor of narcissism. The results were consistent with the social learning theory. This study implied that parent-child relationship is important for it influences child's development.*

*Key Words: narcissism, parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, parental coldness*

Parents are influential to their child's life as their behaviors to their child can greatly affect their development. Parental behaviors are the ways in which parents monitor, control, and show their affection for their child. However, an ineffective parental behavior could lead to some problems to their child's development. Loving oneself excessively and feeling superior to others are some traits that people with inflated egos possess. They also have little or no regard for how other people may feel or think. These traits may cause them to behave in socially distressing manners. Individuals with narcissistic tendencies could have a difficult time forming interpersonal relationships. As characterized by having a positive and exaggerated view of oneself, together with physical attractiveness and importance (John and Robins, 1994, as cited by Alloway, et al., 2014) narcissism or subclinical narcissism is common in the society and people who exhibits these traits are on the rise (Pedersen, 2014). In the United States alone, the subclinical levels of narcissism have risen among college students since 1970's (Dingfelder, 2011); In 2008, 9.4% of Americans in the age of 20's had experienced Narcissistic Personality Disorder at some event in their life, compared with 3.2% of people with the age of 65 and above (Stinson, et al., 2008 as cited by Dingfelder, 2011). Additionally, Asian statistics shows that 48% of Filipino men are narcissistic and said to be as the most narcissistic in Asia, 25% were Singaporean men, 17% in China and Taiwan, and 12% in Hong Kong (Synovate, 2006 as cited by Cordova, 2011). Due to the increasing number of narcissists, the previous studies recommend for further research on parenting as predictors of narcissism.

Furthermore, there were many interventions done for narcissism. According to Bressert (2015) individual and group therapy both focuses on the person's narcissistic characteristics to reconstitute an intact self-image and to recognize others as independent people and to reduce the need for self-defeating coping mechanisms. Also, Neff's (2009, as cited by Firestone, 2014) self-compassion intervention helps an individual to change their negative traits, and one way to do this is by teaching and practicing mindfulness, and identifying one's critical inner voice. With this self-compassion intervention, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness are considered as natural solutions to narcissism.

Given these facts, interpersonal relationship is essential to a person such that he would always need someone to feel that he belongs. Healthy interpersonal relationships suggest to be a defense for stress and risk, a help for task performance, emotional support, and a basis for social and emotional development (Martin, 2014). Also, individuals tend to live longer and reported less physical and psychological illness, with greater satisfaction in life (Duck, 1981, as cited by Burton, 2011). In addition, the study of Kosir, Socan, and Pecjak (2007) showed that healthy interpersonal relationship among students was related to their academic achievement.

### ***Parental Overindulgence***

In the past ten years, there have been many studies done dealing with parental overindulgence. Capron (2004, as cited by Savage, 2011) conducted a retrospective cross-sectional survey and results revealed that parental overindulgence was strongly correlated with narcissism. Similarly, the study of Bredehoft and colleagues in 1998 (as cited by Savage, 2011) indicated that parental overindulgence was associated with

narcissism. In 2010, Bredehoft and Walcheski conducted a study and results showed that parental overindulgence was related to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

### ***Parental Overvaluation***

Several researchers in the past ten years studied about parental overvaluation. Otway and Vignoles (2006) stated that parental overvaluation and narcissism were related. In addition, the study of Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, & Ramnath (2004, as cited by Campbell and Miller, 2008) concluded that narcissism develops when parents overvalue their child's accomplishments. Like this study, Brummelman, Thomaes, Nelemans, de Castro, Overbeek, and Bushman (2015) conducted a survey to 565 children together with their parents (415 mothers and 290 fathers). Their study revealed that narcissism was predicted by parental overvaluation, which was consistent to the social learning theory. In contrast to these studies, Horton and Tritch (2014) concluded that parental overvaluation and parental support were not associated with narcissism.

### ***Parental Coldness***

In the last few years, there have been multiple studies dealing with parental coldness. The study of Eisenberg, Gersten, and Langner's (2006) revealed that parental coldness was significantly related to child behavior. In addition to these studies, in 1979 (as cited by Farrington, 2010), McCord stated that cold parents tend to have delinquent children. Also, Gardner, Kendler, and Hettema (2013) stated that parental coldness was linked with the risk of adult psychopathology (major depression, phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder). Horton and Tritch (2014) conducted a survey and results found that parental coldness was correlated negatively with leadership and superiority subscales of narcissism. Similarly, the study of Otway and Vignoles (2006) indicated that parental coldness predicted overt narcissism. In contrast to these studies, in 2015, the study of Brummelman et al. revealed that narcissism was predicted by parental overvaluation and not by parental coldness.

### ***Synthesis***

In the past ten years, many studies about the relationship of parenting and narcissism have been reviewed by the researcher. However, the previous studies left unclear determinants of narcissism. Parental overindulgence as defined by Savage (2011), is an excessive gratification of a child's needs. Previous studies associated parental overindulgence with narcissism. On the other hand, parental overvaluation is viewed as parents' belief that their child was more special and more entitled than the others (Brummelman et al., 2015). Many studies showed the relationship between parental overvaluation and narcissism. However, the study of Horton et al. (2014) stated that parental overvaluation and narcissism were not related. As defined by Savage (2011), parental coldness is the lack of parents' interest to their child and the tendency to neglect their needs. Several studies linked parental coldness to narcissism.

The present study extended the existing research on parenting and narcissism, since the previous studies were mostly done on the viewpoint of a parent. Moreover, results of earlier researches revealed conflicting results concerning parental overvaluation, parental coldness, and narcissism. It was also observed that previous studies showed different relationships of parental coldness. For this study, the researcher determined the level of respondents' parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, parental coldness, and narcissism using the child's viewpoint. Specifically, this study identified the relationship of perceived parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, and parental coldness with narcissism as well as the best predictor of narcissism.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The research design used in the current study is a descriptive correlational design. Correlational research is designed to measure the relationships between two or more variables and to make predictions (Stangor, 2011). Thus, this research design determined the relationship of parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, and parental coldness to narcissism. Moreover, predictions of outcomes based on these relationships were determined and showed which of the three parenting behaviors best predict narcissism.

### ***Participants***

The respondents for this study were chosen through a simple random sampling which comprised 217 young adults (16-24 years old) college students from San Beda College in Manila City, Philippines. The purpose of selecting this school was to ensure the homogeneity of the Bedan culture, since the researcher conducted the pilot test for each scale at San Beda College Alabang. The researcher however did not consider gender differences, thus both males and females were given equal opportunity to participate in the present study.

### ***Instrumentation***

The research instrument used in the current study was in a form of survey. Each item in the different surveys were given a rating of the subject with the Likert scale: 4 – true of me, 3 – slightly true of me, 2 – slightly not true of me, and 1 – not true of me.

Narcissism Scale. A 10-item instrument which was modified and revised by the researcher with a reliability of 0.878 Cronbach alpha. This instrument was drawn from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 by Ames, Rose, and Anderson (2013). This NPI-16 was a short measure of subclinical narcissism. It has significant face, internal, discriminant, and predictive validity.

Parental Overindulgence Scale. An instrument which consists of 10 items that measure parental overindulgence from the viewpoint of a child of any age. This scale has Cronbach alpha-reliability of 0.882. The researcher revised and modified the Overindulged: Indicators of Overindulgence Scale (OIOS) by Bredehoft (2006). The OIOS established a construct validity using the Parental Authority Questionnaire of Buri (1991).

Parental Overvaluation Scale. A 10-item modified and revised instrument from Otway and Vignoles' (2006) self-made scale that measures recollections of parental overvaluation during childhood. This scale has 0.925 Cronbach alpha-reliability.

Parental Coldness Scale. The researcher revised and modified the Child Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Child PARQ) of Rohner (2005). This instrument was composed of 10 items that measures parental coldness from the viewpoint of a child. Parental coldness scale has an alpha-reliability of 0.939. Measures of discriminant and convergent validity showed the instrument to be sound (Rohner, 2005).

Average response (mean) was used for the scoring of each scale. Interpretation of scores on the Narcissism Scale, Parental Overindulgence Scale, Parental Overvaluation Scale, and Parental Coldness Scale would be either high-level for those with a mean ranging from 3.25-4.00, an average-level for 2.50-3.24 mean scores, mild-level for means with 1.76-2.49, and low-level for a mean score of 1.00-1.75.

### ***Procedures***

The researcher asked for the permission of the authors to use their instruments for the current study, together with a copy of those scales. After receiving an approval and a copy of it, the researcher revised and modified the items in each scale, and the scoring procedures. The researcher conducted a pilot test to 40 college students. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha of each scales was computed through Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), a computer software which can perform highly complex data manipulation and analysis. The researcher conducted the survey in a university in Manila. A letter to the Dean and the Director of Research, Planning and Knowledge Management Center (RPKMC) requesting permission to conduct a study was given by the researcher. After approval, surveys were given to random college students inside the College of Arts and Sciences building and were asked to answer it in approximately 5-10 minutes. After they have finished answering the scales, the researcher collected the surveys and thanked the respondents for participating in the study. Lastly, the gathered data from the surveys were treated statistically for interpretation and analyzation of results.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

The statistical treatment of data used were the mean, Pearson product-moment correlation and linear regression analysis. The mean determined the average scores of the subjects in each measure of the four variables (parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, parental coldness, and narcissism). Using the Pearson r correlation, the researcher determined the relationship between these variables (parental overindulgence and

narcissism; parental overvaluation and narcissism; and parental coldness and narcissism). Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine which among the variables best predicts narcissism as well as the ranking of the strengths of these predictors.

**Results and Discussion**

**Research Question #1:** What is the profile of the respondents in terms of parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, parental coldness, and narcissism?

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

| N=217                   | Mean | SD   | Interpretation |
|-------------------------|------|------|----------------|
| Parental Overindulgence | 2.56 | 0.66 | Average        |
| Parental Overvaluation  | 2.79 | 0.64 | Average        |
| Parental Coldness       | 1.66 | 0.67 | Low            |
| Narcissism              | 2.58 | 0.59 | Average        |

Table 1 shows that respondents have low levels of perceived parental coldness (M = 1.66, SD = 0.67). In general, the respondents perceived their parents as being affectionate and attentive to their needs. However, respondents' measure of perceived parental overindulgence (M = 2.56, SD = 0.66) have an interpretation of being average. The respondents perceived their parents as having an average level in gratifying their needs. Moreover, results revealed that there was an average level of perceived parental overvaluation (M = 2.79, SD = 0.64). Respondents perceived their parents as having an average level of appreciation towards them. Lastly, it was revealed that the respondents were of averaged level of narcissism (M = 2.58, SD = 0.59). They view themselves to be having an average level of physical attractiveness and importance.

In summary, there was a low level of perceived parental coldness among the respondents. According to Savage (2011), college students have low level of parents' lack of interest to them and negligence of their needs. The respondents perceived that their parents gratify their needs in normal way and believed that their child was special and entitled in an average level. As stated by Brummelman et al. (2015), college students have an average level of parents' belief that they were more special and more entitled than the others.

**Research Question #2:** Is there a significant relationship between the predictor variables and narcissism?

**Table 2. Correlation of Variables**

| Paired Variables                       | r-value | Significance | Interpretation  |
|--|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| Parental Overindulgence and Narcissism | 0.474   | 0.000        | Significant     |
| Parental Overvaluation and Narcissism  | 0.562   | 0.000        | Significant     |
| Parental Coldness and Narcissism       | -0.099  | 0.147        | Not significant |

Significant at 0.01

Table 2 shows the relationship of parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, and parental coldness with narcissism among the respondents. Measures of respondents' perceived parental overindulgence was significantly correlated with narcissism (r = 0.474, p < 0.01). There was a moderate positive relationship between parental overindulgence and narcissism. Also, perceived parental overvaluation showed a significant relationship with narcissism (r = 0.562, p < 0.01). Respondents' parental overvaluation has a moderate positive relationship with narcissism. Lastly, parental coldness and narcissism of the respondents were not significantly correlated (r

= -0.099,  $p > 0.01$ ). The relationship between respondents' perceived parental coldness and narcissism was found to be negligible.

The results revealed that respondents' measure of perceived parental overindulgence was correlated with narcissism. The results implied that whenever they perceived too much gratification of their needs they tend to be self-centered. The findings of this study were similar to the findings of Bredehoft et al. (1998); and Capron (2004, as cited by Savage, 2011) that parental overindulgence was related to narcissism. Also, it was revealed that perceived parental overvaluation and narcissism were correlated. This result suggested that when an individual perceived that they are being overvalued by their parents they tend to view themselves with more importance, and feeling superior than others. The study of Otway and Vignoles (2006) similarly found that narcissism and parental overvaluation were correlated. However, the results also indicated that parental coldness negatively influence narcissism though not significant in this study. Horton and Tritch (2014) found in their study that parental coldness was correlated negatively with narcissism.

**Research Question #3:** Which among the parenting behaviors best predict narcissism among the respondents?

**Table 3. Regression Analysis of Variables**

|                         | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | F      | Level of Significance | β     |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------|--------|-----------------------|-------|
| Regression              | 0.623 | 0.388          | 45.105 | 0.000                 |       |
| (Constant)              |       |                |        | 0.014                 | 0.521 |
| Parental Overvaluation  |       | 0.316          |        | 0.000                 | 0.449 |
| Parental Overindulgence |       | 0.056          |        | 0.000                 | 0.235 |
| Parental Coldness       |       | 0.016          |        | 0.016                 | 0.124 |

a. Dependent Variable: Narcissism

Regression Equation: Predicted Narcissism = 0.521 + (0.449 Parental Overvaluation) + (0.235 Parental Overindulgence) + (0.124 Parental Coldness)

As shown in Table 3, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted to evaluate whether perceived parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, and parental coldness predict narcissism. At step 1 of the analysis parental overvaluation entered into the regression equation and was significantly related to narcissism  $F(3, 213) = 45.105, p < 0.01$ . Generally, the multiple correlation coefficient was 0.623 and a coefficient of determination = 0.388; of which approximately 31.6 % of the variance of the criterion variable (narcissism) could be accounted for by perceived parental overvaluation by the respondents. Also, 5.6 % and 1.6 % of parental overindulgence and parental coldness predicted narcissism respectively. Parental overindulgence and parental coldness did not enter into the equation at step 2 of the analysis. The regression equation implied that the greater scores in perceived parental overvaluation the higher the narcissism.

The findings indicated that it was perceived parental overvaluation, and not parental overindulgence nor parental coldness that best predicts narcissism. An individual tends to love themselves excessively and feel more superior than others when they perceived that their parents appreciate them too much. Also, it makes a child to be self-centered when they were being overvalued by their parents. According to Millon, et al. (2004, as cited by Campbell and Miller, 2008) and Brummelman, et al. (2015) narcissism was predicted by parental overvaluation and not by parental coldness, and this was also consistent with the social learning theory. Also,

Otway and Vignoles' (2006) study revealed that narcissism was strongly predicted by parental overvaluation and parental coldness, when these two are joined together.

Narcissism develops by childhood experiences of constant praise from their parents. According to Millon's (1981, as cited by Otway and Vignoles, 2006) social learning theory, parents that unrealistically overvalue their child's worth creates an enhanced self-image within the child that the outer world cannot sustain. Similarly, Millon and other social learning theorist (1981, as cited by Horton, 2011) argued that narcissism can be learned, it is either through modeled after or reinforced by parental behavior. Specifically, parents who excessively show affection to their children regardless of their behavior tends to facilitate their children's sense of superiority and entitlement, which is one of the characteristic of narcissism.

### **Conclusions and Recommendation**

In conclusion, results of this study showed that college students have low levels of parental coldness and an average level of parental overindulgence, parental overvaluation, and narcissism. Research findings indicated that parental coldness was negatively correlated with narcissism, and parental overindulgence was moderately correlated with narcissism. Furthermore, parental overvaluation was significantly correlated with narcissism, and also the best predictor of narcissism among the three parenting behaviors.

The implications of the present study to the society is that the child-parent relationship is important, for it significantly influences the child's development. Parents should consider their parenting behaviors as the results of this study suggest that parental overvaluation best predicts narcissism.

The current study focused only on three predictor variables affecting narcissism and was limited to quantitative method of research. For the betterment of the study, researchers in the future may improve on several points such as considering the viewpoint of both parent and children, different parenting behaviors, and subscales of narcissism to be measured. Parental overindulgence should be examined separately to distinguish it more from parental overvaluation. Since predictors of narcissism were determined in this research, results of the study can help the guidance counselors in designing and implementing activities and interventions that will benefit the parent-child relationship.

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