

A Literature Review on the Formation of Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Behaviors of the Family as the Influence Factor

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Abstract: This literature review examines the behaviors of the family and how they are likely to lead to the formation of Narcissistic Personality disorder (NPD). While the disorder is caused by a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors, it is also evidently clear that some family dynamics play a role in the development of this disorder. Thus, to prevent or reduce the development of this personality disorder, it is necessary to look at the families and develop necessary interventions that may make families more suitable for the overall well-being of children. The review of the literature resulted in diverse findings. Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) was found to be predicted by complex interactions between environmental, genetic, and psychological factors. NPD was related to the overvaluation of children by their children, leading to the development of an increased sense of worthiness. Inadequate or lack of boundaries in some families was found to influence children's growth, causing the potential development of narcissistic behaviors and a sense of entitlement. Other significant factors that were found to impact the development of NPD are emotional neglect, demand for perfectionism, parental favoritism, unhealthy competition, and lack of empathy. These findings indicate that various and complex factors predict the development of NPD.

Keywords: Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), Behaviors of the family and environment, Overvaluation of children, Parental favoritism and emotional neglect

1. Introduction

The Narcissistic Personality is usually characterized by “a grandiose sense of self-importance, attitude of entitlement or arrogance, and an excessive need for external validation” [1]. Often, persons with narcissistic psychopathy are impulsive, aggressive, they have no regard for the rules or the rights of other people besides failing to adhere to social norms. In many cases when these people break the rules, rather than seeing that they are wrong and adopt suitable ways to change their behaviors, they seem to enjoy it and offer justifications. Because of their tendency to cause harm to other people, people with narcissistic personality disorders often find it difficult to create and sustain relationships. The cause of the narcissistic personality disorder is very complex. However, theorists believe that the main cause of this disorder is environmental in nature and it has to do with the relationship between the child and the parents. This environmental theory indicates that the manner of parenting that

parents employ when bringing up their children plays an important role in determining the development of narcissistic personality disorder among the children [2]. For example, too much adoration of children and exceeding levels of criticisms to a child that do not match up with their experiences and achievements may lead to narcissistic behavior among children. A study revealed that people with Narcissistic Personality Disorder are responsible for between 30% and 40% of crimes in the United States [2]. According to these authors, people living with Narcissistic Personality Disorder have little or no regard for laws. Besides, these people have no adherence to ethical and cultural norms. In many cases, people who commit violent crimes are those with Narcissistic Personality Disorder since they see nothing wrong with whatever they are doing. Cases of assault, rape and murder are common among these groups of people.

2. Methods

The researcher used pre-selected search terminologies to search for the sources for this literature review. All the sources are selected from the Google Scholar data base. The choice for Google Scholar was influenced by the fact that it has open source for a wide range of scholarly sources. The researcher then selected the sources based on their scholarliness (peer-references journals and books published by reputable publishers). Finally, the researcher evaluated the relevance of the sources to the topic and their currency.

3. Family's Behaviors and the Formation of Narcissistic Personality Disorder

The development of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is influenced by a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors [3]. In their work, they make it clear that some family dynamics play a role in the development of this disorder. Thus, while not specific behaviors of a family, certain family dynamics and parenting styles can contribute to the development of narcissistic traits in an individual. In order to address the disorder in society, there is a compelling need to make sure that the family causes are addressed adequately.

3.1. Overvaluation of children

Overvaluation of children by their parents may lead to the development of NPD. When parents consistently overvalue their child, excessively praising and indulging them, it can lead to the child developing an inflated sense of self-importance [3]. The authors say that overvalued children may not develop a realistic self-image because they have not received balanced feedback from their parents. As a result, they may struggle to accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses, leading to a distorted self-concept. Ordinarily, how children develop an image of themselves significantly plays a role in how they grow. Wilk and colleagues [4] in their study affirm this position by saying that how parents handle their children is a critical component in how they develop self-perception, a trait that may be both useful and damaging, depending on the direction it takes. Excessive praise and indulgence can instill a sense of entitlement in children [4]. They may come to expect constant admiration, special treatment, and that their needs and desires should be catered to without question. Moreover, children who have been overvalued may develop a strong need for external validation and approval from others to maintain their inflated self-esteem [4]. Overvaluation of children can drive them to seek admiration, attention, and validation from peers, romantic partners, or colleagues in an unhealthy way. This can contribute to narcissistic traits, as the child may come to believe they are more special or entitled than others.

3.2. Lack of boundaries

The lack of boundaries in some families may affect how children grow and thus may cause the development of narcissistic traits. Families that lack clear and consistent boundaries can enable narcissistic behavior. Children in such families may not learn appropriate limits or consequences for their actions, leading to a sense of entitlement. In families without clear boundaries, children may not be held accountable for their actions. They may not experience consistent consequences for their behavior. As a result, they may not learn to take responsibility for their actions and develop a sense of entitlement. In a properly functional family, children must know their boundaries, and this is attributable to the kind of parenting to which they are exposed [5]. Moreover, when boundaries are unclear, parents may indulge their children excessively. This can lead to a sense of entitlement and the expectation that their needs and desires will always be met without question. These children may grow up believing that they are special and deserving of preferential treatment. Most importantly, children in such families may not be encouraged to develop their autonomy and make age-appropriate decisions. Overinvolved parents can undermine a child's ability to develop a sense of independence and self-reliance. In life, there are many instances where children may be needed to make independent decisions without the influence of their parents. When parents do not provide appropriate boundary directions and allow direct the children to behave appropriately, they may end up developing narcissistic personality disorder.

3.3. Emotional neglect

Emotional neglect or abuse is another family dynamic that may negatively impact the development of children and cause them to develop narcissistic personality disorder [6]. Emotional neglect involves parents or caregivers failing to provide emotional support, warmth, and nurturing to the child. When children do not receive the emotional validation and affection they need, they may develop a sense of emptiness and insecurity. Emotional neglect or emotional unavailability from parents can lead a child to seek validation and attention outside the family. Children are emotionally vulnerable and, in the event, where families fail to handle the various emotional challenges that children demonstrate, it becomes possible that they may develop some personality disorders such as the narcissistic personality disorder. Children who experience emotional neglect may grow up seeking external validation to fill the emotional void left by their parents. They may become excessively dependent on others to provide them with the emotional support and admiration they lack, a characteristic of NPD [3]. Finally, children who have experienced emotional neglect may develop manipulative behaviors to gain attention, affection, and validation. This manipulation can become a part of their interpersonal style, a feature often seen in individuals with NPD.

3.4. Demand for perfection

There are parents who demand perfection from their children, and this may lead to the development of narcissistic personality disorder. Parents who place unrealistic expectations on their child to be perfect or successful may inadvertently foster narcissistic traits in their child [6]. Perfectionist parenting, characterized by excessive pressure to achieve high standards, unrelenting expectations, and a focus on external validation, can contribute to the development of narcissistic traits. For instance, perfectionist parents may unintentionally convey that their love and approval are based on the child's achievements and meeting their high standards. This can create a strong drive in the child to seek external validation and approval. Besides, children of perfectionist parents may develop a fear of criticism and an inability to accept failure [6]. They may become defensive in the face of perceived criticism and struggle with a fragile self-esteem. Finally, the authors sat that the focus on achievement and external validation may hinder the development of deep, meaningful, and empathetic

relationships. Individuals with narcissistic traits may prioritize relationships based on admiration and validation, rather than genuine emotional connection.

3.5. Lack of empathy

The lack of empathy in a family may lead to the development of the symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder among children [7]. Lack of Families that lack empathy and emotional support can make it difficult for a child to learn to empathize with others. The authors say that in families lacking empathy, emotional expression and vulnerability may be invalidated or dismissed. Children may not learn how to identify, understand, and cope with their emotions, leading to emotional suppression or avoidance [7]. It is important to note that empathetic connections between family members are essential for developing secure attachment and emotional bonds. In families with a lack of empathy, these bonds may be weak or nonexistent, and children may struggle to form deep, meaningful relationships later in life. As a result, children in such families may learn to rely solely on themselves for emotional support and may develop a strong sense of self-sufficiency. This self-reliance can later manifest as a sense of grandiosity, self-importance, and a reluctance to seek help from others. As a result of these reasons, a lack of empathy is a common trait in individuals with NPD [7].

3.6. Parental favoritism

Another phenomenon in many families that may lead to the development of narcissistic behaviors among children is parental Favoritism [8]. Parental favoritism, where one child is consistently favored over others within a family, can potentially lead to the development of narcissistic traits in children. This favoritism can have a significant impact on a child's self-esteem and interpersonal dynamics. When parents show clear favoritism toward one child over others, it can lead to jealousy and resentment among siblings. The favored child may develop narcissistic traits due to the excessive attention and validation received [8]. The authors proceed to indicate that the favored child may come to expect special treatment and may feel entitled to privileges and advantages that their siblings do not receive. This sense of entitlement is a key characteristic of narcissistic traits.

3.7. Unhealthy Competition in Families

Negative and unhealthy competition that led to rivalry among children in a family may have negative impact on the emotional development of children [9]. Families that foster competitiveness and rivalry among siblings can create an environment where narcissistic traits are more likely to develop. Siblings may feel the need to outdo one another to gain approval. Rivalry and jealousy can be pervasive in such families. Siblings may harbor feelings of resentment and envy toward one another, which can contribute to a sense of competition and a desire to surpass their siblings. Moreover, competition and rivalry among siblings may hinder the development of empathy [9]. Children may become less attuned to the feelings and experiences of their siblings and prioritize their own success and recognition instead. These dynamics may lead to the children developing narcissistic tendencies.

3.8. Parental overprotection

Parental overprotection leads to some developmental challenges that may lead to narcissistic tendencies [9]. Overprotective parents who shield their children from the challenges and failures of life can hinder the development of resilience and coping skills, leading to a sense of entitlement. Moreover, overprotective parents often make decisions for their children and shield them from taking risks or facing challenges. This can hinder the development of autonomy and self-reliance, as children

become dependent on their parents for every decision and action. Additionally, overprotected children often rely on their parents for emotional validation and approval. They may develop a strong need for external validation, which can manifest as a constant desire for admiration and attention from others [10]. Finally, overprotected children may not learn how to cope with adversity or failure because their parents shield them from such experiences. This can lead to a lack of resilience and the inability to handle setbacks.

4. Conclusion

This paper has presented a wide range of literature on how the behaviors and dynamics within families present the likelihood of the development of narcissistic personality disorder. From the studies, it is evident that the overvaluation of children by their parents can contribute to the development of Narcissistic Personality Disorder through various mechanisms. The studies have demonstrated that while not all children who are overvalued will develop this personality disorder but it can be a contributing factor. Secondly, the studies have shown that families that lack clear and consistent boundaries can contribute to the development of narcissistic behavior in their children. In families without clear boundaries, children may not be held accountable for their actions. They may not experience consistent consequences for their behavior. As a result, they may not learn to take responsibility for their actions and develop a sense of entitlement.

The studies have also shown that emotional neglect in childhood can contribute to the development of Narcissistic Personality Disorder through its impact on a child's emotional and psychological development. While emotional neglect is just one of several potential contributing factors to the problem, it can play a significant role in shaping narcissistic traits and tendencies. Emotional neglect involves parents or caregivers failing to provide emotional support, warmth, and nurturing to the child. When children do not receive the emotional validation and affection they need, they may develop a sense of emptiness and insecurity. The studies have also shown that perfectionist parenting, characterized by excessive pressure to achieve high standards and unrelenting expectations can contribute to the development of narcissistic traits and Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Additionally, the studies have also demonstrated that a lack of empathy within a family can contribute to the development of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in an individual, as well as create a family environment where narcissistic traits are more likely to flourish. In addition to that, the studies have shown that parental favoritism can potentially lead to the development of narcissistic traits in children. This favoritism can have a significant impact on a child's self-esteem and interpersonal dynamics.

It is important to note that not all individuals raised in these family environments will develop Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The development of the disorder is complex and individual personality development is influenced by a combination of genetic, environmental, and personal factors. Furthermore, not all individuals who exhibit narcissistic traits will meet the diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

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