

Patterns of Parental Warmth, Attachment, and Narcissism in Young Women in United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom

Minna Lyons* & Keith Morgan

Liverpool Hope University

Justin Thomas & Amani Al Hashmi

Zayed University

**Minna Lyons; The University of Liverpool; Eleanor Rathbone Building; Bedford Street South; Liverpool L69 7ZA; m.lyons@liverpool.ac.uk (email).*

ABSTRACT - Few studies have looked at the relationship between parenting styles and narcissistic traits across cultures. We investigated parental influences and attachment in the development of narcissistic traits in two female student samples from the United Kingdom ($n = 78$) and the United Arab Emirates ($n = 70$). The UAE students scored significantly higher than the UK students on all of the three Narcissistic Personality Inventory subscales. Higher scores on the Entitlement/Exploitativeness facet was best explained by culture and low paternal care. Culture was a significant moderator between Grandiose Exhibitionism and preoccupied attachment, and Leadership Authority and secure attachment. Our results highlight the importance of investigating cross-cultural parenting influences in narcissism, as narcissism is likely to be affected by cultural differences in parenting practices.

Meta-analytical and empirical studies suggest that self-centered, narcissistic personality traits have been rising across the globe over the past few decades (Cai, Kwan, & Sedikides, 2012; Twenge et al., 2008; although see also Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008). The “narcissism epidemic” is observable in increase in the scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Twenge et al., 2008), in the content of pop song lyrics (DeWall et al., 2011), self-centered use of words and phrases in books (Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012) and in decrease in dispositional empathy (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011). Narcissism has been linked to characteristics of a culture (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003), and the change in narcissistic dispositions could have a direct relationship with cultural change (Cai et al., 2012), which is often fuelled by economic development (Hamamura, 2012). Despite a mushrooming of research into generational and cultural differences in narcissism, the proximate causes of these differences are still unclear.

Parenting practices have been proposed as one of the main proximate factors in the development of narcissistic predispositions (Thomaes, Bushman, De Castro, & Stegge, 2009). For instance, Konrath et al. (2011) suggested that changes in parenting styles could explain the generational decrease in empathy and increase in narcissism. However, empirical findings regarding childhood experiences and narcissism are confusing and

often contradict each other. Some studies have found that parental warmth links to higher scores on the NPI instrument (Horton, Bleau, & Drwecki, 2006), while others have suggested parental coldness and lack of empathy act as a developmental trigger leading to inflated views of self, often as a form of self-defense (Cater, Zeigler-Hill, & Vonk, 2011; Otway & Vignoles, 2006; Trumper, Watson, O'Leary, & Weathington, 2008). Further, parenting may have differential influence on different aspects of narcissism, highlighting the importance of investigating narcissism as a multi-faceted construct (Jonason, Lyons, & Bethell, 2014). Most studies on narcissism and parenting have concentrated on westernised, industrialized cultures. This is unfortunate, as parenting style is culturally constructed, and the outcome of parenting is largely dependent on the culture (Dwairy, 2008; Harkness & Super, 1995; Xinyin et al., 1998).

In the present study, we are interested in looking at the importance of recalled parenting and attachment styles in the individual differences in the NPI instrument in two different cultures. To do so, we are utilizing female student samples from a western, industrialized nation, the United Kingdom (UK), and the rapidly developing, Arabian Gulf nation, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). With the commencement of oil revenues in the 1960s, the Arabian Gulf states, that would later unify and form the UAE, have witnessed unprecedented economic and social developments. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2006) suggests that few nations on earth have gone through such complete and far-reaching change over the past few decades. This affluence has brought about change in the family structure, for example, an increase in the rate of polygamy, and in the marriage of Emirati men to non-Emirati women (Dresch, 2005). A related familial consequence is the reliance on nannies and domestic help. In the post oil-era, having maids and nannies has become a social norm amongst Emirati families, and there are serious concerns expressed about the effects foreign nannies may be having on the development of the UAE's children (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). In the wake of all this socio-economic transition, there has undoubtedly been an increased prevalence of chronic lifestyle disorders, such as diabetes, and hypertension. Such rapid change is also likely to have consequences for psychological health (Eapen et al., 2006), and possibly, increased narcissism too.

Here, we are investigating cultural differences between the UK and UAE, as well as the influences of recalled parental care and adult attachment styles in sub-facets of the NPI instrument. As the study is exploratory in nature, we are not making any specific predictions. However, based on previous suggestions of the relationship between economic growth, cultural change, and narcissism (Hamamura, 2012), we are expecting that the UAE sample scores higher than the UK sample on the NPI instrument.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants were 70 UAE ($M = 19.71$, $SD = 2.33$) and 78 UK ($M = 21.04$, $SD = 5.52$) women, recruited from psychology seminar groups in two universities. Participants received a course credit for their participation, and the testing was implemented in groups of 10-20 students at the end of a seminar session. Participants were informed that the research is about personality and childhood experiences with parents, and a full debrief was provided after completing the paper and pen questionnaires.

Materials

Narcissism was measured with the 40-item, forced-choice Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Participants had to choose between high narcissism (I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so) and low narcissism (When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed) options. Participants get a point for each high narcissism choice, and these points are averaged to create an overall narcissism index ($\alpha = .82$). In the present study, we report the three-factor solution recommended by Ackerman et al. (2011), including facets of Leadership/Authority (LA; $\alpha = .72$), Entitlement/ Exploitativeness (EE; $\alpha = .72$), and Grandiose Exhibitionism (GE; $\alpha = .50$).

Recollections of parental care were measured by 24 care items from the 4-point Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979). The scale has 12 items reserved for the mother or mother figure ($\alpha = .84$) and 12 for the father, or father figure ($\alpha = .83$). Participants are asked to recall their parents (or parental figures) up until the age of 16, and rate them on statements such as "My mother was affectionate to me" or "My mother seemed emotionally cold to me".

Attachment styles were measured with the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The RQ scale is a brief self-report measure of adult attachment styles, consisting of four vignettes describing feelings in inter-personal relationships, scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1=not like me at all, 7=very much like me). The styles can be analyzed as separate dimensions of secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful attachment. For the UAE sample, all the scales were translated by native speakers using the back-translation method.

Results

In Table 1, we report descriptive statistics and group differences for the variables. In table 2, we show the cross-correlations between the parental care and attachment measures, and the subscales of NPI.

There were statistically significant cultural differences in all of the facets of narcissism, UAE students scoring higher on EE, GE, and LA than UK students did. Furthermore, the UAE sample scored higher on recalled parental care, as well as preoccupied attachment styles.

Next, we run cross-correlations for each sample on the attachment measures and narcissism sub-scales. In Table 2, we show that father care had a negative relationship to the EE facet of the NPI in the UAE, but not in the UK sample. Preoccupied attachment related to the GE and EE facets, but only in the UK sample. Finally, fearful attachment style correlated positively with the EE facet, but only in the UK sample.

Fisher's *z* tests were used to test whether culture moderates the relationships between the attachment measures, and the three sub-facets of narcissism. Significant moderations were found between GE and preoccupied attachment (Fisher's $z = -1.59$, $p = .05$), indicating that the development of GE links to preoccupied attachment, but only in the UK participants. Furthermore, LA and secure attachment were moderated by the culture (Fisher's $z = 1.71$, $p = .04$). In the UAE sample, lower scores on LA linked to secure attachment, whereas the opposite pattern was observed for the UK sample.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and t-tests Between UAE and UK on Narcissism and Attachment Measures

	UAE		UK		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
NPI-LA	.41	(.22)	.32	(.25)	2.22*	0.17
NPI-GE	.39	(.22)	.23	(.23)	4.27**	0.71
NPI-EE	.34	(.27)	.16	(.24)	4.21**	0.70
Mother Care	37.84	(6.70)	28.54	(8.37)	7.45**	1.53
Father Care	37.85	(6.70)	24.78	(9.60)	9.58**	1.57
Secure	5.00	(1.75)	4.73	(1.55)	0.95	0.16
Dismissive	4.34	(1.59)	4.14	(5.01)	0.32	0.05
Preoccupied	3.98	(1.72)	3.03	(1.70)	3.47**	0.56
Fearful	4.18	(1.98)	3.85	(1.83)	1.07	0.17

Note. LA= Leadership/Authority, GE= Grandiose Exhibitionism, EE= Entitlement/Exploitativeness.

p* < .01 *p* < .001

Table 2
Cross-Correlations Between the Narcissism Sub-Facets and Attachment Measures for UK and UAE

	UAE LA	UK LA	UAE GE	UK GE	UAE EE	UK EE
Mother Care	-.06	.07	.17	.01	-.04	.05
Father Care	.01	.11	-.19	-.05	-.24*	-.13
Secure	-.15	.14	-.13	.05	-.07	-.10
Dismissive	.05	-.11	.14	-.10	.06	-.08
Preoccupied	-.05	.05	.03	.29*	.07	.27*
Fearful	-.14	.09	-.02	.07	.06	.26*

Note. LA= Leadership/Authority, GE= Grandiose Exhibitionism, EE= Entitlement/Exploitativeness.

p* < .01 *p* < .001

In order to isolate the relative importance of culture, attachment and parental care on the NPI subscales, we run three regression analyses, where LA, GE and EE were the outcome variables (See Table 3 for Beta values). None of the variables were significant predictors of the LA. GE was significantly predicted by culture, namely, the UAE sample. The beta values indicate that although there was a non-significant trend between low paternal and high maternal care in the development of GE, only culture reached

statistically significant values. Both culture (being UAE) and low paternal care were significant predictors of EE.

Table 3
Beta-Values for the Narcissism Sub-Facets (Outcome) and Predictors of Culture, Attachment Styles and Parental Care

	β		
	LA	GE	EE
Culture	-.14	-.31**	-.35**
Mother Care	-.06	.19	.15
Father Care	.13	-.19	-.23*
Secure	-.02	-.02	-.04
Dismissive	-.07	-.00	-.01
Preoccupied	.01	.17	.14
Fearful	-.10	-.05	.08

Note. 1 = UAE, 2 = UK

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$

Discussion

Our results show that recollections of parental care and attachment styles relate to the sub-facets of the NPI differently depending on the culture. Students from the UAE scored significantly higher than the UK students on Grandiose Exhibitionism, Leadership/Authority, Entitlement/Exploitativeness, recalled parental care and preoccupied attachment styles. In both samples, recollections of low paternal care related to higher scores on the EE facet, but this reached statistical significance only in the UAE sample. Culture moderated some of the relationships, for example, in the UAE sample, LA was related to higher secure attachment, but in the UK sample, an opposite pattern was found. Furthermore, the regression analyses suggested that neither culture nor parenting explained the LA facets of the NPI, and that culture (being from the UAE) explained some variance in the GE facet, and culture (being from UAE) and low paternal care were significant predictors of the EE facet.

The higher NPI scores of the UAE students is an interesting finding, and somewhat contradicts Foster et al. (2003), who found that their European sample had overall higher narcissism scores than their Middle-East sample. However, their study combined several regions in the Middle-East, which is an economically, and some would argue culturally, heterogenous area. The higher scores on the NPI in the UAE could be linked to rapid, recent economic development, and perhaps a shift from collectivist to individualist culture. Previous research has found that collectivist values predict lower narcissism (Foster et al., 2003; Ghorbani et al., 2004). Further evidence for this comes from a

longitudinal study on a sample of American women. Roberts and Helson (1997) found that a transformation from collectivist to individualist personality styles coincided with cultural change, and suggested that higher individualism and narcissism could function as a coping mechanism in adjusting to the change in the traditional female roles. Women in the Middle-East are facing challenges at many levels. On the one hand, rapid economical development has allowed more women to enter in work places and educational establishments. On the other hand, women still face many barriers in employment (Gallant & Pounder, 2008), and may be viewed in a negative way by the more traditional members of the society (Elamin & Omair, 2010). It is possible that in our UAE female student sample, the narcissism scores were especially elevated as more male-like, agentic social styles could be a coping mechanism in the changed societal context.

Interestingly, low recalled paternal care had a relationship with elevated scores in the entitlement and exploitive inter-personal orientation components of the NPI instrument. Although the correlation reached significance only in the UAE sample, the same trend was found in the UK participants. This is an interesting finding, especially as EE has been considered as one of the maladaptive facet of narcissism (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011), and has previously been linked to harsh parental discipline (Cater et al., 2011). There are several possible explanations for this relationship, all of which demand further investigation. Predictions from the psychoanalytical literature, for example, suggest that the lack of a nurturing father figure contributes to resentment and feelings of entitlement, due to the need to compensate for the suffering caused by the father (Bishop & Lane, 2000). Furthermore, the outcome of sub-optimal paternal contribution also depends on the behavior of the mother, and how the mother compensates for the absence or coldness of the father (Bishop & Lane, 2000). However, empirical research is needed to test these predictions.

Socio-economic status (SES) could also be a confounding factor between low recalled paternal warmth and sense of entitlement. Alderman (2001) suggested that growing up in an affluent family, with minimal parental presence, can contribute to development of an unhealthy sense of entitlement. The extensive use of maids and nannies in the childcare of the UAE children (Bristol-Rhys, 2010), coupled with increase in affluence, could explain our finding of low care and culture contributing to scores in the EE facet. Future studies should address the relationship between SES and parental care in the development of narcissistic sense of entitlement further. This could be useful for investigators interested in the “narcissism epidemic” (e.g., Twenge et al., 2008), too, as the purported generational differences could, proximately, be caused by the interplay between increase in affluence and change in parenting practices.

We found that the Leadership/Authority component, which has been considered as an adaptive facet of narcissism (Ackerman et al., 2011) had a culture-dependent relationships to secure attachment. In the UAE sample, secure attachment style was related to low scores on the LA facet, whereas in the UK, the opposite pattern was observed. In a previous study on university students in the US, positive aspects of parenting related to heightened scores on the LA subscale (Trumpeter et al., 2008). The results from our UK sample mirrored the same, whereas the UAE participant’s scores suggest that in a non-western sample, LA may be more maladaptive, and stem from a low attachment security. This underscores the importance of cross-cultural investigations into

the developmental factors of adaptive and maladaptive narcissism, as these can take different meanings in different cultural contexts.

We also found that grandiose exhibitionism, another putative adaptive facet of the NPI (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011) had a relationship with elevated scores on preoccupied attachment style, but only in the UK participants. This somewhat contradicts previous findings (e.g., Rohmann, Neumann, Herner, & Bierhoff, 2011) that have suggested that grandiosity is linked to lower scores on insecure attachment styles. However, in another study in an adult student sample, preoccupied attachment was related to inconsistent maternal care and negative self-evaluations (Wearden et al., 2008). Preoccupied attachment style may have origins in parental care, and parental coldness and over-evaluation, in turn, could lead to higher scores on exhibitionism (Otway & Vignoles, 2006).

Our study has obvious limitations. Because of the correlational, cross-sectional nature of our data, it is difficult to infer causality. Although it is possible that aspects of narcissistic personality stem from childhood experiences, it is equally possible that narcissistic individuals have a bias when recalling their childhood, as previous research has linked narcissism to biased memory for past romantic relationships (Rhodewalt & Eddings, 2002). It is also possible that our data are confounded with cultural differences in response bias, for example, in impression management and self-deceptive enhancement (Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006), which could provide an explanation for the apparent cultural differences between UK and the UAE. Longitudinal studies as well as parent reports would be beneficial in investigating the aetiologies of narcissism in the cross-cultural context.

In conclusion, the present study demonstrated that there are cultural differences in both narcissism and parental care, and that there may be relationships between rapid cultural change and higher narcissism scores in the UAE population, in a similar way observed in modern China (Cai et al., 2012). Thus, we provided some, albeit indirect, evidence for the narcissism epidemic. Some aspects of narcissism have probably different aetiologies, depending on the interplay between cultural context and parenting styles. Our findings highlight the importance of cross-cultural research into the understanding of factors that contribute to the development of narcissism, as the scores on the NPI are likely to vary as function of culture and parenting styles.

Author Note

We would like to thank Mrs Rita Moore for assisting in data collection for the United Kingdom sample

References

- Ackerman, R.A., Witt, E.A., Donnellan, M.B., Trseniewski, K.H., Robins, R.W., & Kashy, D.A. (2011). What does the narcissistic personality inventory really measure? *Assessment, 18*, 67-87.
- Aderman, E.M. (2001). Growing up in an affluent family: unique psychosocial issues for the adolescent. *Adolescent Medicine, 12*, 379-388.

- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L.M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *61*, 226-244.
- Bishop, J., & Lane, R.C. (2000). Father absence and the attitude of entitlement. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, *30*, 105-117.
- Bristol-Rhys, J. (2010). *Emirati Women*. London: C.Hurst & Co.
- Cai, H., Kwan, V., & Sedikides, C. (2012). A sociocultural approach to narcissism: The case of modern China. *European Journal of Personality*, *26*, 529-535.
- Cater, T.E., Zeigler-Hill, V., & Vonk, J. (2011). Narcissism and recollections of early life experiences. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *51*, 935-939.
- DeWall, C.N., Pond, R.S., Campbell, W.K., & Twenge JM. (2011). Tuning in to psychological change: Linguistic markers of psychological traits and emotions over time in popular U.S. song lyrics. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *5*, 200-207.
- Dresch, P. (2005). Debates on Marriage and Nationality in the United Arab Emirates. In P. Dresch & J. Piscatori (Eds). *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and identity in the Arab states of the Gulf*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Dwairy, M.A. (2008). Parental inconsistency versus parental authoritarianism: Associations with symptoms of psychological disorders. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *37*, 616-626.
- Eapen, V., Mabrouk, A. A., & Bin-Othman, S. (2006). Disordered eating attitudes and symptomatology among adolescent girls in the United Arab Emirates. *Eating Behaviors*, *7*, 53-60.
- Elamin, A.M., & Omair, K. (2010). Males' attitudes towards working females in Saudi Arabia. *Personnel Review*, *39*, 746 – 766.
- Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K., & Twenge, J. M. (2003). Individual differences in narcissism: Inflated self-views across the lifespan and around the world. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *37*, 469–486.
- Gallant, M., & Pounder, J.S. (2008). The employment of female nationals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE): An analysis of opportunities and barriers. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, *1*, 26 – 33.
- Ghorbani, N., Watson, P.J, Krauss, S.W, Bing, M.N, & Davison, H.K (2004). Social science as dialogue: Narcissism, individualist and collectivist values, and religious interest in Iran and the United States. *Current Psychology*, *23*, 111-123.
- Hamamura, T. (2012). Are cultures becoming individualistic? A cross-temporal comparison of individualism-collectivism in the United States and Japan. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *16*, 3-24.
- Harkness, S., & Super, C. M. (1995). Culture and parenting. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Biology and ecology of parenting* (Vol. 2, pp. 211–234). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Horton, R.S., Bleau, G., & Drwecki, B. (2006). Parenting Narcissus: What Are the Links Between Parenting and Narcissism? *Journal of Personality*, *74*, 345-376.
- Jonason, P.K., Lyons, M., & Bethell, E. (2014). The making of the Darth Vader: Parent Child care and the Dark Triad. *Personality and Individual Differences*.

- Konrath, S.H., O'Brien, E.H., & Hsing, C. (2011). Changes in dispositional empathy in American college students over time: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *15*, 180-198.
- Lalwani, A.K., Shavitt, S., & Johnson, T. (2006). What is the relation between cultural orientation and socially desirable responding? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *90*, 165-178.
- Otway, L.J., & Vignoles, V.L. (2006). Narcissism and childhood recollections: A quantitative test of psychoanalytical predictions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*, 104-116.
- Parker, G., Tupling, H., & Brown, L.B. (1979). A parental bonding instrument, *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, *52*, 1-10.
- Raskin, R., & Terry, H. (1988). A principal-component analysis of the narcissistic personality inventory and further evidence of its construct validity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *54*, 890-902.
- Rhodewalt, F., & Eddings, S. (2002). Narcissus reflects: Memory distortion in response to ego-relevant feedback in high- and low-narcissistic men. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *36*, 97-116.
- Roberts, B.W., & Helson, R. (1997). Changes in culture, changes in personality: The influence of individualism in a longitudinal study of women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *72*, 641-651.
- Rohmann, E., Neumann, E., Herber, M.J., & Bierhoff, H-W. (2011). Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism; Self-Construal, Attachment, and Love in Romantic Relationships. *European Psychologist*, *16*, 1-12.
- Thomaes, S., Bushman, B.J., De Castro, B.O., & Stegge, H. (2009). What makes narcissist bloom? A framework for research on etiology and development of narcissism. *Development and Psychopathology*, *21*, 1233-1247.
- Trumpeter, N.N., Watson, P.J., O'Leary, B.J., & Weathington, B.L. (2008). Self-functioning and perceived parenting: Relations of parental empathy and love inconsistency with narcissism, depression and self-esteem. *Journal of General Psychology*, *169*, 51-71.
- Trzesniewski, K.H., Donnellan, M.B., & Robins, R.W. (2008). Do Today's Young People Really Think They Are So Extraordinary? An Examination of Secular Trends in Narcissism and Self-Enhancement. *Psychological Science*, *19*, 181-188.
- Twenge, J.M., Campbell, W.K., & Gentile, B. (2012). Increases in Individualistic Words and Phrases in American Books, 1960-2008. *PLoS ONE*, *7*, e40181.
- Twenge, J.M., Konrath, S., Foster, J.D., Campbell, W.K., & Bushman, B.J. (2008). Egos inflating over time: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the narcissistic personality inventory. *Journal of Personality*, *76*, 875-899.
- Wearden, A., Peters, I., Berry, K., Barrowclough, C.H., & Liverside, T. (2008). Adult attachment, parenting experience, and core beliefs about self and others. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *44*, 1246-1257.
- WHO. (2006). Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and the United Arab Emirates 2005-2009 (Vol. 1). Cairo: WHO

Xinyin, C., Hastings, P.D., Rubin, K.H., Chen, H., Cen, G., & Steward, S.J. (1998). Child-rearing attitudes and behavioural inhibition in Chinese and Canadian toddlers: A cross-cultural study. *Developmental Psychology*, 34, 677-686.