

Original article / Araştırma**God complex: the effects of narcissistic personality on relational and sexual behavior****Ayten ZARA,¹ Burçak ÖZDEMİR²****ABSTRACT**

Objective: The present research examines the association between narcissistic personality and sexuality, and what the consequences of this association might be in relation to the perceived parental attitudes. Additionally, it explores the role of narcissism within the context of romantic relationships. **Methods:** This study consisted of 267 young adults between ages 19 to 38 with a mean age of 25.85 years. **Results:** A series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the association between narcissism, romantic relationships, and sexuality after controlling the possible effects of perceived parental attitudes. Results revealed a significant association of narcissism with romantic relationships, and sexual behavior, indicating that people with narcissistic personality have a strong tendency in sexual permissiveness. The narcissism also found to be an important factor in predicting relational esteem, relational monitoring, internal relational control, relational assertiveness and relational anxiety. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study shed a light on the association between narcissistic personality, parental attachment, close relationships and sexuality. Mental Health specialist working with narcissistic personalities need to work on the sexual relationship dynamics as well as the influence of maternal overprotection on intimate relationships. (*Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry* 2018; 19(1):29-36)

Key words: narcissistic disorders, narcissistic personality, perceived parental attitudes, romantic relationships, and sexuality

Tanrı kompleksi: Özsever kişiliğin romantik ilişkiler ve cinsellik üzerine etkisi**ÖZ**

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, özsever kişilik ve cinsel davranışlar arasındaki ilişkiyi ve bu ilişkinin algılanan aile tutumlarıyla bağıntıyı araştırmaktır. Bu çalışma ek olarak, özsever kişiliğin yakın duygusal ilişkilerdeki rolünü de irdelemektedir. **Yöntem:** Çalışmaya, yaşları 19-38 arasında değişen, yaş ortalaması 25.85 olan 267 genç yetişkin katılmıştır. **Sonuçlar:** Algılanan aile tutumlarının etkisi kontrol edilerek, özseverlik, romantik ilişkiler ve cinsellik arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek için hiyerarşik analizler uygulanmıştır. Analizlere göre, özseverliğin romantik ilişkiler ve cinsellik ile anlamlı bir bağı vardır. Özsever kişilik özellikleri gösteren bireylerin cinsel onaylayıcılığa yüksek düzeyde eğilimlerinin olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Ayrıca özseverlik ilişkide kendine güven, ilişkiyi ayarlama, içsel ilişki kontrolü, ilişki girişkenliği ve ilişki kaygısı değişkenlerini öngörmede önemli bir etken olarak bulunmuştur. Ruh sağlığı uzmanlarının özsever kişilerle yakın ilişkilerde cinsel davranışların ve anne-baba kontrolünün yakın ilişki üzerindeki etkilerinin çalışılması gerekir. (*Anadolu Psikiyatri Derg* 2018; 19(1):29-36)

Anahtar sözcükler: Özsever bozukluklar, özsever kişilik, algılanan aile tutumları, romantik ilişkiler, cinsellik

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INTRODUCTION

Narcissism or another name god complex is defined as arrogance, extreme self-centeredness, a great need to be loved and admired by others, grandiose fantasies as well as envy, lack of interest and empathy for others.¹ Individuals with narcissistic vulnerabilities may function very well in their social or work lives but they have significant problems in their romantic and sexual relationships. People with narcissistic personality frequently idealize and devalue their partners. They are attracted to individuals who admire their traits such as beauty, attractiveness, success or fame.² The narcissistic people are prone to deny other people as a separate person and find difficult to accept the natural boundaries of interpersonal relationships which then results in pain of loneliness and alienation.³

Narcissistic people display less commitment and attention toward alternative partners that mediate the link between commitment and narcissism.⁴ Their relationships have a game-playing pattern and this pattern is a result of a need for power and autonomy.⁵ They are attracted by individuals who can enhance the narcissistic sense of self-worth but less attracted by caring individuals.⁶ They tend to give stronger reactions to perceived rejections than non-narcissists⁷ and feel more anxious because of their incapacity to cope with their negative view of self,⁸ and place greater importance upon physical pleasure rather than emotional intimacy due to lack of commitment capacity.⁹

Studies also attempted to explore the narcissistic personalities in relation to a number of interpersonal dynamics. For instance, narcissism was found to be positively related with extraversion and openness to experience and negatively related with agreeableness¹⁰ and neuroticism.¹¹ Narcissistic people perceive themselves as more intelligent¹² and more confident than non-narcissists,¹³ show unstable self-esteem¹⁴ and their self-esteem is sensitive to external validation,¹⁵ report delinquency, overt aggression and relational aggression,¹⁶ exaggerated number of sexual partners,¹⁷ and sexual aggression.¹⁸

Parenting practices have been accepted as preliminary factor in the narcissistic development. A few studies investigated the relationship between parental attachment patterns and narcissism suggested that narcissism is related with attachment anxiety.^{8,7,19} However, some studies on the relationship between grandiose narcissism and parental attachment have provided

conflicted associations. A recent study has indicated that narcissism is negatively correlated with attachment avoidance¹⁹ whereas others found positive correlation between narcissism and attachment avoidance²⁰ and positive correlation between narcissism and preoccupied attachment.²¹

As summarized, because narcissism is associated with poor relationship functioning in a variety of ways, it is important to uncover the roots of these associations. That is, why are narcissistic romantic partners less committed, less faithful, and less emotionally intimate? One important domain of relationships is that of sexuality and perceived parental attitudes.

METHODS

Participants

There were 170 females (61.6%) and 106 males (38.4%) participants with the ages ranged from 19 to 38 years (25.85 ± 3.58). Participants were asked to evaluate their relationship satisfaction on a scale of 1 (lowest satisfaction) and 10 (highest satisfaction). Female participants' relationship satisfaction score was 7.74 ± 1.62 , whereas male participants' relationship satisfaction score was 7.52 ± 1.88 . The detailed information about participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables	n	%
Marital status		
Single	269	97.8
Widowed/divorced	6	2.2
Educational level		
Primary school	0	0
Secondary school	1	0.4
High school	8	2.9
University	174	63.3
Postgraduate	86	31.3
Doctorate	6	2.2
Socioeconomic status		
Lower	9	3.3
Middle	229	83.6
Upper	36	13.1
Current residency		
Family	157	56.9
Friend/relative	51	18.5
Girl/boyfriend	12	4.3
Alone	56	20.3

Measures

Demographic Information Form: It was used to collect background data such as age, gender, educational level, marital status, work, family information and psychiatric history, relationship history and the self-evaluation of participant's relationship.

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI): Turkish adaptation of NPI²² was used to evaluate the narcissistic tendencies in nonclinical population. Each item has two statements and the participant will choose one of each statement. NPI includes factors that indicate basic components of narcissism-authority, exhibitionism, superiority, vanity, exploitation, entitlement and self-sufficiency.²³ Alpha coefficients for the total scale was found as 0.84. Test-retest reliability was also found as 0.89. The construct validity of NPI was found as 0.55. In the present study, internal consistency of NPI was found as 0.83.

Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI): Turkish adaptation of Parental Bonding Inventory²⁴ was used to evaluate the quality of parental bonding. The PBI has two forms (mother form and father form) and each form has 25 items. It is required that participants rate the four-point Likert type scale according to first 16 years of his/her life. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.87 for mother and 0.89 was for father form. The overprotection subscale's Cronbach's alpha value was 0.70 for both forms whereas, care/control subscale's value was 0.90 for mother, and was 0.91 for father form. Test-retest reliability of care/control subscale was 0.91 for mother and 0.90 for father form whereas it was found that the reliability of overprotection subscale was 0.64 for mother and 0.78 for father form.

The Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ): The Turkish adaptation of Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire²⁵ was used to assess the dynamics of intimate relationships. MRQ has 60 items with five-point Likert-type scale. Items range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It has 12 subscales. The internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 and test-retest reliability coefficient was 0.80. Split-half reliability was 0.83. The factor analysis also resulted in 53 items and eight factors-relational esteem, internal relational control, external relational control, relational assertiveness, relational monitoring, relational anxiety/fear, relational satisfaction, and focus on relation extremely.

The Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS): The

adaptation of Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale²⁶ aims to assess the sexual attitudes of person. BSAS aims to assess the sexual attitudes. It is comprised 23 items with five-point Likert-type scale. Items range from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). BSAS has four subscales - permissiveness, birth control, communion and instrumentality. Permissiveness subscale indicates acceptance of casual sex with many partners. Birth control subscale represents responsible sexuality. Communion subscale indicates idealistic sexual attitudes regarding sex as a closest form of communication. Instrumentality subscale represents self-centered and physical orientation to sexuality. The validation of BSAS was found acceptable. Internal consistency of BSAS was found as 0.85. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of four subscales were found as following: permissiveness ($\alpha=0.86$), birth control ($\alpha=0.84$), instrumentality ($\alpha=0.69$), communion ($\alpha=0.66$).

Procedure

The data was collected via convenient sampling through both online and individual resources. Completion of survey package took approximately 20-25 minutes. Each participant were given brief information about study, the informed consent form, and assured the confidentiality of their answers.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis of the sample

Before the main analyses, descriptive characteristics of the sample were investigated. Descriptive analyses for the sample can be found in Table 2.

Relationships among predictor variables with narcissistic personality

Results of Pearson's correlation test revealed that mother overprotection was positively related to mother-care, $r_{(265)}=0.42$, $p<0.01$, positively related to father overprotection, $r_{(265)}=0.44$, $p<0.05$, and positively related to father-care, $r_{(265)}=0.25$, $p<0.01$. All correlations between NPI and PBI can be found in Table 3.

Results of Pearson's correlation test revealed that relationship satisfaction level was negatively related with relational anxiety, $r_{(143)}=-0.24$, $p=0.003$, whereas positively related with relational esteem, $r_{(143)}=0.30$, $p<0.001$ and internal relational control, $r_{(143)}=0.17$, $p=0.042$, and that relationship satisfaction level was positively

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Table 2. Means, standard deviations and ranges of the continuous variables

Variables	Mean±SD	Range
Age	25.85±3.58	19-38
Relationship satisfaction	7.67±1.71	1-10
NPI	13.73±6.18	0-33
PBI-mother care	39.59±9.60	8-54
PBI-mother overprotection	12.40±4.56	0-21
PBI-father care	35.27±11.97	1-54
PBI-father overprotection	13.98±4.52	0-21
MRQ-satisfaction	29.89±8.13	10-45
MRQ-anxiety	23.32±6.93	11-46
MRQ-esteem	18.76±3.31	10-25
MRQ-monitoring	11.53±4.57	5-25
MRQ-external control	11.60±3.83	4-20
MRQ-internal control	12.99±2.55	6-20
MRQ-assertiveness	14.63±3.44	4-20
MRQ-focus	38.71±9.37	14-60
BSAS-permissiveness	28.56±8.84	10-50
BSAS-communion	11.94±2.57	4-18
BSAS-instrumentality	14.39±3.30	5-25
BSAS-birth control	13.34±1.77	6-15

related with sexual communion, $r_{(265)}=0.21$,

$p=0.013$. It has been found that anxiety negatively correlated with relational esteem, $r_{(265)}=-0.49$, $p<0.01$ whereas positively related with monitoring, $r_{(265)}=0.47$, $p<0.01$ and positively related with external relational control, $r_{(265)}=0.38$, $p<0.01$ and negatively related with internal relational control, $r_{(265)}=-0.23$, $p<0.01$. Anxiety also negatively related with assertiveness, $r_{(265)}=-0.45$, $p<0.01$ and positively related with focus of relation, $r_{(265)}=0.26$, $p<0.05$. All correlations between MPI and MRQ can be found in Table 4.

It has been found with Pearson's correlation test that permissiveness negatively related with birth control, $r_{(265)}=-0.14$, $p<0.05$, and positively related with instrumentality, $r_{(265)}=0.29$, $p<0.01$. There was also a negative correlation between birth control and instrumentality, $r_{(265)}=-0.20$, $p<0.01$. All correlations between NPI and BSAS can be found in Table 5.

Narcissism and perceived parental attitudes as predictor variables

Prior to regression analyses, a series of Pearson's correlation analyses were calculated to determine the association between narcissism and other variables in the present study.

As hypothesized in the present study, the hierar-

Table 3. Pearson correlations between NPI and PBI

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. NPI	1.0	-0.036	-0.051	-0.023	-0.053
2. Mother overprotection		1.0	0.42**	0.44*	0.25**
3. Mother-care			1.0	0.31**	0.50**
4. Father overprotection				1.0	0.29**
5. Father-care					1.0

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Table 4. Pearson's Correlations between NPI and MRQ

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. NPI	1.0	0.11	-0.17*	0.34**	0.13*	0.00	0.31**	0.24**	0.15
2. Satisfaction		1.0	-0.57*	0.49**	-0.25*	-0.32**	0.35**	0.35**	0.19**
3. Anxiety			1.0	-0.49**	0.47**	0.38**	-0.23**	-0.45**	0.26*
4. Esteem				1.0	-0.13*	-0.13*	0.46**	0.40**	0.23**
5. Monitoring					1.0	0.31**	-0.09	-0.30*	0.39**
6. External						1.0	-0.04	-0.15*	0.24**
7. Internal							1.0	0.40**	0.11
8. Assertiveness								1.0	-0.04
9. Focus									1.0

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Table 5. Pearson's correlations between NPI and BSAS

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. NPI	1.0	-0.26**	0.05	0.12*	-0.10
2. Permissiveness		1.0	-0.14*	-0.07	0.29**
3. Birth control			1.0	-0.04	-0.20**
4. Communion				1.0	-0.08
5. Instrumentality					1.0

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

chical regression analyses were performed separately to see whether participants' narcissism scores predicted the love and sexual attitudes. A two-stage hierarchical regression was conducted for each criterion variables.

Sexual attitudes

Regression model with small effect size and explained the 6.2% of the variance, $t_{(264)} = -4.17$, $\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.001$. This shows that higher narcissism was associated with lower sexual permissiveness scores. (Note that, lower scores on sexual permissiveness indicate higher permissive attitudes). This finding shows that higher narcissism indicates higher permissive attitudes. The hierarchical regression analysis for sexual communion revealed that, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes did not contribute significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.019$, $F_{(4,259)} = 1.28$, $p = 0.278$. However, among perceived parental attitudes, father overprotection had a significant relationship with sexual communion, $t_{(264)} = -2.02$, $\beta = -0.14$, $p = 0.045$, indicating higher father overprotection was associated with lower sexual communion (Note that, higher parental overprotection score indicates less overprotective attitudes). At stage two, narcissism did not contribute significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.027$, $F_{(5,258)} = 1.43$, $p = 0.213$. For the sexual permissiveness, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes did not contribute significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.016$, $F_{(4,259)} = 1.04$, $p = 0.387$. At stage two, narcissism contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.078$, $F_{(5,258)} = 4.35$, $p = 0.001$.

Multidimensional relationship

The hierarchical regression analysis for relational anxiety revealed that, at stage one, mother overprotection was the only significant predictor of relational anxiety, $t_{(265)} = -3.01$, $\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.003$. At stage two, narcissism contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.101$, $F_{(5,259)} = 5.80$, $p < 0.001$. The regression model

with small effect size explained the 3.5% of the variance, $t_{(265)} = -3.16$, $\beta = -0.19$, $p = 0.002$. This suggests that higher narcissism was associated with lower relational anxiety.

The hierarchical regression analysis for relational esteem revealed that, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes did not contribute significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.013$, $F_{(4,258)} = 0.86$, $p = 0.487$. At stage two, narcissism contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.126$, $F_{(5,257)} = 7.44$, $p < 0.001$, contributing the regression model with small effect size and explained the 11.3% of the variance, $t_{(263)} = 5.77$, $\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$. That is, higher narcissism was associated with higher relational esteem.

For relational monitoring revealed that, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.060$, $F_{(4,260)} = 4.15$, $p = 0.003$. However, not all of the predictors were significant in the analysis. Mother overprotection was the only significant predictor of relational monitoring at stage one, $t_{(265)} = -0.293$, $\beta = -0.21$, $p = 0.004$, indicating that lower mother overprotection was associated with higher relational monitoring (Note that, lower scores on the parental overprotection indicate higher overprotective attitudes). At stage two, narcissism contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.081$, $F_{(5,259)} = 4.56$, $p = 0.001$, contributing the regression model with small effect size and explained the 2.1% of the variance, $t_{(265)} = 2.42$, $\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.016$. This indicates that higher narcissism was associated with higher relational monitoring.

For internal relational control revealed that, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2 = 0.036$, $F_{(4,260)} = 2.44$, $p = 0.048$. Mother care/control was the only significant predictor of internal relational control at stage one, $t_{(265)} = 1.99$, $\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.048$, indicating that higher mother care/control was associated with higher internal

relational control. At stage two, narcissism contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2=0.124$, $F_{(5,259)}=7.33$, $p<0.001$, contributing the regression model with small effect size and explained the 8.8% of the variance, $t_{(265)}=5.10$, $p<0.001$. This shows that higher narcissism was associated with higher internal relational control.

In terms of the relational assertiveness, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2=0.056$, $F_{(4,260)}=3.89$, $p=0.004$. Mother overprotection was the only significant predictor of relational assertiveness at stage one, $t_{(265)}=2.69$, $\beta=0.19$, $p=0.008$, showing that higher mother overprotection was associated with higher relational assertiveness (Note that, higher scores on the parental overprotection indicated lower overprotective attitudes). At stage two, narcissism contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2=0.124$, $F_{(5,259)}=7.33$, $p<0.001$, indicating that narcissism contributed the regression model with small effect size and explained the 6.8% of the variance, $t_{(265)}=4.47$, $\beta=0.26$, $p<0.001$. This shows that higher narcissism was associated with higher relational assertiveness.

Finally for the relational focus, at stage one, perceived parental attitudes contributed significantly to the regression model, $R^2=0.037$, $F_{(4,258)}=2.50$, $p=0.043$. Mother overprotection was the only significant predictor of relational focus at stage one, $t_{(263)}=-2.76$, $\beta=-0.20$, $p=0.006$, indicating that lower mother overprotection was associated with higher relational focus (Note that, lower scores on the parental overprotection indicate higher overprotective attitudes). At stage two, narcissism did not contribute significantly to the regression model, $R^2=0.051$, $F_{(5,257)}=2.75$, $p=0.057$.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the role of narcissistic personality in the relationship between sexuality and perceived parental attitudes. The findings of this investigation suggest that individuals with narcissistic personalities tend to have more casual sex with many partners. This suggest that sex to a romantic partner high in narcissism appears to be characterized by higher individuality rather than shared intimacy.^{4,5} As suggested by Kernberg² that narcissistic people have a strong tendency in sexual permissiveness. Although narcissistic people place greater importance upon physical pleasure rather than emotional intimacy,⁹ the findings shows that sex is the

closest form of communication between two people as well as sex is a very important part of life. It may be argued that narcissistic people downplay the importance of emotional intimacy, instead focusing more on physical pleasure.

With regards to the exploration of the operation of narcissism within the context of close relationships, the findings suggest that narcissistic people are less interested in communal qualities, such as warmth, caring, or nurturing.²⁷ For example, narcissistic people self-focused rather than focused on others that means that they care primarily about their own wants and needs rather than needs and wants of partners and others. They have a positive evaluation their own relational capacity and can be more assertive as compared to their partners, suggesting a strong interest in dominance, power, and excitement.

As suggested, although narcissistic people tend to view relationships as arenas for bolstering themselves, sometimes even at the expense of their partners,^{4,5} feel rather anxious and fearful about their relationships. This may be explained by the fact that narcissistic individuals tend to prefer romantic partners who make them feel powerful or raise their social status rather than partners who provide emotional intimacy or warmth.⁵ Especially, ones who perceived their mothers overprotective and controlling, tend to feel more anxious and highly self-conscious about their romantic relationships. These findings suggest that mother's overprotection has a strong impact in shaping children's relational emotions and attitudes. It could be argued that narcissism was a kind of defense against the aversive feelings of loss and abandonment experienced during childhood.⁹

Although perceived parental attitudes did not predict sexual attitudes, father overprotection was associated with sexual communion. This suggests that perceiving fathers as overprotective has impact on experiencing sexuality without emotional commitment for people with high narcissism.

The findings of this study should be interpreted with the limitations. First limitation is based on narcissism scale. Original form of narcissism scale has seven subscales. However, factor structures have been changed and only total scores can be considered in Turkish scale. Moreover, narcissism can be regarded as healthy narcissism, pathological narcissism, narcissistic defenses or narcissistic vulnerability. In the present study, narcissism was measured by only one scale. Because of the narrow

operationalization of narcissism, the results are limited. Another limitation based on the sample characteristics. Majority of the participants comprised female students, between the ages of 21 to 29, from middle and high socioeconomic status. The sample might not be representative of larger population.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the current study have important clinical implications. This study revealed a general concept to improve relationship of people with narcissistic

personalities, which is to minimize the negative effects of narcissism on sexual and emotional attachment. Mental health professionals need to gain insights into relational patterns that creates conflicts from present study to help narcissistic people's relational problems. Working with narcissistic people requires a narrow focus on sexual dynamics of, as well as the influence of maternal overprotection on intimate relationships.

Authors' contributions: A.Z.: Finding the theme, searching literature, statistical analysis and writing the manuscript, B.O.: Finding the theme, searching literature, statistical analysis collecting the data and writing the manuscript.

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