

INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NARCISSISM AND EMOTION REGULATION DIFFICULTIES: THE ROLE OF GRANDIOSE AND VULNERABLE TRAITS

Rossella Di Pierro, Marco Di Sarno, Fabio Madeddu

Abstract

Objective: Whilst the relationship between narcissism and emotion regulation is a topic of great interest, little is known about the nature of this association. The aim of the present study is to clarify the relationship of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism with difficulties in emotion regulation, controlling for the effect of borderline personality traits.

Method: Narcissistic traits, borderline personality traits and difficulties in emotion regulation were assessed in 293 non clinical participants (72.7% women, $M = 26.99$, $SD = 9.13$)

Results: Narcissistic vulnerability was associated with difficulties in accessing emotion regulation strategies, and in understanding, accepting and being clear about emotional states. Borderline personality traits were associated with difficulties in inhibiting impulsive emotional responses and in accomplishing goal directed behaviours during negative emotional states. Narcissistic grandiosity was not associated with any difficulties in emotion regulation.

Conclusions: These findings clarified the relationship between narcissism and emotion regulation, highlighting the importance of considering both grandiose and vulnerable manifestations of pathological narcissism. Research and clinical implications are discussed.

Key words: pathological narcissism, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, emotion regulation

Declaration of interest: none

Rossella Di Pierro, Ph.D.; Marco Di Sarno; Fabio Madeddu, M.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Milano-Bicocca, Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo, 1 - 20126 Milano, Italy.

Corresponding author

Rossella Di Pierro, Department of Psychology, University of Milano-Bicocca,
Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo, 1 - 20126 Milano
E-mail: rossella.dipierro@unimib.it

Introduction

Empirical research interest in narcissism has steeply increased over time, providing arising evidence of its multifaceted associations with several aspects of pathological functioning, both in clinical and nonclinical samples. A relatively recent acquisition considers pathological narcissistic traits as defined by at least two manifestations: grandiosity and vulnerability (Pincus et al. 2009).

One of the main obstacles in obtaining a deeper acknowledgement of pathological narcissistic functioning has been the predominance of the taxonomic approach to the study of narcissism for a long time. Indeed, criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD; APA 2013) describe exclusively behavioural expressions of narcissistic grandiosity, neglecting vulnerable narcissistic manifestations. Recently, clinicians have suggested that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissistic traits might coexist within the same individual (Ronningstam 2009, Pincus et al. 2014), and recent studies have provided preliminary evidence of such fluctuations (Gore and Widiger 2016). After all, considering both the phenotypic manifestations of narcissism might be particularly useful to increase our knowledge about pathological narcissistic functioning.

One of the most relevant issues in studying pathological narcissism is its association with emotion

regulation capabilities: the way individuals experience and respond to negative emotional states (Gratz and Roemer 2004, Werner and Gross 2010). Difficulties in the ability to adaptively cope with challenging emotions have shown to be both a symptom and a risk-factor for personality pathology (Berkin and Wupperman 2012), and some authors consider narcissistic pathology itself as a disturbed pattern of self and affect regulation (e.g., Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). Previous studies showed that individuals high in narcissistic traits react to negative feedback with great fluctuations in self-esteem, anxiety and anger (Kernis and Sun 1994, Smalley and Stake 1996, Rhodewalt and Morf 1998, Stucke and Sporer 2002, Zeigler-Hill et al. 2010). Moreover, Miller and colleagues found significant associations between narcissistic vulnerability and neuroticism, depression, angry hostility, anxiety, and reactive anger in both samples of ungraduated students (Miller et al. 2011, Miller and Maples 2011, Miller et al. 2013a) and psychiatric outpatients (Miller et al. 2008). Very similar results have been found on the associations between vulnerable narcissism and emotional instability (Jakšić et al. 2014), high emotionality and social sensitivity (Fossati et al. 2014), and internalizing symptoms in community samples (Pincus et al. 2009, Malkin et al. 2011, Thomas et al. 2012). Moreover, Russ et al. (2008) found that clinicians describing NPD patients with vulnerable manifestations reported significantly

higher symptoms of depression and anxiety than when describing NPD patients with grandiose manifestations. Overall, these findings suggest that impaired emotion regulation abilities are related to vulnerable narcissism, whereas the relationship between grandiose narcissism and proneness to negative emotions is still controversial. Studies among ungraduate students have found significant associations between grandiose narcissistic traits and negative affectivity (Thomas et al. 2012, Wright et al. 2013), while others have found no significant association between them (e.g., Miller et al. 2011). The relationship between traits of pathological narcissism and difficulties in regulating negative emotions has been demonstrated also by a recent neuroscientific study (Mao et al. 2016). Among college students, individuals high in narcissism showed lower cortical volume and thickness of some areas implied in emotion regulation (e.g. the right dorso-lateral-prefrontal-cortex) than people low in narcissism. Despite this, the specific role played by vulnerable and grandiose traits of narcissism is still unclear. Only few studies investigated the association of both vulnerable and grandiose narcissism with difficulties in emotion regulation. Recently, Altmann (2017) has shown that maladaptive strategies of emotion regulation, such as emotional suppression, were positively associated with vulnerable narcissistic traits in a large community sample. Similarly, recent studies have found that difficulties in emotion regulation were significantly associated with only vulnerable narcissistic traits (Zhang et al. 2015), while no significant associations were found between grandiose narcissistic traits and emotion dysregulation (Zeigler-Hill and Vonk 2015, Zhang et al. 2015). Despite still limited in number, these preliminary findings suggest that the relationship between emotion regulation and narcissistic functioning is complex and primarily related to vulnerable manifestations of narcissism. After all, none of these studies has considered borderline personality traits when investigating the link between narcissism and emotion regulation.

The importance of considering borderline personality traits to better understand which is the link between narcissistic functioning and emotion regulation impairments is due to two main reasons. First, emotion dysregulation is one of the most widely recognized mechanisms underlying borderline personality pathology (Gratz et al. 2016). Empirical studies showed that borderline personality traits were generally related to lack of emotional clarity, difficulties in accepting negative emotional experiences, and the tendency to react impulsively when experiencing negative emotions (Kuo and Linehan 2009, Beblo et al. 2010). Secondly, it is noteworthy that NPD often co-occurs with borderline personality disorder (Levy et al. 2009), and some studies showed a strong association between vulnerable narcissism and BPD traits (Miller et al. 2010). In particular, recent studies (Krueger et al. 2012, Wright et al. 2013, Miller et al. 2013b) have found that narcissistic vulnerability was strongly associated with the negative affect domain of the Alternative DSM-5 Model for personality disorders (APA 2013), which is the main domain of maladaptive personality traits describing BPD. In this sense, it is important to consider the presence of borderline traits in order to clarify the relationship between narcissistic functioning and emotion regulation.

On the basis of the existing literature, the aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between narcissistic traits and emotion regulation. Specifically, we studied whether narcissistic traits might be related

to difficulties in emotion regulation, controlling for co-occurring borderline personality traits. Finally, we investigated which manifestation of narcissistic traits (i.e. grandiose and vulnerable) might be related to such difficulties. In particular, we expected that vulnerable narcissism would be related to difficulties in emotion regulation, whereas grandiose narcissism was not. Moreover, we expected to find different patterns of associations of vulnerable narcissism and borderline personality traits with emotion regulation impairments. In particular, we hypothesized that difficulties in inhibiting impulsive behaviours when experiencing negative emotions would be associated with the presence of borderline traits rather than vulnerable narcissistic traits.

Method

Participants

The study involved 293 Italian nonclinical adult participants (213 females, 80 males) taken from the general population, with a mean age of 26.99 (SD = 9.13; range = 18 – 60). The majority of participants were single (N = 219; 74.7%), 24.6% (N = 72) were married, and 0.9% (N = 2) were separated or divorced. The mean education level of participants was 14.48 (SD = 2.78) years. One hundred and twenty-one participants (41.3%) reported to have a university degree or higher and the 58.7% (N = 172) of participants reported to have a high-school level of education or below. Finally, the majority of participants were university students (N = 144; 49.1%), 42.0% of participants (N = 123) were employed, and only 8.9% of participants (N = 26) were unemployed.

Measures

The *Pathological Narcissism Inventory* (PNI; Pincus et al. 2009) is a 52-item self-report measure which assesses both two phenotypic manifestations of narcissism (Wright et al. 2010). Narcissistic Grandiosity (NG) is described by dimensions of Exploitative, Grandiose Fantasy and Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement; whereas Narcissistic Vulnerability (NV) is described by dimensions of Contingent Self-Esteem, Hiding the Self, Devaluing and Entitlement Rage. All the items use a 6-point response format that ask respondents to indicate how well each statement describes themselves (from 0 = not at all like me; to 5 = very much like me). In the present study, both NG and NV showed good internal consistency (NG: $\alpha = .85$; NV: $\alpha = .93$).

The *Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale* (DERS, Gratz and Roemer 2004) is a 36-item self-report measure designed to assess multiple aspects of emotional dysregulation. Specifically, it measures six dimensions: (a) Non-acceptance of Emotional Responses (Non-Acceptance); (b) Difficulties Engaging in Goal-Directed Behavior (Goals); (c) Impulse Control Difficulties (Impulse); (d) Lack of Emotional Awareness (Awareness); (e) Limited Access to Emotion Regulation Strategies (Strategies); and (f) Lack of Emotional Clarity (Clarity). The participants were asked to indicate how often the items were applied to them, with responses ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Higher scores in DERS reflect greater emotion regulation difficulties. In the present study, Cronbach's alphas of the DERS scales ranged from .83 to .90.

The *Borderline Personality Disorder Checklist* (BPDCL, Arntz et al. 2003) is a 47-items self-report measure of the patient's burden of complaints about borderline personality disorder symptoms in the previous month according to *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition, text revision (DSM-IV-TR) criteria. In the present study, the BPDCL shows good internal consistency ($\alpha=.96$).

Procedure

Participants were invited to participate in this study through mass e-mail and announcements or postings on Internet websites. All participants voluntarily decided to complete self-reports questionnaires after they read and accepted the informed consent form. All materials and procedures were approved by the Ethical Committee of the University of Milano-Bicocca.

Statistical analyses

All analyses were performed using SPSS 21.0 (IBM 2012). Descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the sociodemographic characteristics of participants. Three-step Hierarchical Multiple Linear regression analyses were conducted to investigate the associations between narcissistic traits (both vulnerable and grandiose traits) and difficulties in emotion regulation, controlling for the effect of age, gender and borderline personality traits. For each difficulty in emotion regulation as dependent variable, we conducted three step regression analyses: in the first step, we included gender and age as predictors (Model 1); in the second step we added borderline personality traits (Model 2); in the third step, we added grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Model 3).

Results

The mean, SD and correlations of the DERS dimensions, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism and borderline traits are reported in **table 1**. As expected, the DERS dimensions were significantly correlated with each other; also, narcissistic traits

and borderline personality traits were positively correlated. Finally, correlation analyses showed that narcissistic traits (both grandiose and vulnerable) were positively correlated with all difficulties in emotion regulation, except for the Awareness dimension, whereas borderline personality traits were significantly correlated (positively) with all the DERS dimensions.

Results from hierarchical regression analyses are reported in **table 2**. Narcissistic traits significantly predicted the Non acceptance dimension of the DERS. Model 3 explained more variance than both Model 1 and Model 2. Borderline traits ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) and vulnerable narcissistic traits ($\beta = .35, p < .001$) were positively associated with the Non acceptance dimension, whereas narcissistic grandiosity did not show a significant association with the Non acceptance dimension ($\beta = -.10, p = .11$). That is, the higher were both borderline traits and vulnerable narcissistic traits, the more individuals had difficulties in accepting experiences of negative emotions.

Again, narcissistic traits significantly predicted the Awareness dimension of the DERS. Model 3 explained more variance than both Model 1 and Model 2. Grandiose narcissistic traits ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$) and vulnerable narcissistic traits ($\beta = .20, p < .05$) were significantly associated with the Awareness dimension, whereas borderline traits did not show a significant association with the Awareness dimension ($\beta = .12, p = .08$). That is, the higher were vulnerable narcissistic traits, the more individuals had difficulties in being aware of their negative emotions; at the same time, the higher were grandiose narcissistic traits, the less individuals had difficulties in being aware of such emotions.

Moreover, narcissistic traits significantly predicted the Strategies dimension of the DERS. Model 3 explained more variance than both Model 1 and Model 2. As shown in **table 2**, borderline personality traits ($\beta = .56, p < .001$) and vulnerable narcissistic traits ($\beta = .21, p < .01$) were positively associated with the Strategies dimension, whereas grandiose narcissistic traits showed a negative association with the Strategies dimension ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$). That is, the higher were borderline and vulnerable narcissistic traits, the more individuals had difficulties in using adaptive strategies when experiencing negative emotions; but the higher

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Correlations of the DERS dimensions, narcissistic grandiosity, narcissistic vulnerability and borderline personality traits

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
(1) Non acceptance	2.03	.90	(.88)								
(2) Goals	2.70	1.05	.52**	(.88)							
(3) Impulse	1.75	.76	.56**	.57**	(.84)						
(4) Aware	2.58	.91	.06	.01	.20**	(.83)					
(5) Strategies	2.08	.90	.65**	.73**	.67**	.08	(.90)				
(6) Clarity	2.17	.91	.46**	.43**	.50**	.39**	.56**	(.85)			
(7) NG	3.30	.70	.21**	.18**	.12*	-.10	.18**	.18**	(.85)		
(8) NV	2.96	.73	.51**	.39**	.37**	.09	.49**	.49**	.60**	(.93)	
(9) BPT	1.48	.50	.55**	.48**	.63**	.14*	.66**	.67**	.30**	.61**	(.96)

N = 293; Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) appear on the diagonal.

NG= Narcissistic Grandiosity; NV= Narcissistic Vulnerability; BPT= Borderline personality traits.

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

Table 2. Results from Hierarchical Regression analyses

DV	IV	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
		B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
NonAcceptance	Gender	-.24*	.12	-.12	-.14	.10	-.07	-.10	.10	-.05
	Age	-.01	.01	-.08	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00	.04
	BPT				.99***	.09	.55	.67***	.11	.38
	NG							-.13	.08	-.10
	NV							.43***	.09	.35
	<i>R</i> ²		.02			.31			.37	
	<i>F</i>		2.86			43.99***			33.50***	
ΔR^2					.29***			.05***		
Goals	Gender	-.10	.13	-.04	-.01	.12	-.00	.02	.12	.01
	Age	-.03***	.01	-.26	-.02***	.01	-.18	-.02**	.01	-.18
	BPT				.95***	.11	.45	.79***	.13	.38
	NG							-.13	.10	-.09
	NV							.25*	.11	.17
	<i>R</i> ²		.07			.27			.28	
	<i>F</i>		10.64***			35.00***			22.18***	
ΔR^2					.20***			.01		
Impulse	Gender	-.10	.10	-.06	-.01	.08	-.00	.01	.08	.01
	Age	-.01	.00	-.10	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00	-.00
	BPT				.48***	.03	.63	.48***	.04	.64
	NG							-.07	.04	-.10
	NV							.03	.05	.04
	<i>R</i> ²		.01			.40			.40	
	<i>F</i>		1.68			63.72***			38.94***	
ΔR^2					.39***			.01		
Awareness	Gender	.43***	.12	.21	.46***	.12	.22	.54***	.11	.26
	Age	-.01	.01	-.06	-.00	.01	-.03	-.01	.01	-.07
	BPT				.28**	.10	.15	.22	.13	.12
	NG							-.40***	.09	-.31
	NV							.25*	.10	.20
	<i>R</i> ²		.05			.07			.13	
	<i>F</i>		7.70**			7.60***			8.57***	
ΔR^2					.02**			.06***		
Strategies	Gender	-.16	.12	-.08	-.05	.09	-.02	-.00	.09	-.00
	Age	-.02**	.01	-.18	-.01	.00	-.07	-.01	.00	-.07
	BPT				.59***	.04	.65	.51***	.05	.56
	NG							-.12*	.05	-.14
	NV							.19**	.06	.21
	<i>R</i> ²		.04			.44			.46	
	<i>F</i>		5.40**			76.52***			49.52***	
ΔR^2					.41***			.02**		
Clarity	Gender	.11	.12	.05	.23*	.09	.11	.28**	.09	.14
	Age	-.02***	.01	-.25	-.01**	.00	-.13	-.01**	.00	-.14
	BPT				1.19***	.08	.66	1.05***	.09	.58
	NG							-.24**	.07	-.18
	NV							.28***	.08	.22
	<i>R</i> ²		.07			.48			.51	
	<i>F</i>		10.26***			90.55***			60.10***	
ΔR^2					.42***			.03***		

N= 293; DV = dependent variable; IV = independent variable; BPT = Borderline personality traits; NG = Narcissistic Grandiosity; NV = Narcissistic Vulnerability.

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

were grandiose narcissistic traits, the more easily individuals could use adaptive strategies when experiencing negative emotions.

The model including narcissistic traits was also significantly associated with the Clarity dimension of the DERS. Model 3 explained more variance than both Model 1 and Model 2. Specifically, borderline personality traits ($\beta = .58, p < .001$) and vulnerable narcissistic traits ($\beta = .22, p < .001$) were positively associated with the Clarity dimension, whereas grandiose narcissistic traits showed a negative association with the Clarity dimension ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$). That is, the higher were borderline and vulnerable narcissistic traits, the more individuals had difficulties in having clear perceptions of their negative emotions; but the higher were grandiose narcissistic traits, the more clearly individuals could perceive their negative emotions.

Finally, narcissistic traits were not significantly associated with other difficulties in emotion regulation. As shown in **table 2**, the regression model including narcissistic traits (Model 3) was significant for both the Goals and the Impulse dimensions, but it did not significantly improve prediction when compared to Model 2 (Goals scale: R^2 change = .01, F change = 2.53, $p = .08$; Impulse scale: R^2 change = .01, F change = 1.47, $p = .23$). Considering results of Model 2, borderline personality traits showed to be positively associated with both the Goals ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and the Impulse ($\beta = .63, p < .001$) dimensions.

Discussion

The present study investigated the association between difficulties in emotion regulation and narcissism in a nonclinical sample. Despite some evidences of emotion regulation impairments in patients with narcissistic personality disorder (Ronningstam 2016), empirical literature on this topic is still lacking and previous studies have shown relevant limitations. The majority of studies did not include both the phenotypic manifestations of narcissism (i.e. narcissistic grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability), probably because of their recent recognition in the psychiatric field (APA 2013). Furthermore, recent studies examining emotion regulation impairments in narcissists have not considered overlapping features between pathological narcissism and borderline personality. Although there are meaningful differences between narcissists and borderline individuals in their intrapsychic functioning (Kernberg 1975), vulnerable narcissism and borderline personality have often shown similar emotional impairments such as emotional lability (Miller et al. 2010, Baskin-Sommers et al. 2014).

Consistent with our hypotheses, results suggest that narcissistic functioning involves only some aspects of emotion dysregulation, and such impairments seem to be specifically related to vulnerable narcissistic traits rather than grandiose ones. Findings showed that individuals with high levels of vulnerable narcissistic traits reported some difficulties in regulating emotions, whereas individuals with high levels of narcissistic grandiosity showed preserved regulatory abilities. In this sense, our results supported previous data widely reporting associations between vulnerable narcissism and emotional lability, negative affectivity, and internalizing symptoms, but no relationship between such difficulties and narcissistic grandiosity (Dickinson and Pincus 2003, Given-Wilson et al. 2011, Miller et al. 2011, Miller et al. 2013b, Wright et al. 2013).

Partly confirming results from Zhang et al. (2015), we found specific associations between narcissistic vulnerability and some emotion regulation difficulties: non-acceptance of emotional responses, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, lack of emotional clarity and lack of emotional awareness. When vulnerable manifestations of narcissism are present, the use of adaptive strategies to modulate intensity and duration of negative emotions might become extremely difficult, leading individuals to feelings of being unable to exert control over internal states. Similarly, when individuals with high vulnerable narcissistic traits experience negative emotions, they are generally unable to tolerate them, so that they may feel upset or they can feel guilty, ashamed and irritated by them. Finally, individuals with high vulnerable narcissistic traits seem to have difficulties in understanding and in being clear about their own feelings, so that they generally feel confused and cannot make sense out of them.

Additionally, differently from previous studies (Given-Wilson et al. 2011, Zhang et al. 2015), the possibility to distinguish between vulnerable narcissistic traits and borderline personality traits allowed us to demonstrate that some emotion regulation impairments were specifically related to borderline personality traits rather than vulnerable narcissism. In particular, borderline personality traits were mainly related to lack of ability to manage one's impulses and to direct efforts and behaviors towards relevant objectives during negative emotions, whereas vulnerable narcissism was not. This result is in line with the conceptualization of borderline personality pathology in DSM-5 (APA 2013) and empirical research findings (Kuo and Linehan 2009, Beblo et al. 2010) showing that both impulsivity and affect dysregulation are the core features of borderline personality functioning. Indeed, as stated by Carpenter and Trull (2013), individuals high in borderline personality traits are more prone to engage in impulsive or risky behaviours, such as self-injurious behaviours, when experiencing intense negative emotions. Furthermore, some authors (Brown et al. 2002) showed that people with BPD feel usually overwhelmed by negative emotions, experiencing intense grief instead of sadness, and shame instead of mild embarrassment. In this sense, it could be that negative emotional experiences might lead people with high borderline personality traits to feel so overwhelmed that they are unable to accomplish and to concentrate on tasks, often engaging in impulsive behaviours in order to obtain relief from such emotions.

Notably, findings from the present study provide evidence that there is more to vulnerable narcissism than just an overlap with borderline traits. Despite the similarities that have been highlighted between the two personality traits (Miller et al. 2010), this study suggests that vulnerable narcissism has specific correlates in terms of emotion dysregulation that do not only depend on the co-occurrence of borderline personality features. In particular, borderline personality traits showed to be univocally related to impulsive reactions and difficulties in accomplishing goals when experiencing negative emotional states; whereas vulnerable narcissistic traits showed to be univocally related to difficulties in paying attention to emotional experiences. That is, while individuals with borderline traits are usually burdened by negative emotional states, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits usually do not care about what they are feeling. Such emotional detachment reported by individuals with high vulnerable narcissistic traits might be explained by the need to preserve their self-image from the effect of negative emotional states.

Indeed, vulnerable narcissists are characterized by increased sensitivity to ego-threats which often lead them to avoid possible painful experiences, such as the avoidance of interpersonal relationships because of possible social rejection (Kohut and Wolf 1978, Akhtar 2003, Dickinson and Pincus 2003, Ronningstam 2005). As with social avoidance, the emotional detachment reported by individuals with high levels of vulnerable narcissism could be explained as the attempt to avoid ego-threats. Indeed, studies showed that individuals' self-esteem and self-efficacy usually decrease when experiencing negative emotions (Huang and Zhang 2010, Gang et al. 2011).

Finally, narcissistic grandiosity was not related to any difficulty in emotion regulation in the present study. Overall, this result confirms previous studies showing a significant association between narcissistic grandiosity and adaptive strategies of emotion regulation, using the DERS (Zeigler-Hill et al. 2015, Zhang et al. 2015), as well as other emotion regulation measures (e.g. Altmann 2017). Specifically, we found that narcissistic grandiosity was associated with preserved abilities in being aware and in clearly perceiving negative emotions. Our study also showed that individuals with high grandiose narcissistic traits were able to access to adaptive regulation strategies when experiencing challenging emotions. Contrary to vulnerable narcissism, it is likely that grandiose facets of narcissism, which are associated with presentation of positive self-images based on feature of performance, leadership, or success, require a certain ability to cope with emotions (especially negative emotions) in order to maintain control in stressful situations.

From a clinical point of view, the different patterns of associations between the two narcissistic manifestations and difficulties in emotion regulation might explain what is frequently observed in clinical settings. Clinicians frequently report oscillations between grandiose and vulnerable manifestations in narcissistic patients during psychotherapy treatment (Ronningstam 2009, Pincus et al. 2014), but treatment-seeking narcissistic patients will often ask for contact with providers exclusively when they are in a more vulnerable state (Ellison et al. 2013). In a sense, the present study demonstrates that only vulnerable manifestations of narcissism are related to difficulties in tolerating and modulating negative emotions. It is possible that these difficulties bring out emotional distress that individuals can not handle, promoting seek for help in order to obtain relief from the suffering they are experiencing.

The results of the present study can be better understood in light of its limitations. First, participants were predominantly females. Despite this, the imbalance seemed not to affect our results. Considering the possible influence of gender on difficulties in emotion regulation, regression analyses were conducted controlling for its effect. However, after controlling for the effect of gender, results showed significant associations between narcissism and emotion regulation difficulties. Finally, only self-report instruments were administered to participants in the present study. Given the aim of the present study, it is possible that self-report measures might be influenced by social desirability. In particular, participants with grandiose narcissistic traits might exaggerate positive aspects and minimize negative ones. Future studies using different assessment methods such as clinical interviews, informant ratings, and behavioral or laboratory measures are needed. These assessment methods might address the effects of social desirability in the study of the relationship between narcissism and emotion regulation capabilities.

In spite of these limitations, the present study sheds new light on the multifaceted relationship between emotion regulation and pathological narcissism. It provides further evidence for the clinical utility of considering both grandiose and vulnerable manifestations in the study of the construct and its correlates, as well as for the need to distinguishing between vulnerable narcissistic traits and borderline personality traits. As shown, vulnerable narcissism and borderline personality may have some overlapping psychological aspects of functioning, but significant differences exist between the two distinct personality styles.

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