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An Examination of Narcissism and Schadenfreude within the Framework of Self-Esteem, Social Comparison and Envy

Narsisizm ve Başkasının Talihsizliğine Sevinme Duygusunun (Schadenfreude)Benlik Saygısı, Sosyal Karşılaştırma ve Haset Duygusu Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

This review study aims to investigate the correlation between narcissism and schadenfreude (the pleasure gained from the misfortunes of others). In this regard, literature investigating the concepts of narcissism and schadenfreude was reviewed. Despite the similarities among the terms self-esteem, envy, and social comparison in the context of both narcissism and schadenfreude, there exists a paucity of studies investigating the relationship between narcissism, including vulnerable and grandiose, and schadenfreude. This study encompasses definitions of narcissism and schadenfreude, as well as concepts of self-esteem, social comparison, and envy, which elucidate their interrelationship, alongside findings from various studies exploring the connection between narcissism and schadenfreude from multiple perspectives. This review study culminated in an examination of the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude, discussing the findings and offering recommendations for future research and mental health professionals.

Keywords: Narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, grandiose narcissism, schadenfreude

ÖZ

Bu gözden geçirme çalışmasında narsisizm ile başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme (schadenfreude) duygusu arasındaki ilişkinin değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda alanyazındaki narsisizm ve başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme kavramlarını inceleyen araştırmalar taranmıştır. Hem narsisizm hem de başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme duygusu ile çalışırken ele alınan kavramlar (benlik saygısı, haset ve sosyal karşılaştırma) benzer olsa da bu iki kavramın ilişkisinin incelendiği çok az çalışma olduğu görülmüştür. Mevcut çalışmada narsisizm ve başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme kavramlarının tanımlarına, aralarındaki ilişkiyi açıklamada kullanılan benlik saygısı, sosyal karşılaştırma ve haset kavramlarına ve narsisizm ve başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme duygusu arasındaki ilişkiyi farklı yönleriyle ele alan araştırmaların bulgularına yer verilmiştir. Son olarak, yapılan bu derleme çalışması neticesinde narsisizm ve başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme duygusu arasındaki ilişkiyi ele alan araştırmalar ve sonuçları tartışılmış; ayrıca gelecekte yapılacak araştırmalara ve ruh sağlığı çalışanlarına önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Narsisizm, kırılgan narsisizm, büyüklenmeci narsisizm, başkasının talihsizliğine sevinme

Introduction

The term narcissism, which means self-love, exaggerated self-perception, and self-serving prejudice, was first used by Havelock Ellis in 1898 (Pulver 1970, Sedikes 2020). Ellis approaches the term narcissism within the scope of auto-eroticism and associates it with the mythological character Narcissus, who fell in love with his reflection in the water and, after being unable to reciprocate his love, continued to watch his reflection until he died. In the following years, narcissism became a term frequently included in literary and artistic work, and it was studied by many theorists, especially psychoanalytic theorists (Freud 1914, Kohut 1971, Kernberg 1975).

Wink (1991), who was one of the first personality researchers to acknowledge the differences in the use of the term narcissism, to draw attention to the dual nature of narcissism and to provide evidence supporting it, defined the two dimensions of narcissism as grandiosity-exhibitionism and vulnerability-sensitivity. While grandiose narcissism includes the desire to maintain an exaggerated self-perception, the aspiration to attract

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attention, and a strong need for the admiration of others, vulnerable narcissism involves low self-esteem, high levels of anxiety, and oscillations between feelings of superiority and inferiority (Miller et al. 2010). It can be seen in the literature that there are studies examining the relationship between the term narcissism and self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill et al. 2010, Barry et al. 2017), empathy (Hepper et al. 2014, Urbonaviciute and Hepper 2020), social comparison (Krizan and Bushman 2011, Wang 2019), envy (Krizan and Johar 2012, Lange et al. 2016) and interpersonal relations (Wurst et al. 2017).

Schadenfreude is a word of German origin that describes rejoicing at someone else's misfortune (Van Dijk et al. 2006). The term schadenfreude was defined by Heider in 1958. As a result of the studies, it was stated that it could be expected to occur under three conditions: when the observer has something to gain from the other's misfortune, when the misfortune that happens to the other is deserved, and when the misfortune befalls an envied person (Smith et al. 2009). There are studies in the literature examining the relationship of schadenfreude with terms such as envy (Smith et al. 1996, Van Dijk et al. 2006), social comparison (Jung 2017), grudge (Feather and Nairn 2005), narcissism or The Dark Triad (Krizan and Johar 2012, James et al. 2014), self-esteem (Van Dijk et al. 2011), the pain of being inferior (second) position (Leach and Spears 2008), whether misfortune is deserved or not (Feather and Nairn 2005, Van Dijk et al. 2005).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there is no review study in English or Turkish on the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude. For this reason, the current study aims to examine the relationship between narcissism and its two dimensions (grandiose and vulnerable) and schadenfreude by examining the relevant literature.

Narcissism

Narcissism is defined in two ways in the Psychology Dictionary of the APA (American Psychiatric Association) (APA 2023). The first of these descriptions is exaggerated self-love or egocentrism; the second is, according to psychoanalytic theory, the person's acceptance of their self or body as the sexual object or the focus of their libido, or it is explained as the essential criterion of a person's relationships is being based on the similarity of the other to themselves.

The term narcissism was first used in 1898 by Havelock Ellis, and it is associated with the Narcissus myth in Greek mythology (Pulver 1970). Ellis used the word 'narcissus-like' and defined the concept as "a tendency to assimilate and often completely disappear due to self-admiration of sexual feelings, especially found in women" (Pulver 1970). Paul Näcke translated Ellis's work into German a year after its publication, using the word 'narcissism' to bring the concept to his field (Symington 1993). Narcissism has become a concept that is frequently studied in the following years by early psychoanalytic theorists (Freud 1914), object relations theorists (Kernberg 1975), and self-theorists (Kohut 1971).

Freud (1914) defines narcissism as directing one's libidinal energy towards one's self. Narcissism is part of psychosexual development and is divided into primary and secondary narcissism. Freud describes primary narcissism as a process in which grandiose emotions predominate and libidinal energy is directed towards one's self. In the process of primary narcissism, the baby realizes that the caregiver is not a part of their own and completes the primary narcissism process by developing the 'ego ideal' (Freud 1914). Secondary narcissism, conversely, is defined as the redirection of libidinal energy to the self due to the disappointment caused by being directed to external objects (Bing et al. 1959). According to Freud, primary and secondary narcissism processes are a normal part of development, and the balanced experience of these processes is of great importance for the person's development.

Kohut (1971) defines primary narcissism as the almost perfect satisfaction state that babies experience in the first years of their lives, which he describes as a regular aspect of development. This state can be interrupted unavoidably for many reasons. In ideal cases, babies overcome developmental difficulties and replace their unrealistic self-representation with realistic self-designs. Kohut defines narcissistic people as people who have not experienced this process of change and have somehow been developmentally fixed.

Kernberg (1975), sees the narcissistic personality as a pathological structure that is markedly different from normal childish narcissism and states that narcissists see others as a means to reflect their grandiose feelings. Narcissistic people lack empathy, feel competent, and can be exploitative and cruel. In addition, the feeling of envy plays an essential role in narcissistic people. According to Kernberg, these people envy others who have things they do not have or seem to be satisfied or enjoying their lives. However, narcissistic people mask the emotions they feel with shallow social accustoms.

Today, narcissism is considered on two levels: normal and pathological narcissism. The individual's self-care and self-worth are defined as normal narcissism (Sedikides et al. 2004). These narcissistic behaviors are internal and interpersonal strategies dedicated to maintaining one's self-esteem. Pathological narcissism, which is defined as narcissistic personality disorder, is the personality structure that is conceptualized by having exaggerated ideas about himself, feeling the need to be approved and liked, and not being able to empathize (Kohut 1977).

The concept of pathological narcissism was first included in the DSM-III (APA 1980). In the next edition of the DSM, it was among the Axis II disorders within the scope of the diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder (DSM-IV-TR, APA 2000). After the changes made in the axis structure in DSM-5, it started to take place as "Narcissistic Personality Disorder" under "Personality Disorders". It was defined as "a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts".

In order to be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder, at least five of the following diagnostic criteria must be met (DSM-5, APA 2013):

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance
2. Is occupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associated with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
4. Requires excessive admiration.
5. Has a sense of entitlement.
6. Is interpersonally exploitative.
7. Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
9. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

It is noteworthy that the narcissistic personality disorder diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 emphasize only the grandiose dimension of pathological narcissism. However, when the literature is examined, it is seen that the researchers draw attention to the multidimensional structure of narcissism. In his 1991 article, Wink included evidence for the dual nature of narcissism and described these two dimensions underlying the narcissistic personality as grandiose and vulnerable. Researches examining narcissism's grandiose and vulnerable dimensions are increasing daily (Dickinson and Pincus 2003, Pincus and Lukowitsky 2010, Kampe et al. 2021, Sedikides 2021).

In the researches, there are findings regarding the differentiating characteristics of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. While grandiose narcissism is defined by features such as grandiosity, arrogance, desire to attract attention, inability to see the needs of others and low level of anxiety, vulnerable narcissism is defined by features such as extreme humility, shyness, low self-esteem, high level of anxiety, thinking of suffering, which is the exact opposite of the characteristics of grandiose narcissism (Wink 1991, Miller et al. 2010, Weiss and Miller 2018). Vulnerable narcissists are perceived as shy, needy of help, and less confident because they tend to doubt and self-criticize themselves, unlike grandiose narcissists, who always seem confident (Zajenkowski et al. 2016). In addition to these characteristics, Miller et al. (2011) noted that vulnerable narcissists are more prone to developing anxiety, depression, obsession, and other psychopathologies.

When the measurement tools used in the evaluation of narcissism are examined, it is seen that the most commonly used measurement tool is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), developed by Raskin and Hall (1988). The first version of the NPI, which was developed considering Kernberg's conceptualization of grandiose narcissism and the narcissism criteria in the DSM-III, consists of 54 items. After the revision carried out by Raskin and Terry, the scale was finalized, which included 40 items and seven sub-dimensions (authority, self-sufficiency, exhibitionism, superiority, exploitativeness, vanity, and entitlement) (Raskin and Terry 1988). The Narcissistic Personality Inventory is criticized for focusing on the grandiose aspect of narcissism and neglecting its vulnerable dimension (Blashfield and Herkov 1996, Cain et al. 2008, Rosenthal and Hooley 2010).

When the evaluation tools developed to measure the vulnerable dimension of narcissism are examined, the scales frequently used by researchers are the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (Hendin and Cheek 1997) and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (Pincus et al. 2009). The Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale, developed by

Hendin and Cheek to measure only the fragile dimension of narcissism, consists of 10 items and shows close to zero correlation with NPI. The Pathological Narcissism Inventory, developed by Pincus et al., evaluates both the grandiose and vulnerable dimensions of narcissism. Grandiose narcissism consists of 4 sub-dimensions (exploitative, self-sacrificing/self-enhancement, grandiose fantasy, and entitlement rage). In comparison, vulnerable narcissism consists of 3 sub-dimensions (contingent self-esteem, hiding self, and devaluing) (Pincus et al. 2009).

Another measurement tool used in assessing narcissism is the Short Dark Triad (Jones and Paulhus 2014) scale. The Dark Triad is a personality theory published by Paulhus and Williams in 2002, consisting of three personality types (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), which are generally aggressive but not pathological. These personality traits have a common tendency regarding emotional coldness. Given the characteristics of narcissism (grandiosity, lack of empathy, self-admiration), psychopathy (low empathy and egocentrism), and Machiavellianism (cynicism, manipulation, and the view that the ends justify the means), it can be thought that the Dark Triad is associated with cold and relatively dark emotions. When the Short Dark Triad, which was developed to measure the Dark Triad personality traits, is examined, it is seen that the scale consists of 27 items in total, contains nine items that measure each personality structure, and the narcissism dimension is represented by items focusing on grandiosity and egocentrism (Jones and Paulhus 2014).

Schadenfreude

'Schadenfreude', formed by the combination of two words, is a word of German origin, and the Turkish translation of the word 'schade' is 'pity', and the translation of the word 'freude' is 'pleasure' (Erzi 2019). It is seen that emotion, translated into English as 'pleasure at the misfortunes of others' (Smith et al. 2009), has more than one translation in Turkish literature. In a small number of studies, it is seen that the term is defined as 'rejoicing in someone else's sadness' (Torun 2012, Yeniay 2012), 'rejoicing at someone else's loss' (Tatlıcıoğlu 2015, Erzi 2019). The definition of 'pleasure at the misfortunes of others' was chosen for the term 'schadenfreude', which has no common translation used by everyone. When literature was examined, it was seen that the word 'misfortunes' was frequently included in the English translation of the term, and therefore, the word misfortune was preferred to be used in the study (Van Dijk et al. 2005, Feather 2006, Cikara and Fiske 2012).

Even though schadenfreude can be expressed in a single word in different languages (in Dutch, 'leedvermaak' and in Norwegian, 'skadefryd'), the emotion has no one-word equivalent in Turkish or English (Van Dijk and Ouwerkerk 2014). Although the English word 'epicaricacy' broadly describes the emotion, it is rarely used. The word is derived from the Greek word 'epikhairekakia', and Aristotle describes the emotion of 'epicaricacy' as 'rejoicing that someone else is in pain' (Aristotle 2009). On the other hand, the term schadenfreude appeared in the German field in the mid-1700s and has been a frequently discussed concept by philosophers such as Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche (Schopenhauer 1841, Portmann 2002).

Studies Examining the Relationship Between Narcissism and the Schadenfreude

The literature review revealed that eight studies discussed the concepts of narcissism and schadenfreude. Three of these studies (Porter et al. 2014, Lee 2019, Erzi 2020b) found no relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude. In all three studies, narcissism was discussed within the scope of the Dark Triad. Even though there was a relationship between schadenfreude and total Dark Triad scores, no meaningful relationship was found between narcissism. In two other studies (James et al. 2014, Erzi 2020a) examining the relationship between the Dark Triad and schadenfreude, it was found that there is a relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude under certain conditions. Both studies found that the participants experienced schadenfreude in situations that included appropriate criteria for social comparison (academic and workplace scenarios). In one of the studies (Ginter 2006), a relationship was found between narcissism and schadenfreude, but narcissism was considered a single dimension. The study, which had a moderate relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude, stated that the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, which measures the arrogating characteristics of narcissism, was used to measure the participants' narcissism score. Finally, two of the studies (Krizan and Johar 2012, Neufeld and Johnson 2016) examined the relationship between the grandiose and vulnerable dimensions of narcissism and schadenfreude. As a result of both studies, it was seen that there was a positive relationship between vulnerable narcissism and schadenfreude. On the other hand, it has been stated that there is no relationship between grandiose narcissism and schadenfreude.

As a result, when the literature is examined, it is seen that schadenfreude is more related to vulnerable narcissism. Studies that indicate a relationship between the two concepts showed that the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude is often associated with three concepts: self-esteem (McNamee 2003, Bosson et al. 2008, Van Dijk et al. 2011b), social comparison (Bogart et al. 2004, Leach and Spears 2008, Steinbeis and Singer 2013), and envy (Feather and Nairn 2005, Krizan and Johar 2012, Lange et al. 2016). For this reason, the relationship of these three concepts with narcissism and schadenfreude is discussed in detail in the next section.

Concepts Associated with Narcissism and Schadenfreude

The examination of literature reveals that the correlation between narcissism and schadenfreude is frequently linked to self-esteem, social comparison, and jealousy. This section thoroughly evaluates the relationships among these three notions, narcissism, and schadenfreude.

Self-Esteem, Narcissism, and Schadenfreude

The concept of self-esteem, defined as the generally positive assessment of the person (Rosenberg et al. 1995, Pyszczynski et al. 2004), is one of the most frequently studied concepts in social psychology and is frequently involved in studies in clinical psychology due to its close relationship with psychopathological disorders (Bos et al. 2010, Zeigler-Hill 2011, Sowisio and Orth 2013).

The relationship between narcissism and self-esteem is first discussed in Freud's article "On Narcissism" (1914). Noting that self-esteem is a remnant of childlike narcissism and its close relationship to narcissistic libido, Freud argued that self-esteem consists of three components: the desires one wants for oneself, one's desires supported by real experiences, and the desire to love others and be loved by them. Freud often used self-esteem, an emotional concept, and narcissistic libido, an impulsive concept, interchangeably. Freud's use of the concept of narcissism as a synonym for self-esteem is commonly adopted, and self-esteem has become one of the most important meanings of the term narcissism (Pulver 1970).

In the following years, researchers put forward different ideas to explain the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem. In addition to the perspective that sees narcissism as an element in the regulation of self-esteem (Kohut 1971, Kernberg 1975), some perspectives explain a high level of narcissism as a defensive preservation of self-esteem (Reich 1960, Pulver 1970). According to Kohut (1971), adult narcissists need to establish relationships with others, similar to how a child in the early developmental stage needs their parents for their personal development. The person receives others as an extension of themself and needs others to regulate self-esteem (Levy et al. 2011). In this way, the other helps stabilize the emotional fluctuations caused by the events that the narcissist individual encounters in daily life, just as a parent helps a young child to regulate their emotions.

Reich (1960) states that narcissistic grandiose is a pathological form of regulating self-esteem. He suggests that narcissistic people fail to regulate their self-esteem as a result of their early trauma experiences and that aggression plays an essential role in regulating self-esteem. Pulver (1970), on the other hand, uses the concepts of good and bad narcissism to explain the difference between self-esteem and narcissism. Good narcissism refers to non-defensive higher self-esteem, and bad narcissism refers to egocentricity used as a defense and high admiration for oneself.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that one of the essential differences between the grandiose and vulnerable dimensions of narcissism is self-esteem. While grandiose narcissism is associated with high self-esteem (Raskin et al. 1991, Bosson et al. 2008, Zeigler-Hill et al. 2008, Miller et al. 2020, Rohmann et al. 2021, Lachowicz-Tabaczek et al. 2021), vulnerable narcissism has found to be related with low self-esteem (Dickinson and Pincus 2003, Zeigler-Hill et al. 2008, Rohmann et al. 2012, Rohmann et al. 2019, Grieve et al. 2020). In both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, individuals may have difficulty maintaining self-esteem, but they use different strategies to deal with this problem. In grandiose narcissism, people filter out the reactions of others, protect themselves from narcissistic injuries, and try to influence others with their abilities and achievements. In vulnerable narcissism, they study people intensively to understand how others will behave, avoid situations where they will feel vulnerable, and try to maintain their self-esteem (Gabbard 1989).

When the relationship between self-esteem and schadenfreude is examined, it is seen that there is a strong relationship between the two concepts, similar to the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem. People are motivated to look at themselves from a positive point of view and are concerned about maintaining this positive perspective (Sedikides and Strube 1997, Steele 1998). According to Van Dijk and his friends (2011b), the misfortune experienced by the other satisfies this critical concern in the person and arouses schadenfreude

in them. The misfortune experienced by the other gives the person an opportunity to maintain or improve their sense of self, which is one of the underlying reasons for experiencing schadenfreude. Studies comparing the tendency of people with low self-esteem and people with high self-esteem to feel schadenfreude have shown that people with low self-esteem have a higher tendency to feel this feeling (Feather 1989, McNamee 2003, Van Dijk et al. 2011b, Jung 2017).

In her study, Ginter (2006) examined the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude, and she created an experimental setup to measure the effect of the role of narcissistic people in the misfortune experienced by others on emotion. Before the start of the experiment, the participant's self-esteem and narcissism levels were measured, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) was used, which measured the grandiose dimension of narcissism. As a result of the study, a relationship was found between narcissism and schadenfreude. Participants with a high score of narcissism experienced more schadenfreude compared to the participants with a lower score. When the role of self-esteem in the schadenfreude is examined, it is stated that the concept that is effective in the emergence of this feeling is not self-esteem but narcissism. In the study, it is thought that taking measurements of only the grandiose dimension of narcissism affects the examination of the role of self-esteem, which is positively related to narcissism and schadenfreude negatively.

As a result, when researches on the relationship of the concept of self-esteem with narcissism and schadenfreude is examined, it is seen that there is a strong relationship between low self-esteem and vulnerable narcissism. It is also noted that there is a positive and robust relationship between low self-esteem and schadenfreude. Due to the strong relationship between self-esteem and social comparison, the relationship between self-esteem with narcissism and schadenfreude will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Social Comparison, Narcissism and Schadenfreude

Social comparison is defined as the tendency of people to compare themselves with others, consciously or involuntarily (Festinger 1954). According to Festinger's Theory of Social Comparison (1954), people prefer to compare themselves with others with similar ideas and skills to evaluate their ideas and skills. The similarity of the other is one of the essential conditions for social comparison. Suppose the skills and achievements of the compared other are far below or above the person's. In that case, it is impossible to compare one's characteristics correctly, and social comparisons cannot be made.

Studies in the following years have shown that social comparison is not only limited to helping one evaluate one's characteristics but is also used to develop and maintain self-esteem (Blanton et al. 2000, Tesser 2000). According to Wills (1981), when people experience misfortune or frustration, they compare themselves to others in worse conditions to feel better. This process, called downward comparison, helps the person feel better about their misfortune or bad state. On the other hand, the person's upward comparison causes feelings of envy, anger, and inferiority in the person and a decrease in their self-esteem (Tesser and Collins 1998, Muller and Fayant 2010). The fact that almost always there will be others who are more successful and resourceful than the person makes upward comparison inevitable. However, as in the downward comparison, some theories suggest that it is possible to make a positive evaluation in cases of upward comparison, that this comparison can remind the person of their goal and help them improve themselves (Thornton and Arrowood 1966, Wheeler 1966).

The concept of social comparison seems to be associated with both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. In studies discussing the grandiose dimension of narcissism, participants reported that they were negatively affected by the upward comparison and positively by the downward comparison (Bogard et al. 2004). The superior self-perceptions of individuals with grandiose narcissism and their opinion that they are in a better position compared to others make them more prone to downward social comparisons. On the other hand, vulnerable narcissistic individuals have low self-esteem and need social feedback mechanisms to perform self-assessment (Zeigler-Hill et al. 2008, Miller et al. 2010), increasing their tendency to compare upwards.

In the study in which Ozimek et al. (2018) examined the relationship between the vulnerable and grandiose narcissist individuals' use of Facebook and the theory of social comparison, they found that vulnerable narcissism was associated with Facebook use and social comparison. The fact that vulnerable narcissists need social feedback to self-assess, and because social comparisons can be made faster than everyday life through social media platforms such as Facebook, encourages vulnerable narcissists to use social media platforms more frequently (Kong et al. 2020, Kong et al. 2021).

Many studies try to explain under which conditions schadenfreude arises, and some of these studies explain the schadenfreude by using the concepts of self-assessment and social comparison (Smith et al. 2009, Van Dijk et al.

2011a, Van Dijk et al. 2017). Witnessing someone else's misfortune allows the person to compare themself with the other and allows them to preserve their self-evaluation. Having motives to maintain one's perception of oneself can cause people to make social comparisons more often and, therefore, feel more frequent schadenfreude (Van Dijk et al. 2011). Research states that people who feel a situational threat of self-assessment and therefore need to protect their perceptions of themselves experience a greater sense of schadenfreude after the misfortune that happens to the other than those who do not experience such a threat (Van Dijk et al. 2011a). In the process where the person feels a threat to their self-perception, the other's misfortune provides an opportunity for the person to protect the threatened self-perception, resulting in the experience of schadenfreude.

The studies examining the relationship between schadenfreude by creating experimental mechanisms reached similar findings. Steinbeis and Singer (2013) examined the relationship between social comparison and schadenfreude in child participants aged 7-13. Participants participated in an application that measured accelerated response times, and after each trial, participants were given feedback on their own and other contestants' performance. After the experiment, participants were asked to rate how good they felt about the results. It was observed that the participants stated that they felt better in the conditions when they won and that others lost. The loss of other competitors helped participants make a downward comparison and helped them feel better about themselves. It was seen that the degree of satisfaction in the condition when both they and other competitors won was lower compared to the first condition.

One of the most common concepts in studies in which the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude was examined is social comparison. The misfortune that happens to the other, whom the person sees as more successful themselves, causes the other to lose the advantageous position they have. Vulnerable narcissists are more likely to make upward comparisons due to their low self-esteem. However, the other's loss of its successful position provides vulnerable narcissists with the opportunity to make positive self-assessments through downward social comparison (Smith et al. 2009). In other words, the misfortune experienced by the other, whom the person sees as more successful themselves, can cause the direction of social comparison of vulnerable narcissists to change downwards.

The Dark Triad is a personality theory published by Paulhus and Williams in 2002, consisting of three personality types (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), which are generally aggressive but not pathological. James et al. (2014) conducted a study in which the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude was examined within the scope of the Dark Triad. The study conducted with 186 people presented three different scenarios to the participants whose The Dark Triad scores were measured. The people who experienced misfortune in the scenarios were chosen as a wealthy businessman, the opponent on the opposite team in a sports competition, and a co-worker. After each scenario they read, the participants were asked to rate how much fun they had, how pleased they were, how satisfied they were, and how sympathetic they felt towards these people. Participants with a high narcissism score felt schadenfreude only in one scenario, which included a co-worker who received a bad performance evaluation. This finding is similar to the findings in the literature, indicating that narcissistic individuals may make downward social comparisons (Bogard et al. 2014). Similar to the findings of Ginter's (2006) study, in this study, where the grandiose dimension of narcissism was discussed, no relationship was found between self-esteem and schadenfreude felt in three scenarios.

Erzi (2020a) examined the intermediary variables between The Dark Triad and schadenfreude in her study. The Dark Triad characteristics of the participants were evaluated using the Short Dark Triad scale, and the relationship between the two concepts was measured using social and academic scenarios. The social scenario contains the other, who gets better with the main character's friends and communicates better with them during a meeting. The academic scenario includes the other, who has a GPA similar to the main character's. In the academic scenario, the main character competes with that person in the homework prepared within the scope of a lecture. As a result of the research, it was seen that there was a positive relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude, and narcissism and schadenfreude were more meaningfully related in the scenario in the academic context.

In this section, researches on the relationship of social comparison with narcissism and schadenfreude were examined, and it was seen that vulnerable narcissists tend to make upward and grandiose narcissists tend to make a downward social comparison. However, it is also seen that the upward social comparison made by vulnerable narcissists can be turned into a downward social comparison under certain conditions (such as a misfortune happens to the other who is the social comparison is made). Notably, there is a strong relationship between schadenfreude and social comparison, and the misfortune that happened to others helps people to

compare downwards. The relationship between the feeling of envy, an influential concept in the emergence of social comparison, and narcissism and schadenfreude will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Envy, Narcissism, and Schadenfreude

Envy is an unpleasant feeling when the person compares themself to others. The concepts of jealousy and envy are heavily influenced by language and cultural differences and are often used interchangeably. Envy occurs when the person does not have what the other has. The target of the emotion may be a group or a person, but the essential point of envy is that the person does not want the other person to have what they desire but does not have. On the other hand, jealousy usually occurs when the person is afraid to 'lose' what they have to someone else (Ben-Ze'ev 1990, Smith and Kim 2007).

In psychoanalysis, the distinction between envy and jealousy is treated differently. Klein (1957) states that envy first appeared in infancy and was seen in the relationship between the baby and the mother. The fact that someone else has what the person desires causes a destructive and aggressive emotion in the person, which is defined as envy. This destructive feeling creates a desire to take the desired object from the other's hand or destroy it. The object that the baby envies is the breast; it has everything the baby wants, but it disappoints the baby by not always being with them. This situation causes the formation of the baby's first object. According to Klein (1975), jealousy arises when the third person, usually the father, is involved in the relationship. The child thinks that the father kidnapped the mother and the mother's breast. This competition and doubt form the basis of jealousy, an integral element of the Oedipal situation.

The sense of envy is considered a fundamental characteristic of narcissistic personalities and is listed as one of the diagnostic criteria included in the DSM-5. The common assumption that grandiose narcissists tend to experience a sense of envy has often been highlighted in research on narcissism (Kernberg 1975, akt. Lange et al. 2016). However, some studies have found that only vulnerable narcissists experience the feeling of envy (Krizan and Johar 2012, Neufeld and Johnson 2015). Krizan and Johar (2012) stated that, contrary to the general assumption that the feeling of envy arises from the grandiose dimension of narcissism, it occurs in cases of narcissistic vulnerability and, considering the exaggerated feelings of superiority observed in grandiose narcissism, grandiose narcissists are less prone to feeling the envy.

When the studies that discussed schadenfreude are examined, it is seen that one of the prominent concepts is the feeling of envy (Van Dijk et al. 2006, Lange et al. 2018). The fact that a misfortune happens to the person who is envied allows the feeling of inferiority created by envy to be replaced by the feeling of superiority. The misfortune that happens to the other ends the advantageous position that the other party has, thus turning the upward social comparison in the person's mind into a downward social comparison. Studies in literature show a solid cause-and-effect relationship between envy and schadenfreude (Smith et al. 1996, Takahashi et al. 2009, Van de Ven et al. 2015). It can be said that envy creates the necessary conditions for schadenfreude if a misfortune happens to the envied person.

The study, in which narcissism is examined as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, and the relationship between these two dimensions of schadenfreude through envy, was carried out by Krizan and Johar (2012). Researchers have stated that schadenfreude can be accepted as a logical result of envy. The vulnerable narcissism scores of the participants were measured using the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale and the Pathological Narcissism Scale, and the level of grandiose narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. As a result of the research, it was stated that there was no significant relationship between grandiose narcissism and the feeling of envy. On the other hand, it has been observed that individuals with vulnerable narcissism are pretty prone to the feeling of envy, especially in the case of a high-status individual; the feeling of envy and schadenfreude strengthens.

Another study, in which the relationship between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism with envy was examined in two stages through experimental conditions, was conducted by Neufeld and Johnson (2015). Prior to the experiments, participants' narcissism scores were measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale. Subsequently, in both stages, participants were exposed to competitive situations where they were relatively disadvantaged, arousing feelings of envy. As a result of the first study, a strong relationship was found between vulnerable narcissism and envy; no relationship was found between it and grandiose narcissism. In the second study, participants were allowed to sabotage people they competed with for a small cost, and it was seen that 65% of the participants accepted sabotage despite the cost. At the end of the experiment, schadenfreude measurements were applied to the participants who accepted sabotage, and it was stated that there was a moderately positive relationship between vulnerable narcissism and schadenfreude.

As a result, when the field is examined, the findings of the experimental studies indicate that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between envy and schadenfreude. This positive relationship between envy and schadenfreude is also stated in the correlational studies. It is noteworthy that the feeling of envy is not associated with grandiose narcissism but with vulnerable narcissism.

Discussion

In the current study, the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude was discussed in terms of self-esteem, social comparison, and envy. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that very few studies examine narcissism and schadenfreude, and these studies yield different findings. It is thought that the most important reason for this is due to the different contextualization of the concept of narcissism. In the studies, it is seen that the concept of narcissism is discussed together with other personality types in The Dark Triad theory; only the grandiose dimension is evaluated, or the vulnerable and grandiose dimension is examined together. This situation caused the inability to obtain distinctive findings regarding the vulnerable and grandiose dimension of narcissism in the studies. Studies examining both dimensions of narcissism have shown a relationship between vulnerable narcissism and schadenfreude (Krizan and Johar 2012, Neufeld and Johnson 2015). However, when studies conducted using The Dark Triad measurement tools are examined, it is seen that there is only a relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude in certain conditions, for example, when appropriate criteria for social comparison are found (James et al. 2014, Erzi 2020a) or there is no relationship between them at all (Porter et al. 2013, Lee 2019, Erzi 2020b). It is seen that the theory of The Dark Triad mainly emphasizes the grandiose aspect of narcissism, and the tools measuring these personality traits provide information on the grandiose characteristics of narcissism (Furnham et al. 2013, Jones and Paulhus 2014).

It is noteworthy that the concepts of self-esteem, social comparison, and envy play an essential role in the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude. In the studies conducted by Ginter (2006) and James et al. (2014), it was stated that the concepts of narcissism and schadenfreude are not related to self-esteem. In both studies, it is thought that the scales used to evaluate narcissism measured the grandiose aspect of narcissism and the fact that the vulnerable narcissism characteristics of the participants were not measured, causing the relationship of self-esteem with the concepts not to be examined appropriately. It is stated in the literature that schadenfreude is related to low self-esteem and low self-esteem related to vulnerable narcissism (Van Dijk et al. 2011b, Jung 2017, Rohmann et al. 2019, Grieve et al. 2020). The fact that low self-esteem has a vital role in schadenfreude shows that vulnerable narcissists are more prone to feeling this emotion. It is thought that the relationship of grandiose narcissism with high self-esteem may have a protective role in making these people feel schadenfreude.

The fact that social comparison can be seen in both the vulnerable and grandiose dimensions of narcissism requires a detailed examination of the relationship between schadenfreude and narcissism. In the studies where the grandiose aspect of narcissism was discussed, the participants reported that they were negatively affected by the upward social comparison and positively affected by the downward social comparison (Bogard et al. 2014). The superior self-perceptions of individuals with grandiose narcissism and their thoughts that they are in a better position compared to others make them more prone to downward social comparisons. This situation may suggest that grandiose narcissists, who tend to make downward comparisons in daily life, can experience schadenfreude in order to maintain their positive perception of themselves. On the other hand, vulnerable narcissistic individuals have low self-esteem and need social feedback mechanisms to perform self-assessment (Zeigler-Hill et al. 2008), which may make them prone to making upward comparisons. The misfortune that happens to the other, who is successful and envied, causes that person to lose their advantageous position. This provides vulnerable narcissists with low self-esteem the opportunity to self-assess through downward social comparison (Smith et al. 2009). The fact that grandiose narcissists tend to make downward comparisons and vulnerable narcissists make downward social comparisons as a result of misfortune happening to others increases the importance of successfully distinguishing between the two dimensions of narcissism.

The scenario, which includes the poorly performing co-worker used in the study conducted by James et al. (2014), has criteria that allow participants to make social comparisons. People need others with similar characteristics to themselves to evaluate themselves and make social comparisons. The scenario includes the co-worker and the other with the appropriate criteria that help the person evaluate their performance at work and make a social comparison. If the characteristics of the other are very different from what the person has, as in other scenarios, social comparison cannot be made. Participants may not have found a similarity to a wealthy businessman or opponent in a sports competition, which may have caused them not to be able to make social comparisons and feel schadenfreude.

Similarly, Erzi's (2020a) study suggests that academic environments offer more objective criteria for downward social comparison than social contexts. This structured setting enables individuals to compare their achievements or status against others in a way that is more clear-cut than in general social interactions. Research by James et al. (2014) further supports this by showing that situations with objective criteria allow those with heightened narcissistic traits to engage in downward comparisons more readily, using others' misfortunes to boost their own self-esteem. For grandiose narcissists, who tend to rely on downward social comparisons, such scenarios reinforce their inflated self-perception and sense of superiority, often resulting in feelings of schadenfreude. In contrast, vulnerable narcissists typically lean toward upward social comparisons, often measuring themselves against individuals they perceive as more successful or competent. However, when misfortune befalls these higher-status individuals, vulnerable narcissists may use this opportunity to reverse the comparison trajectory, effectively transforming it into a downward comparison. This shift allows them to feel momentarily superior, bolstering their self-esteem through the misfortune of others. The process demonstrates how downward comparisons enable vulnerable narcissists to experience schadenfreude as a temporary relief from their insecurities and self-doubt. Overall, these findings underscore the complex interplay between narcissistic traits, social comparison dynamics, and schadenfreude. Grandiose narcissists reinforce their self-view through consistent downward comparisons, while vulnerable narcissists use downward comparisons selectively, often as a coping mechanism when others face setbacks. This differentiation highlights how individuals with varying types of narcissism derive self-esteem in distinct ways, illustrating the role of comparison direction in eliciting schadenfreude.

Psychologists frequently examine the emotion of envy in relation to both narcissism and schadenfreude, as envy often serves as a precursor to experiencing schadenfreude. For an individual to feel schadenfreude, the misfortune typically befalls someone they envy. This connection is particularly evident in individuals with vulnerable narcissism, whose heightened sensitivity and tendency toward envy increase their likelihood of experiencing schadenfreude. Studies employing targeted tools to differentiate grandiose and vulnerable narcissism support this link, showing that schadenfreude is often analyzed alongside envy (e.g., Krizan and Johar, 2012; Neufeld and Johnson, 2015). The findings suggest that envy is a key driver behind schadenfreude, especially for those high in vulnerable narcissism. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism experience a greater propensity for envy, which in turn intensifies their tendency to feel pleasure in another’s misfortune. These studies underscore a significant correlation between envy and vulnerable narcissism, illustrating how the insecurities characteristic of vulnerable narcissism can lead to a higher susceptibility to schadenfreude when someone they envy faces setbacks. In contrast, grandiose narcissism does not exhibit a similar connection with envy or schadenfreude. Research suggests that individuals high in grandiose narcissism maintain elevated self-perceptions that insulate them from distressing emotions such as envy. Their self-assuredness and superiority reduce their susceptibility to envy compared to those with vulnerable narcissism. Consequently, grandiose narcissists are less likely to experience schadenfreude, as their relative lack of envy diminishes the appeal or significance of others’ misfortunes. In sum, the distinction between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism reveals two contrasting pathways in the experience of schadenfreude: vulnerable narcissism, characterized by heightened sensitivity and a propensity for envy, predisposes individuals to find pleasure in others' misfortunes. Meanwhile, the self-assured nature of grandiose narcissism appears to reduce both envy and the likelihood of schadenfreude, highlighting the complex role envy plays in linking narcissism to schadenfreude.

Studies in which participants' grandiose narcissism characteristics were measured (Ginter 2006, James et al. 2014, Erzi 2020a) have shown that there is a relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude under certain conditions. In order to better understand the reasons why schadenfreude, which is more associated with vulnerable narcissism, is found to be associated with grandiose narcissism and to examine the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude in detail, it is of great importance to take measurements of both dimensions of narcissism and to consider the conditions in which the relationship is examined and the variables that can be mediated.

Conclusion

The current study examined the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude. It is seen that the studies examining the relationship between these concepts are focused mainly on the grandiose aspect of narcissism. The fact that narcissism is considered within the scope of The Dark Triad makes it challenging to examine both the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude and the role of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism in schadenfreude. It is thought that obtaining different results from the studies may be because the distinction between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism is not defined clearly.

To deepen our understanding of the relationship between schadenfreude and the two primary types of narcissism—vulnerable and grandiose—future research should focus specifically on these dimensions rather than the broader Dark Triad construct. By isolating vulnerable and grandiose narcissism, researchers can better analyze each type's unique impact on schadenfreude, thus gaining insights into the nuanced psychological mechanisms at play. A focus on these two dimensions will allow for a more comprehensive investigation into how narcissistic traits interact with self-esteem, social comparison, and envy. Vulnerable narcissism, typically marked by insecurity and hypersensitivity, may interact with schadenfreude differently from grandiose narcissism, which is often associated with overt self-confidence and dominance. Exploring how each type of narcissism influences responses to others' misfortunes may reveal contrasting motivations driven by varying levels of self-worth and social comparison.

Additionally, future studies would benefit from using experimental methodologies to observe the dynamics between narcissism and schadenfreude in controlled settings. By manipulating factors such as perceived similarity or status between the observer and the misfortunate individual, researchers could more accurately assess which conditions intensify or mitigate schadenfreude within each narcissistic dimension. This experimental approach would offer valuable insights into the contextual triggers of schadenfreude and clarify the role of social comparison in these reactions. Finally, understanding these distinctions in narcissistic responses to schadenfreude could significantly enhance the broader knowledge of how individuals with different self-esteem strategies navigate social interactions. Incorporating the concept of social comparison, especially with similar individuals experiencing setbacks, would provide a framework for future studies aiming to delineate the pathways through which narcissism manifests in the enjoyment of others' misfortunes.

Moreover, when studies that explore the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude are analyzed, findings suggest that this link tends to emerge specifically when individuals feel envy toward the person experiencing misfortune. However, the literature currently lacks evidence on whether individuals with vulnerable narcissism experience schadenfreude in situations where envy is absent. Future research that addresses this gap by examining the specific role of envy in the connection between vulnerable narcissism and schadenfreude would offer valuable contributions to the field.

The present study does not meet the criteria for a systematic review due to the limited number of studies focusing specifically on narcissism and schadenfreude. Additionally, the studies reviewed often lack clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and other potential variables that may influence the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude remain unexplored. These factors represent key limitations, indicating a need for further research that systematically controls for these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Understanding the relationship between narcissism and schadenfreude holds significant importance not only for advancing psychological theory but also for informing mental health practices. A clearer knowledge of how the two dimensions of narcissism—grandiose and vulnerable—interact with factors such as schadenfreude, self-esteem, social comparison, and envy can enhance diagnostic precision and improve intervention strategies for mental health professionals. By recognizing how these psychological processes interact, clinicians can more effectively modify treatment plans that address the underlying issues related to narcissism, self-worth, and social dynamics in their patients.

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