

### An Empirical Study on Parental Attitudes, Narcissism, and Perceptions of God

#### *Ebeveyn Tutumları, Narsisizm ve Tanrı Algıları Üzerine Ampirik Bir Araştırma*

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**Abstract:** The family is the primary structure that lays the foundation for both personality and religious development, as it represents the first and most influential social environment encountered by the child. Parental attitudes refer to behaviors exhibited during child-rearing and have been widely studied in relation to personality development and religious schemas in the literature. Given the increasing concern over narcissism, understanding its relationship with parenting styles and religious concepts is important for effective religious education. In this context, our study aims to explore the relationships between perceived parental attitudes, narcissism, and perceptions of God. The study was conducted with 503 students from the Faculty of Theology and employed a quantitative correlational research design. The findings indicate that parental attitudes are significantly associated with both personality characteristics and God representations. One of the notable findings of the study is that paternal rejection and overprotective attitudes were found to be positively and significantly related to grandiose narcissism, whereas no significant relationship emerged between perceived maternal attitudes and grandiose narcissism. Another significant finding indicates that higher levels of narcissism were associated with more punitive perceptions of God and lower levels of positive God representations. In terms of gender, male students demonstrated higher levels of grandiose narcissism and negative God perception compared to female students, while narcissistic tendencies were found to decrease with increasing age. Overall, the study suggests that religious cognition is closely linked to early relational experiences, highlighting the importance of considering individual relational schemas in both theological education and family relationships.

**Keywords:** Psychology of Religion, Family, Parental Attitudes, Narcissism, Perception of God.

**Öz:** Aile, çocuğun karşılaştığı ilk ve en etkili sosyal çevreyi temsil etmesi bakımından kişiliğin ve dini gelişimin temelini oluşturan yegâne yapıdır. Ebeveyn tutumları, çocuk yetiştirme sürecinde anne babalar tarafından sergilenen davranışlar olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Literatürde kişilik gelişimi ve dini şemalarla ilişkisi bakımından çok kez incelenmiştir. Günümüzde giderek artan bir endişe kaynağı haline gelen narsisizmin ebeveyn stilleri ve dini kavramlar ile olan ilişkisinin anlaşılması etkili bir dini eğitim açısından önem taşımaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışmamız algılanan ebeveyn tutumları, narsisizm ve Tanrı algıları arasındaki ilişkileri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlahiyat Fakültesi'nde öğrenim gören 503 öğrenci ile yürütülen nicel araştırmada ilişkisel tarama deseni kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, ebeveyn tutumlarının hem kişilik hem de Tanrı temsili ile ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Araştırmanın dikkat çekici bulgularından biri, babanın reddedici ve aşırı koruyucu tutumunun büyüklenmeci narsisizm ile pozitif yönde anlamlı şekilde ilişkili olmasıdır. Buna karşılık, algılanan anne tutumları ile büyüklenmeci narsisizm arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmamıştır. Diğer bir önemli bulgu olarak narsisizm düzeyi arttıkça Tanrı'nın daha cezalandırıcı algılandığı, olumlu Tanrı algısının ise azaldığı tespit edilmiştir. Cinsiyet değişkeni açısından erkek öğrencilerin büyüklenmeci narsisizm ve olumsuz Tanrı algısı puanlarının kadınlardan daha yüksek olduğu, yaş ilerledikçe narsistik eğilimlerin azaldığı görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak araştırma, bireyin dini bilişinin erken dönem nesne ilişkilerinden bağımsız olmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu veriler, ilahiyat eğitiminde ve aile ilişkilerinde birey odaklı ve bilişsel şemaları dikkate alan yeni yaklaşımların geliştirilmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din Psikolojisi, Aile, Ebeveyn Tutumları, Narsisizm, Tanrı Algısı.

## Introduction

The family is defined as the first and most significant social environment a child encounters. Every behavior and attitude exhibited by parents not only provides a life model for the child to follow but also functions as a key factor in individual development (Durlanık - Uzman, 2022, 71). Socio-emotional development, psychological resilience, problem-solving skills, social competence and academic performance, self-confidence and anxiety levels are often related to parental attitudes to which individuals were exposed during childhood (Kol, 2023, 92; Kaya et al., 2012, 208–225; Erkan, 2002, 120; Darling, 1999, 3; Zakeria - Karimpour, 2011, 761; Wolfradt et al., 2003, 521).

Parental attitudes refer to the persistence of positive or negative judgmental tendencies exhibited by parents while raising their children (Mızrakçı, 1994, 9–10). The development of a healthy personality is closely linked to parents' ability to adequately meet their child's needs (Gürses, 2017, 79). As a personality structure mostly known to stem from a lack of love, acceptance, support, and parental neglect, the prevalence of narcissistic personality has increased in developed societies where individualization is increasing. Recent studies have shown that one in every four university students responds to questions in a manner indicative of narcissistic tendencies (Twenge - Campbell, 2010, 60). Narcissism is conceptualized as a multidimensional personality configuration characterized by grandiosity, entitlement, diminished empathy, and a persistent need for admiration (Post, 1993, 100). Contemporary perspectives further emphasize its defensive and relational nature, suggesting that narcissistic functioning involves unstable self-regulation strategies aimed at preserving a sense of superiority (McWilliams, 1994, 60; Kernberg, 1986, 396). Rather than representing a cohesive and secure self-structure, narcissism often reflects vulnerability masked by exaggerated self-importance (APA, 2013, 333). These dynamics indicate that narcissism profoundly shapes interpersonal representations and relational patterns.

Essentially, when the sources from the 17th and 18th centuries are examined, the development of narcissism appears to have been explained in terms of genetic factors (Ronningstam, 2010, 70). Over time, increasing attention has been directed toward the family structure in which the individual is raised. Previous research suggests that while genetic transmission plays a role in narcissism, its manifestation largely depends on parental attitudes (Temelli et al., 2021, 202). It is believed that the failure to meet a child's needs in families exhibiting negative parental attitudes may lead to the development of narcissism. As an essentially defense mechanism that involves the formation of a false self, one can develop this distorted sense of self in response to parental rejection. A child who is neglected, ignored, and not properly cared for by their parents may continuously strive to gain their approval within a self-constructed world hence entering a cycle in which they become absorbed in unrealistic grandiose fantasies (Millon, 1981; Özakkaş et al., 2013, 76; Hayta, 2010, 47). On the other hand, social learning theory proposes that narcissism develops in children who are raised with excessive admiration and overvaluation by their parents (see Millon, 1981). For instance, the literature presents divergent findings regarding the predictive power of permissive or overindulgent parenting and parental rejection on the development of narcissism (Horton - Tritch, 2013, 135). Indeed, both parental warmth and parental rejection have been identified in empirical studies as positive predictors of grandiose narcissism (Otway - Vignoles, 2006, 104; Wink, 1991; Kernberg, 2020, 220). In Capron's (2004, 90) study, in which the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) was administered to students in order to examine the relationship between narcissism and parental attitudes, narcissism was found to be positively associated with parental overindulgence in both women and men, thereby supporting the inconsistency observed in the literature.

Overall, the studies converge on the view that parental roles play a critical part in the formation of narcissistic traits. However, the literature continues to reflect an unresolved debate about which particular form of parenting attitude is most strongly linked to the development of narcissism. Given that narcissistic personality traits have increasingly become a concern of our time, raising parental awareness and reconsidering the attitudes displayed toward children constitute an important step in

preventing them from evolving into a broader risk factor. In this context, examining narcissism becomes particularly important as it is not only a personality trait but also a relational construct shaped within early family dynamics. Understanding how specific parental attitudes are associated with narcissistic tendencies may contribute to clarifying the developmental pathways of narcissism. Such an inquiry is essential for identifying potential risk and protective factors within the family system and for advancing theoretical and empirical discussions on personality development.

Apart from personality development, one of the other processes influenced by parental attitudes is the formation of God concepts. Research literature highlights that religious concepts are shaped through emotional experiences and impressions. Core mental concepts such as basic trust, discipline, punishment, sin/reward, and altruism are rooted in the early emotional experiences of the family in which the person grew up (Yıldız, 2007, 6). The relationships a child establishes with their parents are closely associated with the development of their God perception (Clark, 1981, 180). Emotions such as attachment, trust, respect and love which emerge within the bond formed with the parents gradually shift towards God as time progresses (Hökelekli, 1993, 263). A child who experiences a sense of trust in a healthy manner through their relationship with their parents tends to transfer this experience to their relationship with God, thereby developing a 'love-oriented' perception of God. Authoritarian parenting in particular has been associated with the emergence of a punitive and fear-inducing image of God in children's minds (Spiro - D'Andrade, 1958, 456-466). In line with Freud's early claim that "*God is a glorified father*", subsequent theorists have expanded this perspective by arguing that individuals' representations of God may originate not only from the father figure but also from the mother or from both parents jointly (Freud, 2022, 212; Spilka et al., 1975, 154-165; Olds, 2008, 26). In this sense even when the image of God appears to resemble that of the same-sex parent, it is not necessarily derived from a single parental source; rather, it is shaped by the relational experiences associated with both parents (Vergote et al., 1969, 86).

Accordingly, it can be argued that the concept of God, which begins to take shape in the individual's mind from the earliest stages of development, gradually develops over time in line with one's accumulated knowledge, lived experiences and efforts to construct meaning. Depending on the nature of the relationship established with God, individuals may form either positive or negative representations of the divine (Rizzuto, 1979, 47). In brief, the way God is perceived largely shapes the quality and character of an individual's relationship with religion.

In recent years how the omnipotent structure of narcissistic personality influences religious belief has become a subject of considerable interest within the psychology of religion field. Studies have shown that narcissistic personality is generally in conflict with religious beliefs and teachings, has a negative influence on moral judgment, is associated with extrinsic religiosity and as the level of narcissism increases, fear-based attachment to God has also been observed to rise (Çınar, 2020, 136; Cooper et al., 2016, 42; Łowicki - Zajenkowski, 2017, 171; Gürman, 2019, 67). More specifically, prior research has predominantly focused on the relationship between narcissism and general religiosity or moral outcomes, while the association between narcissistic traits and specific representations of God remains comparatively underexplored (Hermann - Fuller, 2017, 99; Zondag - van Uden, 2010, 79; Kartopu, 2013, 643). In addition, although parental attitudes have been widely examined in relation to personality development, their simultaneous role in shaping both narcissistic tendencies and perceptions of God have not been sufficiently addressed (Brummelman et al., 2015, 3661; Ramsey et al., 1996, 227; Assor - Tal, 2012, 9; Nelson - Jones, 1957, 293-297). Our study investigates the relationships between individuals' perceived parental attitudes, narcissistic tendencies and perceptions of God in the context of personality development. Given that both narcissistic tendencies and God representations are shaped within early relational contexts, examining these constructs together through the lens of perceived parental attitudes offers a theoretically meaningful framework. In particular, among students engaged in theological education, understanding how early parental experiences intersect with narcissistic traits in shaping God perceptions may provide valuable insight into the developmental foundations of

religious belief. Despite the growing body of research examining parental attitudes and narcissism, as well as studies exploring narcissism in relation to religiosity, the integrated relationship between perceived parental attitudes, narcissistic tendencies and God perceptions remains insufficiently examined, particularly among university students. By integrating these three constructs within a single empirical framework, the present study aims to contribute to the developmental and psychological understanding of religious representations. The findings may provide insights into understanding religious development in university students and offer implications for educators and parents. The study focuses on two primary research questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between individuals' perceived parental attitudes, narcissism levels, and perceptions of God?
2. Do perceived parental attitudes, narcissism levels, and God perceptions differ significantly based on age and gender?

To examine these questions, a quantitative correlational design was employed.

## **1. Conceptual Framework**

### **1.1. Parental Attitudes**

The values prioritized by parents in raising their children, along with the behaviors they display during this process, are defined as parental attitudes (Darling - Steinberg, 1993, 488). According to the classification proposed by Arrindell et al. (1999), parenting attitudes are categorized into emotional warmth-based attitudes, overprotective attitudes and rejecting attitudes. In emotional warmth-based parenting, children experience unconditional love, acceptance and attention from their parents (Rohner et al., 2005, 305). This attitude reflects a parenting style that combines democratic principles with appropriate discipline and is regarded as one of the ideal forms of parenting (Hacıkeleşoğlu - Karaca, 2021, 214). Overprotective parenting refers to meeting a child's needs beyond what is necessary without taking into account their developmental stage (Levy, 1939, 563). In such families, parents tend to be inconsistent in setting rules and enforcing discipline. As a result, children raised by overprotective parents may struggle with self-regulation and have difficulty recognizing personal boundaries (Arrindell et al., 1999, 622). Rejecting parenting is characterized by the absence of positive emotional expression toward the child. Such an attitude limits the child's sense of individuality (Hacıkeleşoğlu - Karaca, 2021, 216). This may result from the child being ignored by the parents, potentially leading to a persistent sense of loneliness and difficulties in developing trust (Aydoğdu - Dilekmen, 2016, 570). Individuals who feel rejected by their families are more prone to depression, behavioral problems, and various psychological disorders (Rohner et al., 2005, 299).

### **1.2. Narcissism**

Narcissism is a term that is defined as excessive self-love, an inflated sense of self-importance and egocentrism (Budak, 2000, 506). Narcissistic personality gained significant importance in the late 20th century (Millon et al., 2004, 333). The growing popularity of the concept is largely attributable to Freud's (1914) distinction between primary and secondary narcissism, Kernberg's (1986) conceptualization of narcissism as a pathological condition, and Kohut's work (1971; Kohut - Wolf, 1978) suggesting that narcissism may have both healthy and negative outcomes. More recently, Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010) proposed a hierarchical model and categorized narcissism into two types depending on whether its outcomes, such as psychological adjustment and self-esteem, are adaptive or maladaptive. *Normal or healthy narcissism* is defined as the psychological adjustment an individual experiences in their relationship with themselves and others (Rozenblatt, 2002, 53). Normal narcissism, which is the focus of this study, refers to narcissistic traits that do not reach a pathological level and are manifested within a normative and adaptive range. Whereas *pathological narcissism* involves maladaptive coping patterns when faced with perceived criticism or threats to one's self-image (Pincus - Lukowitsky, 2010, 426).

Narcissistic personality is also categorized into two types: *grandiose narcissism*, which involves inflated self-fantasies and a sense of superiority and *vulnerable narcissism*, which reflects a shy, fragile,

internally conflicted self-structure. Grandiose narcissism is characterized by extraversion, exploitativeness and arrogance (Wink, 1991, 591–596). The vulnerable narcissistic self, on the other hand, is marked by an inability to function independently and a constant need for reinforcement and external validation (Otway - Vignoles, 2006, 179). It also reflects tendencies toward insecurity in social settings and a susceptibility to feeling devalued or humiliated (Gabbard, 1989, 529). Studies conducted by various researchers have addressed narcissism in relation to defense mechanisms and psychological disorders, its examination within the context of gender, moral disengagement, work motivation, social media addiction, humor styles and its relationship with self-concept (İnce, 2020; Akgün - Uysal, 2019; Grijalva et al., 2015; Özkan, 2019; Doğan, 2022; Penney - Spector, 2002; Şeker, 2022; Uçar, 2021; Westen, 1990). Narcissism has been found to be positively associated with qualities such as an increased tendency to lie and manipulative behaviors (Forsyth et al., 2021; Waddell et al., 2020, 110160). On the other hand, when the effect of narcissism on job satisfaction has been examined, it has been observed that as narcissism increases, satisfaction in working life decreases (Özsoy - Ardiç, 2017, 391). In addition, individuals who spend excessive time on social media tend to exhibit higher levels of narcissistic tendencies (Arslan, 2019, 68). In another study, narcissism levels were found to be negatively associated with individuals' levels of subjective happiness (Danacı, 2017, 21). Taken together, these findings suggest that examining narcissism from multiple perspectives contributes to a deeper understanding of the nature and consequences of personality structures. While previous research has addressed the relationship between narcissism and religiosity, the association between narcissistic traits and specific religious constructs remain relatively underexplored, highlighting the need for further research in this area (Orhan, 2014; Ashmawy, 2016; Uzun, 2019; Altun, 2015; Solmaz, 2021; Ulusal, 2019; Hermann - Fuller, 2018).

### **1.3. Perception of God**

God perception refers to all attributions and attitudes an individual holds toward God (Güler, 2007, 123). The process of perceiving God develops over time in parallel with one's overall development and is entirely subjective (Peterson, 2005, 4). Rizzuto (1979, 47) categorizes an individual's perception of God into two types, positive and negative representations. Attributing positive qualities to God, such as unconditional love, protection, compassion and forgiveness, is defined as a love-oriented perception of God. On the other hand, ascribing negative characteristics such as being punitive, fear-inducing, harsh or neglectful reflects a fear-oriented perception of God (Güler, 2007, 124–125). While parents function as primary attachment figures during childhood, in adulthood God may assume a compensatory role serving as a "substitute/proxy" attachment figure. In this sense, the God figure can provide a source of security and emotional closeness by fulfilling attachment needs that may not have been adequately met by parental figures. When one or both parents are perceived as absent or insufficient, individuals' perceptions of God are likely to be shaped in accordance with these attachment experiences (Kirkpatrick - Shaver, 1990, 329; Dickie et al., 2006, 58).

Individuals' perceptions of God are shaped by their internal God images and by their familial, social, religious and spiritual experiences (Peterson, 2005, 3). The relationships a child forms with his parents are fundamental in shaping his God perceptions (Clark, 1981, 180). Moreover, how individuals perceive themselves largely influences the way they perceive other people and God (Greenway et al., 2003, 46; Dickie et al., 2006, 58). It is known that low self-esteem is associated with a rejecting God image, whereas high self-esteem is related to a love-oriented perception of God. The ability to experience love depends on perceiving oneself as worthy of being loved. If an individual sees themselves as unlovable, then anything that expresses love toward them may seem meaningless (Benson - Spilka, 1973, 297–298).

The literature has examined the perception of God in relation to self-confidence and willpower, psychological resilience, religious orientation, tendencies toward forgiveness and anger, as well as social anxiety and hope (Benson - Spilka, 1973; Erdoğan, 2015; Spilka - Mullin, 1977; Dilmaç - Çifci, 2019; Göregen - Yıldız, 2021; Uysal et al., 2014). Factors influencing the development of God perceptions

such as gender, self-acceptance and mental health have also been explored (Dickie et al., 2006; Greenway et al., 2003; Schaap-Jonker et al., 2008). In conclusion, the perception of God is ultimately shaped by an individual's internalization of parental attitudes and their own personality characteristics. Hence, it is not a static construction and may evolve over time.

## **2. Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive and correlational research design to investigate the relationships among perceived parental attitudes, narcissistic tendencies, and God perceptions among students enrolled in a Faculty of Theology. Using this method, the existence and strength of the correlations between the identified variables were tested (Karasar, 2020). Data collection was carried out by the researcher during April of the 2023–2024 academic year, with ethical approval obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences of Bursa Uludağ University (Decision No: 37, Date: 26.01.2024) and institutional permission to conduct the data was obtained from Sivas Cumhuriyet University Faculty of Theology (Permission No: E-81703617-100-412261, Date: 25.03.2024).

### **2.1. Participants and Data Collection**

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who were actively receiving formal religious education at the higher education level. The inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in the Faculty of Theology, ensuring that the sample was relevant to the study's focus on religious cognition and development. Exclusion criteria were based on participants' self-reports; individuals who reported having been diagnosed with a personality disorder or a psychotic-spectrum condition were not included in the study. The sample consisted of 503 participants. The overall mean age was 22, with the youngest participant being 18 and the oldest 43. Of the participants, 56% were female and 44% were male.

### **2.2. Procedure**

The measurement instruments employed in this study were completed by participants voluntarily, with assurance of confidentiality for personal information. Data were collected using a questionnaire technique. A closed-ended questionnaire that presented individuals with a set of written questions designed to gather information about their opinions on various topics was administered (Yücedağ, 1993, 443–444). The study utilized a Personal Information Form constructed by the author to gather socio-demographic information, S-EMBU, Five Factor Narcissism Scale-Short Form, and God Perception Scale (TA). Aligned with the purpose of the present study, the questionnaires were administered face-to-face.

The Personal Information Form includes questions regarding participants' age and gender. S-EMBU is the abbreviated version of the EMBU-C, originally developed by Arrindell and colleagues (1999). It was designed to assess parenting styles for both parents. The scale comprises three dimensions; rejecting attitude, overprotective attitude and emotional warmth. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was tested by Dirik et al. (2015) and its reliability and validity were established. The internal consistency of the scale was found to be satisfactory in the present study ( $\alpha = .81$ ). For perceived maternal attitudes, the alpha values were  $\alpha = .79$  for rejection,  $\alpha = .80$  for emotional warmth and  $\alpha = .75$  for overprotection. Regarding perceived paternal attitudes, the alpha coefficients were  $\alpha = .75$  for rejection,  $\alpha = .79$  for emotional warmth,  $\alpha = .75$  for overprotection.

Five Factor Narcissism Scale-Short Form is the short form of the original scale developed by Glover et al. (2012), shortened by Sherman and colleagues (2015). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was carried out by Ekşi (2016) in a 60-item format. The full scale demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The scale was used in its two-dimensional structure, for which the alpha coefficients were calculated as .80 for vulnerable narcissism and .86 for grandiose narcissism (Ekşi, 2016, 1086–1091). General narcissism yielded an overall reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .85$ , with subscale reliabilities of  $\alpha = .85$  for the grandiose narcissism and  $\alpha = .70$  for the vulnerable narcissism in the current sample.

God Perception Scale (TA) developed by Güler (2007), initially consisted of 32 items, was finalized with 22 items following validity and reliability analyses. It includes statements reflecting both a positive image and a negative perception of God. The scale yielded a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .83, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Güler, 2007, 127-132). Accordingly, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated separately for each subdimension. The positive God perception subscale showed high reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ), whereas the negative God perception subscale exhibited acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

### 2.3. Data Analysis and Findings

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS. To determine whether the data collected were suitable for the planned statistical analyses, normality tests were initially conducted. As a first step, missing data and outliers were examined. Following the removal of missing values and confirmation that no outliers were detected, the assumption of normality was assessed using both statistical tests and visual methods. The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests yielded statistically significant results for some subscales ( $p < .05$ ). However, considering that these tests can produce significant outcomes even with minor deviations in large samples, the assumption of normality was not evaluated based solely on these test results. Given the large sample size ( $N = 503$ ), skewness and kurtosis values falling within the acceptable range of  $-1.5$  to  $+1.5$  and the symmetrical structure observed in visual assessments (Q-Q plots, histograms), the use of parametric tests was deemed appropriate. Therefore, parametric tests were employed in the data analysis. Such an approach represents a standard procedure commonly recommended in multivariate analyses involving large samples (Tabachnick - Fidell, 2013, 80). After normality tests, the data were examined using reliability and validity analyses, factor analysis, correlation, t-test and one-way ANOVA. ANOVA examines whether mean scores differ significantly across independent groups (Silva, 2020, 107). The findings of the analyses are presented in Tables 1 to 5.

**Table 1:** Findings on the Relationship Between Perceived Parental (Mother) Attitudes, Narcissism and God Perception

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. S-EMBU (Mother)</b>	1									
2. R (M)	.487**	1								
3. EW (M)	.301**	-.474**	1							
4. OP (M)	.836**	.416**	-.104*	1						
<b>5. Narcissism Scale</b>	.198**	.158**	.013	.163**	1					
6. Grandiose	.131**	.083	.062	.076	.955**	1				
7. Vulnerable	.265**	.276**	-.144**	.312**	.449**	.164**	1			
<b>8. God Perception</b>	.156**	.071	.071	.112*	.048	.034	.059	1		
9. Positive God	.032	-.132**	.207**	-.041	-.206**	.186**	-.126**	.671**	1	
10. Negative God	.150**	.251**	-.169**	.188**	.315**	.272**	.229**	.392**	-.419	1

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

Correlation analyses revealed that maternal rejection is positively associated with overall narcissism ( $r = .158$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vulnerable narcissism ( $r = .276$ ,  $p < .01$ ); maternal overprotectiveness is positively associated with narcissism ( $r = .163$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vulnerable narcissism ( $r = .312$ ,  $p < .01$ ); maternal emotional warmth is negatively associated with vulnerable narcissism ( $r = -.144$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As shown in

Table 1, none of the individual subscales of perceived maternal attitudes showed a significant association with grandiose narcissism ( $p > .05$ ).

A significant negative correlation was found between maternal rejection and positive God perception ( $r = -.132, p < .01$ ) whereas a positive correlation was found with negative God perception ( $r=.251, p < .01$ ). While maternal emotional warmth was positively correlated with positive God perceptions ( $r=.207, p < .01$ ); it was negatively related with negative God perceptions ( $r=-.169, p < .01$ ). Maternal overprotectiveness showed a significantly positive correlation with negative God perception ( $r=.188, p < .01$ ) however no significant correlation was found with positive God perceptions ( $p > .05$ ).

Narcissism and negative God perceptions were significantly and positively related ( $r=.315, p < .01$ ). Put another way, when the narcissism level increases, negative God perception also increases. Overall narcissism was also significantly and negatively correlated with positive God perception ( $r=-.206, p < .01$ ). While grandiose ( $r=-.186, p < .01$ ) and vulnerable narcissism ( $r=-.126, p < .01$ ) were negatively and significantly correlated with positive God images, they were positively associated with negative God images ( $r=.272, r=.229, p < .01$ ).

**Table 2:** Findings on the Relationship Between Perceived Parental (Father) Attitudes, Narcissism and God Perception

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. S-EMBU(Father)</b>	1									
2. R (F)	.443**	1								
3. EW (F)	.405**	-.458**	1							
4. OP (F)	.797**	.411**	-.069	1						
<b>5. Narcissism Scale</b>										
6. Grandiose	.198**	.150**	.021	.172**	1					
7. Vulnerable	.149**	.097*	.058	.098*	.955**	1				
8. God Perception	.210**	.207**	-.106*	.279**	.449**	.164**	1			
9. Positive God	.132**	.045	.053	.116**	.048	.034	.059	1		
10. Negative God	.035	-.167**	.193**	-.021	-.206**	.186**	-.126**	.671**	1	
	.119**	.262**	-.174**	.169**	.315**	.272**	.229**	.392**	-.419	1

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

Paternal rejection was found positively and significantly correlated with overall narcissism ( $r=.150, p < .01$ ), grandiose ( $r=.097, p < .05$ ) and vulnerable narcissism ( $r=.207, p < .01$ ). Likewise paternal overprotectiveness was positively correlated with overall narcissism ( $r=.172, p < .01$ ), grandiose ( $r=.098, p < .05$ ) and vulnerable narcissism ( $r=.279, p < .01$ ). However paternal emotional warmth was only found negatively related with vulnerable narcissism ( $r=-.106, p < .05$ ).

Paternal rejection was positively related with negative God perception ( $r=.262, p < .01$ ) and negatively associated with positive God perceptions ( $r=-.167, p < .01$ ). In contrast, emotional warmth was negatively associated with negative God images ( $r=-.174, p < .01$ ) and positively associated with positive God images ( $r=.193, p < .01$ ). According to Table 2, overprotectiveness was also positively correlated with negative God perceptions ( $r=.169, p < .01$ ).

The means, standard deviations and independent samples t-test results regarding the participants' narcissism scores by gender are presented below.

**Table 3:** Findings on the Relationship Between Participants' Narcissism Levels, Perceived Parental Attitudes, God Perceptions and Gender

Scale	Gender	N	M	SD	t	p
<b>S-EMBU (Mother)</b>	Female	282	2.2447	.30821	2.252	<b>.025*</b>
	Male	221	2.1822	.31016		
Rejecting(M)	Female	282	1.4554	.52161	.181	.856
	Male	221	1.4474	.45270		
EmotionalW.(M)	Female	282	2.9228	.61293	1.493	.136
	Male	221	2.8405	.61498		
Overprotective(M)	Female	282	2.3312	.56812	1.804	.072
	Male	221	2.2416	.53180		
<b>S-EMBU(Father)</b>	Female	282	2.1246	.32908	-.170	.865
	Male	221	2.1297	.34744		
Rejecting (F)	Female	282	1.4375	.51335	-1.441	.150
	Male	221	1.5071	.56820		
EmotionalW.(F)	Female	282	2.7483	.73658	.771	.441
	Male	221	2.6967	.75374		
Overprotective(F)	Female	282	2.1739	.56766	.018	.986
	Male	221	2.1730	.53675		
<b>Narcissism Scale</b>	Female	282	2.8557	.40722	-3.867	<b>.000**</b>
	Male	221	3.0062	.46132		
Grandiose	Female	282	2.7583	.44483	-4.508	<b>.000**</b>
	Male	221	2.9495	.50440		
Vulnerable	Female	282	3.0272	.65229	.601	.548
	Male	221	2.9918	.66105		
<b>God Perception</b>	Female	282	3.3179	.34491	.565	.572
	Male	221	3.2988	.39992		
Positive God	Female	282	4.6196	.55986	2.671	<b>.008**</b>
	Male	221	4.4485	.81264		
Negative God	Female	282	1.7560	.63522	-2.725	<b>.007**</b>
	Male	221	1.9191	.69011		

**\*\*p < .01, \*p < .05**

As shown in Table 3, significant differences were found in overall narcissism ( $t=-3.867$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and grandiose narcissism ( $t=-4.508$ ,  $p < .01$ ) based on students' gender. Male students scored higher in overall narcissism ( $M=3.01$ ) and grandiose narcissism ( $M=2.95$ ), respectively compared to female students ( $M=2.8557$ ,  $M=2.76$ ). Gender differences were not statistically significant in vulnerable narcissism scores ( $t=.601$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Positive God perceptions ( $t=2.671$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and negative perceptions of God ( $t=-2.725$ ,  $p < .01$ ) differ significantly according to gender. Female students' positive perceptions of God were higher ( $M=4.6196$ ) than male students' ( $M=4.4485$ ), while male participants' negative perceptions of God were higher ( $M=1.9191$ ) than those of female participants ( $M=1.756$ ). While there was a significant difference

between genders in overall perceived mother parental attitudes ( $p < .05$ ), there was no significant difference between genders in subtypes of perceived parental attitudes ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 4:** Findings Regarding the Relationship Between Perceived Parental Attitudes and Age

	Emotional Warmth		Rejecting		Overprotective		
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	
r	-.014	-.061	.052	.078	-.013	.031	
Age	p	.757	.170	.244	.080	.764	.485
	N	503	503	503	503	503	

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

As shown in Table 4, age was not significantly correlated with subtypes of perceived parental attitudes ( $p > .05$ ). However, a significant relationship between age, narcissism and God perceptions was found.

**Table 5:** Findings Regarding the Relationship Between Participants' Narcissism Levels, Perceptions of God and Age

	God	Positive	Negative	Narcissis	Grandiose	Vulnerable	
	Perceptions	God	God	m	Narcissism	Narcissism	
r	-.098*	-.136**	-.049	-.154**	-.147**	-.074	
Age	p	.028	.002	.277	.001	.001	.099
	N	503	503	503	503	503	

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

A significant negative association was observed between participants' age and both overall narcissism ( $r = -.154$ ,  $p < .01$ ), grandiose narcissism ( $r = -.147$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As age increases overall and grandiose narcissism levels decrease. Similarly, a negative relationship between participants' ages and positive perceptions of God ( $r = -.136$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was found. As individuals age, their tendency to perceive God as loving being decreases.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored the association between individuals' perceived parental attitudes, narcissistic tendencies, and perceptions of God, focusing specifically on faculty of theology students. To enable a broader evaluation of the subject, gender and age variables were also included in the study.

The findings indicated that perceived parental rejection and overprotectiveness showed a significant positive association with both general and vulnerable narcissism ( $p < .01$ ). Previous research examining the relationship between parental attitudes and narcissism has yielded mixed findings. Some studies have reported that authoritarian paternal attitudes are associated with higher levels of vulnerable narcissism (Üzümcü, 2016, 47; Peker - Aydın, 2017, 150). While others have found that individuals raised by authoritarian parents exhibit higher overall narcissism compared to those raised in democratic family environments (Güven, 2019, 166). Additionally, cold and neglectful parenting has been linked to vulnerable narcissistic traits (Otway - Vignoles, 2006, 104). In contrast, permissive parenting has been associated with immature grandiosity, whereas authoritarian parenting has been connected to pathological narcissism (Watson et al., 1992, 240). From a developmental perspective, these findings can be better understood by considering the distinctive characteristics of overprotective and rejecting parental attitudes. Overprotective parenting tends to shield children from failure, criticism, and rejection, thereby providing an environment largely insulated from negative experiences. While such protection may appear supportive, it can limit the child's capacity to develop resilience and realistic self-appraisal. Consequently, when confronted with real-life challenges, individuals may

struggle to tolerate frustration and may expect the same level of validation and protection from others. When these expectations are unmet, the individual's sense of self may become destabilized, potentially contributing to a personality structure consistent with vulnerable narcissism. In contrast, rejecting parenting is characterized by critical, distant or harsh interactions with the child (Baumrind, 1966, 890; Sümer - Güngör, 1999, 36; Kulaksızoğlu, 1989, 37). Such relational dynamics may foster chronic feelings of emotional deprivation, which can also play a role in shaping maladaptive self-structures (Kol, 2023, 30). Children whose physical and emotional needs are neglected or met with indifference by their parents may come to perceive themselves as excluded, invisible, unheard, and insignificant (Yıldız, 2004, 138). Such internalized experiences closely resemble the core features of vulnerable narcissism. In addition to overt neglect, relational patterns characterized by a lack of empathy, inconsistency and unpredictability within parent and child interactions are also known to contribute to the development of a fragile narcissistic self-structure (Morf - Rhodewalt, 2001, 179).

An intriguing finding of the study is that paternal rejection and overprotectiveness were positively and significantly associated with grandiose narcissism ( $r=.097$ ,  $r=.098$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However no significant relationship was found between perceived maternal attitudes and levels of grandiose narcissism ( $p > .05$ ). Accordingly, while rejecting and overprotective attitudes from both parents appear to contribute to the development of vulnerable narcissism, only paternal attitudes characterized by rejection and overprotection seem to be associated with grandiose narcissism. This finding contrasts with Winnicott's (1987, 19–39 as cited in Hayta, 2010, 46) emphasis on the central role of the mother and child relationship in healthy personality development, where maternal responsiveness is considered foundational for normative psychological growth. However, it is consistent with studies suggesting that paternal rejection may exert a distinct influence on the formation of grandiose narcissistic traits (İmamoğlu, 2018, 83–87). Several possible explanations may be considered in interpreting this pattern. First, traditional parental roles may play a role in differentiating maternal and paternal influence. In many patriarchal cultural contexts, the father figure is often perceived as an authority and role model. When paternal behaviors are characterized by neglect or overprotection, the absence of a guiding, boundary-setting and supportive authority may have a distinct impact on the child's developing self-structure. Given the symbolic importance attributed to the father in such contexts, paternal relational dynamics may exert a deeper influence on the formation of grandiose self. If the child is unable to secure paternal attention or approval, this may foster a compensatory search for external validation, potentially contributing to the emergence of grandiose narcissistic patterns. In this sense, children may internalize maternal and paternal behaviors differently under the influence of broader social norms. The differential impact observed in this study may reflect the culturally embedded symbolic role attributed to fathers within family systems.

Our analysis also indicated a significant negative association between parental emotional warmth and vulnerable narcissism ( $r=-.144$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $r=-.106$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results suggest that greater emotional warmth from parents is associated with lower levels of vulnerable narcissism in individuals. This finding does not support the assumptions of social learning theory, which attributes the development of narcissism primarily to parental emotional warmth or overvaluation (Brummelman et al., 2015, 3659). Rather, the results suggest that narcissistic tendencies may be more closely associated with neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles that restrict the child's autonomy and hinder the development of an independent self-structure. Consistent with our findings, Watson et al. (1992, 240) reported that democratic parenting is linked to reduced levels of narcissism. Previous research has indicated that non-empathetic, inconsistent, and unpredictable parental relationships may contribute to the development of vulnerable narcissistic self-structures (Morf - Rhodewalt, 2001, 179). Vulnerable narcissists, whose self-concepts are prone to fragmentation, are unable to maintain a stable sense of self on their own and therefore require continuous reinforcement, support and validation from others (Gabbard, 1989, 531; Otway - Vignoles, 2006, 179). In conclusion, children who do not receive unconditional love, attention, and support from their parents may either relinquish aspects of their

authentic self in an effort to gain parental approval or withdraw into an internal world structured around mistrust and idealized self-perceptions. As a result, they may develop defensive patterns consistent with vulnerable forms of narcissism.

The findings suggest that perceived parental emotional warmth is negatively associated with negative representations of God and positively associated with positive representations ( $p < .01$ ). These results correspond with prior studies indicating that individuals' perceptions of God are shaped by their internalized representations of parents. For example, Dickie et al. (2012, 186) found that children who view their parents as nurturing and strong are more likely to perceive God in a similar way. Consistent with the present findings, a study reported a significant and positive association between rejecting and overprotective parenting styles and a fear and punishment-oriented perception of God (Hacıkeleşoğlu - Karaca, 2021, 216). Ebrahimi and Farouee Firoozi (2019, 3) also report that parental attitudes are associated with the images of God. Their study suggests that rejecting parental behaviors directly influences a child's perception of God and may weaken their sense of connection with the divine. As it is known, parental absence or lack of involvement is associated with diminished functioning in nearly all domains of a child's life (Darling, 1999, 4). The findings highlight that the development of religious life and belief is also affected by parental factors. From a developmental perspective, early interactions with primary caregivers constitute the foundational context in which trust, attachment and authority representations are formed. Given that parents serve as the child's earliest authority figures, these relational experiences may be internalized and later generalized to transcendent authority representations. Accordingly, individuals who experience negative relational dynamics with their parents may be more likely to envision God as punitive, distant, or inaccessible (Kirkpatrick - Shaver, 1990, 329; Olds, 2008, 5).

Among theology students, higher levels of narcissism were associated with higher levels of negative God representations ( $r=.315, p < .01$ ). Overall narcissism was significantly and negatively associated with positive God perception ( $r = -.206, p < .01$ ), both of its subdimensions grandiose narcissism ( $r = -.186, p < .01$ ) and vulnerable narcissism ( $r = -.126, p < .01$ ) were significantly and negatively related to positive representations of God. While prior research has explored narcissism in relation to religiosity and religious orientation, the specific relationship between narcissistic traits and representations of God remains comparatively underexamined. Existing studies generally report a negative correlation between narcissism and religiosity (Gürsu - Önce Özokudan, 2019, 440; Okumuş, 2020, 65). This inverse relationship may be understood in the light of the interpersonal and moral characteristics commonly associated with narcissistic traits. Narcissism has been linked to aggression, reduced forgiveness, lower relationship satisfaction and diminished social adjustment (Çınar - Ergül, 2023, 207; Sezer - Murat, 2020, 1320; Erdoğan - Sahin, 2020, 279). Such features often conflict with core religious and spiritual orientations, including humility, empathy, honesty and constructive religious coping (Trups-Kalne et al., 2020, 187). Given these relational and moral tensions, narcissistic tendencies may not only weaken religiosity but also shape the individual's spiritual relationship with the sacred (Grubbs et al., 2018, 391). Moreover, given the grandiose self-perception often associated with narcissism, individuals with high narcissistic traits may have trouble adopting a transcendent frame of reference that requires submission to a higher authority. This tension may partially explain the development of negatively valenced representations of God. Supporting this perspective, Grubbs and colleagues (2013, 196–197), demonstrated that narcissistic entitlement is positively associated with anger toward God. Individuals with elevated narcissistic traits tend to believe that they deserve better experiences than others. When life circumstances fail to meet these expectations, they may experience dissatisfaction with what they perceive as God's plan for them, which can evoke feelings of anger toward God. Accordingly, such individuals may be more likely to develop a negative image of God.

Our findings further revealed that none of the three subdimensions of perceived parental attitudes varied significantly by gender, suggesting that maternal and paternal relational experiences may be perceived in a relatively similar manner among male and female participants ( $p > .05$ ). In many studies

examining parental attitudes, the relationship between parenting styles and gender has also been investigated. In line with the results of our study, Akpınar's (2023, 165) research found that, except for the mother's punitive attitude, other types of perceived parental attitudes did not significantly differ by gender. Similarly, previous research has found that perceived parental emotional warmth does not differ significantly by gender (Durlanık - Uzman, 2022, 77; Ceylan, 2022, 80). Conversely, some studies have reported results that diverge from the findings of our study (Stephens, 2009, 1; Akgül - Dirik, 2018, 42). As evidenced in the literature, the present findings are consistent with some previous studies, while differing from others. Several factors may account for these inconsistencies. Differences in sample characteristics, such as age, socioeconomic status, geographical context and cultural background, may contribute to variations in research outcomes. Additionally, discrepancies may stem from differences in measurement instruments, research design, data collection procedures and analytical strategies employed across studies.

The findings revealed that grandiose narcissism levels among theology students varied significantly based on gender ( $t=-4.508, p < .01$ ). Male students had higher grandiose narcissism scores ( $M=2.95$ ) compared to female students ( $M=2.76$ ). However, levels of vulnerable narcissism were found not to differ by gender ( $p > .05$ ). Consistent with our results, the study by Grijalva et al. (2015, 282) found that levels of vulnerable narcissism did not differ by gender. Nevertheless, research generally indicates that grandiose narcissism tends to be more prevalent among men, whereas vulnerable narcissism is more frequently observed among women (İmamoğlu, 2018, 78; Arslan, 2019, 68; Kaya - Kalkan, 2019, 246; Peker - Aydın, 2017, 149). Gender differences in narcissistic expression may be influenced not only by dispositional factors but also by sociocultural norms. From early childhood, boys are often encouraged to display traits that align more closely with grandiose narcissism, such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and dominance, whereas girls are more frequently socialized toward empathy and relational sensitivity. Within this framework, grandiose narcissism may appear more compatible with culturally endorsed masculine roles, which could partially explain its higher prevalence among men (Wink, 1991, 596). Nevertheless, despite these differences in expression, narcissistic personality structures tend to produce similar interpersonal and psychological consequences across genders (Campbell - Foster, 2007, 130).

The study found a significant difference in theology students' God perception subdimensions based on gender ( $p < .01$ ). Female students ( $M=4.62$ ) scored higher than male students ( $M=4.45$ ) on positive God perception, whereas male students ( $M=1.92$ ) scored higher than female students ( $M=1.76$ ) on negative God perception. Aligning with our findings, previous studies have reported that women score significantly higher on positive God image scales, whereas men score higher on negative God image scales (Seyhan, 2014, 86; Apak, 2016, 228; Dinvar, 2011, 59). Similarly, Korkmaz (2014, 280) found that women are more likely to describe God using emotionally oriented expressions, further supporting the gender-based differentiation observed in divine representations. In a study conducted by Dickie and colleagues (2012, 187), women were found to be more likely than men to associate God with parental figures. This finding may suggest that parental images play a relatively stronger role in shaping women's perceptions of God. However, contrasting findings have also been reported in the literature. Another study found that men's representations of God were significantly linked to childhood parenting styles, whereas women's God images were not directly associated with parental attitudes. Nevertheless, for women, being raised in a warm and emotionally supportive family context was associated with perceiving God as loving, forgiving, trustworthy and accessible. This divergence suggests that parental influence on divine representations may operate through gender-specific relational pathways (Chou - Uata, 2012, 681-682).

The present findings suggest that women and men may differ in their representations of God. Such differences are likely shaped by a complex interaction of cultural norms, individual characteristics and forms of religiosity. In many sociocultural contexts traits such as compassion, emotional sensitivity and relational orientation are more strongly encouraged among women, whereas assertiveness and

authority are more frequently associated with masculine roles. Through early socialization processes, individuals may internalize these gendered expectations, which in turn may influence their self-perceptions and value orientations. As discussed earlier, self-representations can play a role in the formation of God representations. Individuals may conceptualize the divine in ways that reflect the qualities they value or identify with. Within this framework, women's greater engagement in religious practices and communities, as documented in prior research, may also contribute to perceiving God as a source of comfort, trust and emotional warmth (see Batson et al., 1993). Such dynamics may partially account for the more positive God representations observed among female participants in the present study.

Our findings suggest that theology students' levels of grandiose narcissism differed by age ( $p < .01$ ). Accordingly, as participants' age increased, their levels of grandiose narcissism decreased ( $r = -.147, p < .01$ ). Empirical studies indicate that narcissism differs significantly across age groups (Gülmez, 2009, 126–127; Wetzel et al., 2020, 479; İmamoğlu, 2018, 81). Moreover, in a large-scale study involving 250,000 participants, Weidmann et al. (2023, 36) identified significant age-related differences in narcissism. The observed decline in general and grandiose narcissism levels with increasing age may be attributed to several developmental factors. As individuals accumulate life experiences, they may develop greater self-awareness and a more realistic appraisal of their strengths and limitations. Such maturation may reduce the need for exaggerated self-enhancement strategies commonly associated with grandiose narcissism. In addition, advancing age is often accompanied by an increased prioritization of meaningful and profound relationships. As relational depth and emotional intimacy gain importance, individuals may become less inclined toward self-centered behavioral patterns. From this perspective, age-related changes in narcissism may reflect broader shifts in life priorities and personality development across the lifespan. This interpretation is supported by research indicating that with increasing age, traits such as social adjustment, honesty, emotional stability and self-awareness tend to increase, whereas neuroticism declines (Roberts et al., 2006, 15). Developmental maturation across the lifespan may promote greater self-awareness, thereby reducing reliance on narcissistic self-enhancement strategies.

A significant negative correlation was observed between age and positive God perception ( $r = -.136, p < .01$ ) suggesting that positive representations of God tended to decline with increasing age. In contrast, no significant relationship emerged between age and negative God perception ( $p > .05$ ). Previous research indicates that representations of God develop in line with cognitive and developmental processes, gradually shifting from more concrete and authority based images toward more abstract and relational form (Yıldız, 2007, 227; Vergote et al., 1969, 83–84; Dickie et al., 2012, 186). In this sense, early perceptions of God as punitive or fear-based may be replaced over time by more compassionate and internalized representations (Odabaş, 2022, 88; Demir - Açar, 2022, 50; Bengtson et al., 2015, 374). On the other hand, the divergence between the present findings and the existing literature may be explained by several factors. When discussing concepts such as belief in God and representation, it is essential to consider individuals' developmental trajectories. God perception does not develop independently of environmental influences or individual characteristics. Each developmental stage is shaped by its own cognitive and psychological capacities. While children tend to construct their image of God within the framework provided by parents, teachers or caregivers, adolescence marks a period of questioning and the formation of a more autonomous belief system (Rizzuto, 1979; Su, 2022, 66). Based on accumulated experiences and educational influences, individuals may either move closer to or distance themselves from God in young adulthood. In later stages of life, individuals may engage more deeply with existential questions and reassess religious concepts. In this process, belief in God may serve as a source of meaning and hope, but it may also evoke doubt and lead to the reevaluation of existing beliefs. From this perspective, it is not unexpected that individuals sharing similar cultural backgrounds may develop comparable representations of God. This pattern points to a developmental model of God representation that evolves across the lifespan. Over time and particularly with increasing

maturity, individuals' perceptions of God may be reshaped by cultural context, educational experiences and broader social influences (Desmond et al., 2010, 266).

The findings of the present study underscore the role of parental attitudes in shaping both narcissistic tendencies and perceptions of God. These results suggest that early relational experiences may contribute to the formation of cognitive schemas related to the divine. In this context, the association between narcissism and negative God representations points to the importance of considering individual developmental and relational backgrounds when examining religious cognition.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Narcissism is considered one of the defining psychological phenomena of the contemporary era. However, research examining this construct within the framework of the psychology of religion remains limited. First, given the differential associations observed between maternal and paternal attitudes and the distinct dimensions of narcissism, future studies may examine grandiose and vulnerable narcissism as separate developmental trajectories shaped by differentiated parental influences. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable in clarifying whether the negative association between age and narcissistic traits reflects developmental maturation processes or cohort-specific characteristics. Moreover, subsequent research may investigate whether narcissistic tendencies function as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between perceived parental attitudes and representations of God. Such analyses could provide a more nuanced understanding of how early relational schemas are internalized and later expressed within religious cognition. Finally, comparative studies across different cultural and educational contexts may help determine whether the stronger paternal influence identified in this study reflects broader sociocultural patterns or context-specific dynamics. Although the study provides valuable insights, future research may benefit from examining additional familial and cultural variables that interact with parenting practices and individual personality development. Moreover, this study demonstrates the importance of considering individuals' cognitive schemas regarding God, particularly within higher religious education. Future research may further investigate how these schemas are formed and how negative God perceptions can be transformed through developmental, relational, or educational processes. Finally, as the present study is limited to young adult university students, the representativeness of the findings is restricted. Further research incorporating participants from diverse age groups, professions, and socioeconomic backgrounds may provide broader insights.

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