

Guilt and Shame Proneness in Relations to Covert Narcissism Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract

The present research examined the experience of negative emotions such as guilt and shame proneness that impact entitled perceptions of covert narcissists' own performance. The sample comprised 180 emerging adults, in the age group of 18-23 years. The measure of the study included Maladaptive Covert Narcissism (Cheek, Hendin, & Wink, 2013) and Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (Cohen et al., 2010). It was hypothesized that there will be a significant relationship between Covert Narcissism and Shame and Guilt Proneness. Also, Guilt and Shame proneness will predict Covert Narcissism. The study also investigated gender differences on covert narcissism. The results of the study indicated that there was a positive correlation between covert narcissism and the two dimensions of shame proneness namely negative self-evaluation and shame withdrawal. Additionally, no significant relationship was found between guilt proneness and covert narcissism.

Keywords: *Vulnerable Narcissism, Covert Narcissism, Guilt Proneness, Shame Proneness, Emerging Adults*

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INTRODUCTION

Narcissism is the conviction that one is fundamentally superior to and commendable of more than others; a belief that, practically, relies on others for validation. (Krizan & Herlache, 2017).

The most severe type of unstable narcissism, in which people display narcissistic behaviours through several domains is, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The essential feature of NPD is a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Narcissistic traits

may be particularly common in adolescents and do not necessarily indicate that the individual will go on to have narcissistic personality disorder.

Overt narcissism (i.e., Grandiosity-Exhibitionism) and covert narcissism (i.e., Vulnerability-Sensitivity) are the two types of dysfunctional characteristics or maladaptive forms of narcissism (Wink, 1991). The existing information of narcissistic personality disorder focuses on various aspects of grandiose narcissism but very little has been explored on covert narcissism although both kinds share similar features such as conceit, disinterest in others, impulsiveness, risk-taking, and self-indulgence.

Some of the dissimilarities between both the forms of narcissism are as follows:

GRANDIOSE/OVERT NARCISSISM	VULNERABLE/COVERT NARCISSISM
Pincus and Roche (2011) described grandiose narcissism as “deeply felt desires for recognition and appreciation giving rise to urgent reasons to seek out self-enhancement experiences”.	Pincus and Roche (2011) described a socially avoidant style of self-regulation as “increased sensitivity to ego-threat and subsequent self-, emotion-, and behavioral-dysregulation.
They are confident, outgoing, and charming, but are also vain, manipulative, and aggressive (Wink, 1991).	They are socially inhibited, insecure, defensive, and vindictive (Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Wink, 1991).
They have an inflated sense of self, viewing themselves as superior to others (Krizan & Bushman, 2011), overestimating their intelligence and cognitive ability and preferring the company of powerful and popular people (Campbell & Foster, 2002)	They experience heightened negative emotional reactivity, including envy, shame, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Besser & Priel, 2010; Wink, 1991).

Vulnerable/covert narcissism is defined by social psychology as “a defensive and insecure grandiosity that obscures feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, and negative affect” (Miller et al., 2012). Over the years, this second subtype of narcissism has gone by many names, including covert, closet, shy, or vulnerable narcissism. The paradox of vulnerable narcissism is this: They believe “I deserve more!” because of their sense of entitlement, yet they are sceptical. Their lofty ambitions aren’t matched by a belief in their own power. Because of this avoidance incentive, susceptible narcissists presented modestly and avoid numerous situations where their self-beliefs might be challenged (Foster & Trimm, 2008). As a result of skill limitations in attaining the outcomes they believe they deserve, as well as the discrepancy between internal emotions of entitlement and external modesty and shyness, identifying a susceptible narcissist can be challenging (Miller et al., 2011; Wink, 1991). Even though identifying a vulnerable narcissist and the problems he is feeling may be difficult for an outsider, the psychological stress vulnerable narcissists face is real (Wink, 1991). Grandiose imagination, self-sacrificing self-improvement, contingent self-esteem, and uniqueness are all signs of intrapersonal covert narcissism. Devaluing others, entitled fury, and hiding the ego are all signs of interpersonal covert narcissism. These individuals have low self-esteem (Rose, 2002), high shame (Cain et al., 2008), and internalising symptoms (Krizan & Johar, 2012). Shame also intermediates the relationship between vulnerable narcissism and a more negative model of others (Schie et al. 2021). Positive correlation was reported between covert narcissism and shame (Ghim et al. 2015). Participants with NPD had a higher level of shame than non-clinical controls, according to the literature. They also identified a link between covert narcissism and shame (Ritter, 2014). Shame is another emergent consequence of the innate human desire to be perceived as attractive (Gilbert, 1997) Internalized Shame as ‘shame bound personality’ or ‘shame-based identity’ (Kaufman, 1989). High-shame individuals have been categorized in three ways: (1) more shame-prone than others in regularly shame-eliciting situations, (2) frequently or constantly experiencing generalized or global shame, also known as internalized shame, or (3)

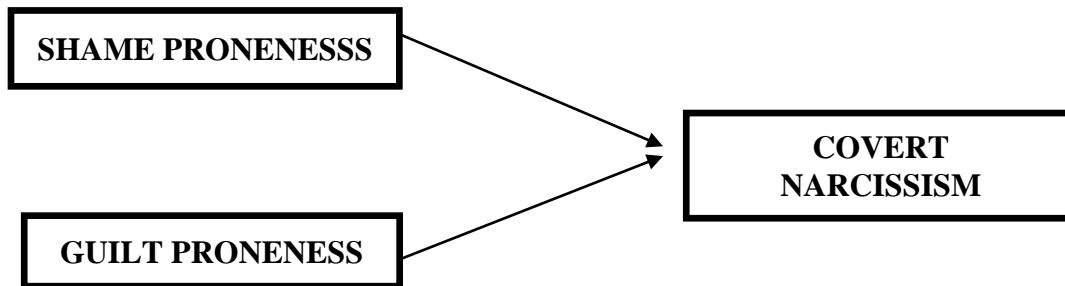
particularly ashamed of some aspect of their behavior or personal qualities (Andrews, 1998). Shame is an emotion that is understudied because it is so clearly absorbed by guilt in our society (Levin, 1967). Shame, according to Adler (1918) has both an isolating and an interfacing effect, emphasizing its immense importance in human civilization. Shame is a byproduct of human connectedness, and as such, it is impossible to exclude it from the human soul's life. Another factor which the present study investigates is guilt proneness. According to Cohen (2012), Guilt proneness is a personality attribute indicative of a susceptibility to experience negative feelings about personal wrongdoing, even when the wrongdoing is private. It is identified by the apprehension of feeling bad about committing transgressions rather than by guilty feelings in a particular moment or generalized guilty feelings that occur without an eliciting event. Research also observed that there were negative relations between narcissism and guilt and also talked about the role played by these factors in males and females (Wright, O’Leary & Balkin, 1989). According to a study done by Harder and Greenwald (1999) revealed that shame was expected to show stronger relationships than guilt with openness, sensation seeking and extraversion. So far only a few research have been published that explores relationship between covert narcissism and its expression in the guilt and shame proneness and none has been published examining the gender differences in expression of covert narcissism experienced by young adults in India. Thus, on this basis we propose the following hypotheses:

- H₁: There will be a significant relationship between Shame Proneness and covert narcissism
- H₂: There will be a significant relationship between Guilt Proneness and covert narcissism
- H₃: Shame Proneness will predict Covert Narcissism
- H₄: Guilt Proneness will predict Covert Narcissism
- H₅: There will be a significant difference in Covert Narcissism between males and females

METHOD

THE PRESENT STUDY

Researchers agree that there are two narcissism expressions Overt/grandiose and Covert/ vulnerable narcissism. The existing information of narcissistic personality disorder focuses on various aspects of grandiose narcissism but very little has been explored on covert narcissism. The present research examines the experience of negative emotions such as guilt proneness and shame proneness that impact covert narcissists' entitled perceptions of their own performance that has been overlooked. The main purpose behind conducting this study was the exploration on the covert narcissism and its expression in the guilt and shame proneness experienced by young adults in India. The study aims to analyse more about relationship between the young adults' shame and guilt proneness with covert narcissism. Research also lacks to highlight gender differences in expression of covert narcissism. As the literature suggest not much studies have focused on the gender difference and expression of negative emotions as guilt and shame proneness and their relationship with covert narcissism in context to Indian population in young adults.



MEASURES

1. **Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale (MCNS)**, an updated version of the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale, developed by Cheek, Hendin, & Wink in 2013. It has 23 items. Maladaptive Covert Narcissism Scale had an alpha reliability of .89 compared to .75 for the original HSNS; it correlated .65 with the MMPI measure of covert narcissism compared to .30 with the maladaptive overt narcissism factor of the NPI and -.16 with the Adaptive Overt Narcissism Scale.

Sample

The sample of study consisted of 180 emerging adults. These emerging adults were selected with the following criteria of inclusion and exclusion:

Criteria of Inclusion

1. University Students within the age group of 18 to 23 years.
2. Both Male and Female students.
3. Students residing in India
4. Students with Proficiency in English language

Criteria of Exclusion

1. College Dropouts or students repeating a year of the degree course.
2. Students with a physical disability or with a history of psychological illness.

In the present study, purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample.

Research Design

A causal research design was used for the present study to investigate the relationship between the above-mentioned variables.

2. **The Guilt and Shame Proneness scale (GASP)** developed by Cohen et al; 2010. It has 16 items measuring individual differences in the propensity to experience guilt and shame across a range of personal transgressions. It contains 2 guilt subscales that assess negative behavior-evaluations (NBEs) and repair action tendencies following private transgressions and 2 shame subscales that assess negative self-evaluations (NSEs) and withdrawal action tendencies following publically-exposed transgressions. Alpha coefficients of .60 or higher would ensure that the reliability of the

GASP is similar to the reliability of other guilt- and shame-proneness scales. It provides evidence for construct validity.

Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, based on the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, the study population of university students was contacted and a sample of 180 students was drawn. In the second phase, students selected in the sample were administered the tests of

RESULTS

TABLE 1: Means and Standard Deviations

	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Covert Narcissism	180	62.5	13.0662
Shame Proneness	180	8.31	2.1469
Guilt Proneness	180	10.28	2.4487

The above table shows Mean's and SD's for all the variables included in the study, namely, Covert

the study through Google Forms. Thereafter, results were compiled and trends were analyzed.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done using and IBM SPSS, including

1. Descriptive Statistics using Mean, Standard Deviation, coefficient of correlation
2. Regression analysis
3. Independent sample T test

Narcissism, Shame Proneness and Guilt Proneness.

TABLE 2: Coefficients of Correlations of Covert Narcissism with Negative Behaviour Evaluation, Guilt Repair, Negative Self Evaluation and Shame Withdrawal.

	COVERT NARCISSIM	Negative Behaviour Evaluation	Guilt Repair	Negative Self Evaluation	Shame Withdrawal
COVERT NARCISSIM	1	-.040	-.006	.236**	.312**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According, to the above table, there is a significant positive correlation between Negative Self Evaluation and Shame Withdrawal with Covert Narcissism among the emerging adults ($p < 0.01$). Hence, H_1 was accepted.

The result further suggests that there was a negative correlation between Negative Behavior Evaluation and Guilt repair with Covert Narcissism. However, there is no significant relationship. Hence, H_2 was rejected.

TABLE 3: Regression analysis showing prediction of Covert Narcissism by Shame Withdrawal.

TABLE 3.1 Model Summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate
1	.312 ^a	.097	.092	12.871

a. Predictors: (Constant), SW

TABLE 3.2 Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	48.414	3.611		13.406	.000
	SW	4.387	1.004	.312	4.369	.000

TABLE 3.2 Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	48.414	3.611		13.406	.000
	SW	4.387	1.004	.312	4.369	.000

a. Dependent Variable: COVERTNARCISSIM

The above table shows that to what extent Covert Narcissism explain the variable Shame Withdrawal, single variable regression test was used. The findings suggested that Shame

Withdrawal contribute 9% variance in predicting Covert Narcissism which is statistically significance ($p < 0.01$ & $F = 19.084, \beta = .312$). Hence, H_3 was accepted.

TABLE 4: Regression analysis showing prediction on covert narcissism by shame Negative Self Evaluation.**TABLE 4.1 Model Summary**

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate
1	.236 ^a	.055	.050	13.166

a. Predictors: (Constant), NSE

TABLE 4.2 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	50.670	4.135		12.254	.000
	NSE	2.554	.792	.236	3.225	.002

a. Dependent Variable: COVERT NARCISSISM

The above table shows that to what extent Negative Self Evaluation, explains the variable Covert Narcissism single variable regression test was used. The findings suggested that Negative

Self Evaluation contribute 5% variance in predicting Covert Narcissism which is statistically significance ($p < 0.01$ & $F = 10.398, \beta = .236$). Hence, H_3 was accepted.

TABLE 5: The table shows the Independent sample t test between males and females respondents on the variable Covert Narcissism

	MALE (n=56)	FEMALE (n=123)	T	Df	P
COVERT NARCISSISM	M= 67.77 SD= 12.904	M= 61.73 SD=13.405	2.826	177	P<0.05

The above table shows significant differences between males and females on Covert Narcissism. ($P < 0.05$)

There existed significant difference between males and females on the variable Covert Narcissism. Hence, H_5 was accepted.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed at exploring the relationship between shame proneness, guilt proneness and covert narcissism and its expression in young adults in India. The current study's findings show that distinct subtypes of shame and guilt proneness have diverse reactions among both aspects of narcissism. The findings of the study revealed that covert narcissism and shame NSE (negative self-evaluation) have a substantial positive association. According to the findings, there is a link between vulnerable narcissism and shame withdrawal. According to the study's findings, there is a link between shame proneness (negative self-evaluation and shame withdrawal) and covert narcissism. This relationship is found to be significant at 0.01 level. This means that the higher shame indicates higher degree of development of covert narcissistic traits. The results of the study can be supported by a study conducted by (Ghim et al., 2015) showing a positive correlation between covert narcissism and shame. Another study by (Georgees et al., 2018) also found that the vulnerable feature of narcissism is positively connected with shame.

The results of also showed that shame withdrawal and negative-self evaluation predict and lead to covert narcissism tendencies. Shame served as a bridge between vulnerable narcissism and a more negative self- and other model (Bilevicius et al., 2019). Another study supporting the hypothesis by Hibbard (1992) stated shame was found to be positively correlated with vulnerable style. Gramzow & Tanqney (1992) from their study showed a positive association between shame and narcissism emerged when maladaptive factors were isolated. (Schie et al., 2021) concluded that more shame was reported in those young people who tended to have traits of vulnerable narcissism and struggled to be close to others.

The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between covert narcissism and guilt proneness. According to the findings, covert narcissism and guilt repair have a negative correlation. Covert narcissism and negative behaviour evaluation also have a negative relationship. This relationship was not found to be significant. According to similar studies, the

negative association between narcissism and guilt proneness could be explained by narcissism's lack of empathy and excessive sense of entitlement (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). A research by Kingston (2005) also confirmed that both the dimensions of narcissism were negatively correlated with guilt. Another study found that narcissistic people have a strong sense of entitlement, which manifests itself as an unjustified expectation of favorable treatment. They expect to be catered to, and if this does not happen, they may become violent (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals with high guilt NBE (negative behaviour evaluation) ratings are more empathetic, modest, and generous than those with low guilt NBE scores in terms of personality. Furthermore, those with a high level of guilt NBE are more likely to want to change their behaviour and prevent future harmful behaviour (Cohen et al., 2012).

Sigmund Freud (1914) originally felt that women were more narcissistic than men, based on the premise that women are more concerned with their physical appearance and are more likely to engage in self-centered behavior "make object choices in reference to qualities desired for the self" (Wink & Gough., 1990). Researches, on the other hand, have revealed that the difference in narcissism between men and women is almost non-existent (Bizumic & Duckitt., 2008). The findings from the study indicates that average score of men on covert narcissism was significantly more than that of females. This is because males have scored higher on the covert narcissism variables than females. Further study by Wright, O'Leary & balkin (1989) also revealed men to be more prone to narcissism and women to depression. Males have higher levels of narcissism and competitiveness as compared to females. (Chan & Cheung., 2020)

Sex differences have also been found in the relationships between hypersensitivity and the Exploitativeness/Entitlement factor of narcissism (Ryan et al., 2008) the study showed that hypersensitivity was positively correlated with frequency of physical assault, such that more hypersensitive men actually reported greater physical assault toward their partners than their partners actually reported. In males, vulnerable narcissism was a significant positive predictor of

physical/sexual abuse perpetration and in females; vulnerable narcissism emerged as a significant positive predictor of physical/sexual and psychological abuse perpetration (Valashjardi, MacLean & Charles., 2020). The etiology of covert narcissism must be studied further, as well as the effect of gender stereotypes on the emergence of covert narcissistic features.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring the relationship of guilt proneness and shame proneness with covert narcissism and its expression in young adults in India. The sample consisted of 180 young adults from age range of 18-23 years. Findings from the current study indicate that shame proneness significantly positively relates to covert narcissism and predicts covert narcissism. It further concludes that males have significantly higher tendencies of development of covert narcissism as compared to females.

IMPLICATIONS

- The present study will serve as a useful literature both for the academic and students for insight in understanding of covert narcissism.
- It'll help in throwing more light on covert and vulnerable type of narcissism.
- It will also help in devising early intervention programmes to eliminate shame and guilt to lessen its impact on development of maladaptive personality patterns.

LIMITATIONS

The Limitations of the following study are as follows: -

- In the following study Questionnaire as tool is used for data collection and it is prone to have a socially desirable response.
- Lesser literature was available in context to Covert Narcissism.
- The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic which affected the availability of the responses.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- It can be explored in other age groups, specifically adolescent in their developmental age.

- It can be conducted on larger sample to generalize the results.
- Other types of narcissism and their relationship with guilt and shame proneness can be studied.
- Other variables in context to clinical psychology can be explored with covert narcissism to get deeper insights.

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