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While narcissism has been researched for decades, little attention has been focused on children growing up with such a parent. Consequently, this studyaims to explore the childhood experiences of adult children who perceive their parents as narcissists, and the effect their upbringing had on their current lives. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews with six participants aged 21-59 . Interview transcripts were analyzed with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Five themes emerged through the analysis: "Never got to feel important", "Isolation and control", "Love is a transaction", "Healing through knowledge and connection" and "Grieving a childhood that could have been". Findings suggest a long-term negative effect on self-image and relationships, which improved through learning and having meaningful connections to others.

The term narcissism originates from the myth of Narcissus, in which Narcissus, a beautiful young man with many admirers, is condemned to suffer an unrequited love as punishment for cruelly rejecting all his admirers (Levy et al., 2011; Thomaes et al., 2009). Narcissus thus falls in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, but is left empty and unfulfilled by this love, hopelessly gazing at his reflected image until he dies (Levy et al, 2011). The nymph Echo, who is hopelessly in love with him, stays by his side but wastes away from being ignored by him (Levy et al., 2011).

Narcissism as a theoretical construct in psychology emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, when psychoanalysts such as Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud adopted the term from the field of sexology (Levy et al., 2011). While the term has subsequently gathered much interest and become a central concept within psychodynamic theory, no consensus definition exists beyond a general description (Krefting, 2004). Freud’s usage of the term was inconsistent, ranging from terming it a sexual perversion to a normal developmental stage to a pathological character defect (Krefting, 2004; Levy et al., 2011). In his first essay devoted to the subject, Freud (1914) proposed a primary narcissism in the sense that an exclusive focus on the self is the initial state of psychological existence, stating that the first love-object in infancy is the self. Other theoreticians (e.g. Klein and Winnicott) instead argued that narcissism occurs as a result of damage to the primary object relationship, i.e. between mother and child (Krefting, 2004). Narcissism is also conceptualized as a personality or character trait (Levy et al., 2011). Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) has been part of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) since 1980 (Tyler, 2007). While narcissism generally can be seen as a dimensional personality trait, the DSM-5 draws a distinction between what can be viewed as personality traits and the level to which they constitute a disorder (APA, 2022). A personality disorder constitutes an inflexible and enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates from the expectations of the individual's culture and that manifests in two or more areas of cognition (ways of perceiving yourself, others and events), affectivity (range, intensity, lability and appropriateness of emotions), interpersonal functioning and impulse control (APA, 2022). For Narcissistic Personality Disorder specifically, this pattern centers around grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy (APA, 2022). The estimated prevalence of Narcissistic Personality Disorder according to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022) ranges from 0-6,4%.

The word narcissism can take on a myriad of different meanings, depending on who is asked. Definitively defining narcissism is thus a difficult undertaking. Krefting (2004) writes that the common denominator in different psychoanalytic perspectives on narcissism is that it is seen as a concentration of psychic interest directed towards oneself. In a similar vein, Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) propose a model of narcissism as a dynamic system of continuous self-regulatory efforts aimed at building and maintaining self-esteem. These efforts stem from a grandiose but unstable self-construct which leads narcissists to seek external validation, but an insensitivity towards other people's feelings and a disdain for their inferiority often prevents them from being successful. Baumeister and Vohs (2001) expanded on this model by proposing that narcissism can be seen as an addiction to self-esteem. In this view, the major driving factor for narcissists is finding ways to enhance their own self-esteem (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001; Thomaes et al., 2009). They do this by seeking out and creating social situations in which they may boost their regard for themself (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001; Thomaes et al., 2009). Much like an addict on the lookout for their next high, the narcissist favours the short-term wins of in-the-moment euphoria over the preservation of long-term social relationships, and when an attempt to bolster their self-esteem fails, they react with anger and lash out (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001; Thomaes et al., 2009). For the purposes of this study, narcissism is viewed as an exaggerated preoccupation and investment in self-esteem, which manifests as an inflated, self-aggrandizing and grandiose yet vulnerable view of oneself which constantly needs to be externally validated (e.g. Baumeister & Vohs 2001; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

The topic of narcissism was at first confined to the psychoanalytic field and did not mean anything to the layperson (Tyler, 2007). However, following influential publications on the subject from Kohut and Kernberg in the 1970's, the concept of narcissism entered the public consciousness and sparked much societal discourse (Tyler, 2007). Early on, the discourse often revolved around the idea that society was becoming more narcissistic (e.g Lasch, 1979; Wolfe, 1976). Currently, the people who are in close relationships with and thus suffer the consequences of narcissists' behaviours are given much attention, particularly on social media where the subject of narcissism is trending (Kapp, 2022). One such group is made up of children of narcissistic parents; the community on the social media platform Reddit named /raisedbynarcissists, for instance, had over 750 thousand members as per 2022 (Kapp, 2022; Lucas, 2022).

While information (and misinformation) on what characterizes narcissistic parents can be found in abundance on the internet (Kapp, 2022), scientific research into narcissism in parents and its effects on children is so far relatively scarce (Hewitt et al., 2024; Jagasia et al., 2023). There has been some research on how narcissism affects parenting style. There are four general types of parenting style; an authoritative parenting style where parents set clear guidelines and use discipline as a supportive measure rather than for punishment; a permissive parenting style where the parent tries to take the role of a friend rather than taking a parenting role; a neglectful parenting style where the needs of the child are dismissed as trivial; and an authoritarian style where parents expect the child to follow rules with no explanation or feedback backed up by heavy punishment (Hart et al, 2017). Studies have shown that narcissism is related to having a less authoritative parenting style, and a more authoritarian or permissive parenting style (Hart et al 2017; Watson et al., 1992). Other research suggests that, because of their lack of empathy and investment in their own needs, narcissistic parents create an environment where the child's needs are not the priority, causing attachment anxiety in the child, which in turn affects the child's mental health (Hewitt et al., 2024).

There is some research on how having grown up with a narcissistic parent affects one's mental health in adulthood. Määtä and Uusiautti (2020) investigated how daughters of narcissistic mothers recalled their childhoods, and found that they felt inadequate, isolated and like they were seen as burdens. Cusack's (2017) study on how adult children of narcissists

(ACON) use online forums for support showed that the main purposes of forum usage were to ventilate difficult relationships, talk about the adversity they faced, to create an identity around their childhoods, and to find support in their healing. A study by Jagasia et al. (2023) explored the experiences of ACON. They found that the experience of growing up with a narcissistic parent centered around a journey of healing which involved realizing that they had suffered narcissistic abuse, coming to terms with it not being their own fault, and seeing the effects of it in various aspects of their lives, such as their sense of self-worth and their relationships (Jagasia et al., 2023). Lyons et al. (2023) looked at 77 reddit posts in which ACON discussed their romantic relationships. They found that fear of abandonment, need for validation, trust issues and lack of boundaries were common among their sample (Lyons et al., 2023).

To date, not much research has investigated the effects of growing up with a narcissistic parent. The few studies that have been done seem to suggest that there is a significant impact on mental health and different life outcomes, such as self-esteem, trust issues, and lack of boundaries in relationships (e.g. Hewitt et al., 2024; Lyons et al., 2023). Still, further research is needed to better understand the experience of people who have been raised by narcissistic parents. More knowledge on the subject would particularly benefit therapists who encounter this group in their practice.

The current study aims to explore the childhood experiences of adult children who perceive their parents as narcissists, and the effect their upbringing had on their current lives. Two areas of psychological and social functioning are of particular interest, namely self-image and relationship quality. Previous research (e.g. Jagasia et al., 2023; Lyons et al., 2023) suggests that these areas are affected by having grown up with a narcissistic parent. Therefore, the research questions for this study are the following:

How do adult children of narcissistic parents view their experiences of their upbringing?

How do adult children of narcissistic parents perceive that their self-image has been impacted by the parenting they received?

How do adult children of narcissistic parents experience that their relationships have been impacted by the parenting they received?

Method

Participants

In total, six people participated in the study. All participants were women. Five of them perceived their mother to be narcissistic, while one of them described their father as such. The perceived narcissistic parent will henceforth be termed the “target parent”. One of the target parents had a formal diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder that the participant was aware of. The participants’ ages ranged from 21 to 59 years. Each participant has been assigned an alias to protect their anonymity. The following descriptions are a brief introduction of the participants.

Annika was a woman in her late twenties who worked in a veterinary clinic. She lived in the countryside with her partner, with whom she had recently had her first child. From a young age, Annika lived alone with her mother, the target parent.

Bella, a woman in her early thirties, came from a family of middle eastern descent. She grew up with several siblings and both of her parents. The target parent is her mother.

Cecilia was a 21 year old student. Her parents divorced in her early childhood. Cecilia lived with her mother, who is also the target parent, and her mother’s new partner for most of her childhood. She also lived together with her brother, a step-sister, and a half-brother from her mother’s new marriage.

Diana was a nurse in her mid-fifties. She grew up in a working-class family, which consisted of herself, her parents, an older brother and a younger sister. Her target parent is her mother.

Elin was in her late fifties. She grew up with both her parents, an older brother and an older sister. Her target parent is her father, who has a military background.

Frida was a 41 year old marketing director. She has a significantly older sister, and grew up in an affluent neighbourhood. After her parents' divorce when she was eleven, Frida lived with her mother, her target parent, until moving out at 19.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through social media, particularly online support groups for people with close relationships with narcissists, and by posters around the city center of Gothenburg (see appendix A). The recruitment on social media consisted of two support groups on Facebook with a total of 15 000 members. Recruitment was carried out in February and March of 2025. Participants were recruited according to three inclusion criteria. The first criterion was being over 18 years of age. Secondly, people who were not currently receiving psychiatric treatment for diagnosed mental health problems were included. The last inclusion criterion was perceiving one parent as narcissistic. People who fulfilled all three criteria were invited to participate in the study. Six participants were included in the study. In addition, one person showed interest in participating but later withdrew from the study, and three people made contact after recruitment had already concluded.

The participants were given information about the study (see appendix B) and the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to an interview. Participants gave oral consent, which was recorded at the start of the interview. The participants had the option to do the interview either in person or on video call. Five of them did it online, while one participant opted to do it in person. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 50 to 75 minutes. Interviews were held in Swedish. Each author conducted three interviews. The interviews were recorded in full and transcribed verbatim. Each interview was transcribed by the author who did not conduct it, facilitating immersion in the data. Transcripts were kept in password protected files for the duration of the study.

Interviews

An interview guide was developed (see Appendix C) based on previous research on adult children of narcissistic parents as well as the topics of self-image and relationships, which were of particular interest in this study. A similar interview guide had been developed and tested in a pilot study in December 2024. The interview guide used in the present study was also tried out on acquaintance to test the suitability of the questions. The main questions of the interview guide included, for example, "Could you describe your parent in three words?", "Thinking about other important relationships in your life, can you see traces of your relationship with your parent in them?" and "How do you think your self-image has been affected by your upbringing?". Follow-up questions were posed in accordance with the participants' answers to elicit in-depth and detailed accounts of their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This approach provided some structure, much needed due to the limited experience of the authors, while centering the participants' individual stories and ensuring they had room to give as elaborate an account as possible.

Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a method which blends hermeneutics and phenomenology in an idiographic approach (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012), meaning that it concerns itself with individual perspectives on both a descriptive and an interpretative level. The method was chosen because of its primary goal of investigating how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The epistemological positions of IPA are phenomenology and hermeneutics (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The phenomenological endeavor of this study was identifying essential components of the experience of growing up with a narcissistic parent. The hermeneutic position was relevant to the aim of understanding how the participant made sense of their experiences. The ontological position of critical realism, which assumes that social realities are influenced by our subjective perspectives (Gorski, 2013), was adopted.

Each interview was first read and analyzed ideographically. In accordance with the recommendations in Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), each transcript was read multiple times to get familiarized with the data and gain new insights. Descriptive (phenomenological) codes were made first, then interpretative notes were added in subsequent readings. The notes were transformed into emergent themes. The codes made in initial readings gave rise to 16 emergent themes. Themes that were conceptually connected to each other were then grouped into clusters. For instance, emergent themes concerning "feeling like an extension of the parent", "a sense of disinterest from the parent", "had to raise myself" and "injuries were scoffed at" were all deemed to be connected through the overarching theme of feelings of unimportance.

The initial reading and coding were done separately. Discrepancies in coding were handled through discussions and going back to the transcripts to corroborate interpretations against the data. The clustering of emergent themes and development into a thematic structure was done through discussing our understanding of the participants accounts, returning to the transcripts to ensure the themes reflected the participants' narratives, engaging in continual dialogue about the individual cases, and examining the effect of our pre-understanding on our reading. Themes that were deemed to be less central or not representative of the majority of participants were discarded. Similarities and differences among the participants' experiences were discussed and attempted to include in the themes. The analysis resulted in a thematic structure consisting of five themes.

Ethics and Reflexivity

As is standard practice for master's theses at the University of Gothenburg, the study was not reviewed by an ethics committee. Because of this, people with ongoing mental illness were excluded from our sample, since collecting sensitive information (such as health status) requires approval from an ethics board according to Swedish law (SFS 2003:460, 3 §). Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and were assured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, care was taken to give ample opportunity for debriefing at the end of the interview and to check in on the participants state of mind throughout. The data was handled with confidentiality in mind. Participants were only referred to by their aliases and the transcripts were kept in password protected files. Participants were also told that the findings would be made available to them upon completion of the thesis, if they were so inclined.

To ensure that the analysis was grounded in the data and limit the influence of our pre-understanding, we engaged in the practice of bracketing to the best of our ability. Bracketing

is used to mitigate the effects of one's preconceptions on the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010) and can be done in different ways. We engaged in bracketing by discussing our preconceptions about narcissism and the sorts of stories we expected to show up in the interviews ahead of time, and by continuously evaluating what was expressly stated by our participants and what interpretations were supported by the data. Because of our varying degrees of prior interest in the topic, we approached the data from different pre-understandings. This entailed a broader perspective on the data and an opportunity to compare our readings with the difference in preconceptions in mind, further contributing to our self-awareness in the research process.

Results

Theme 1: Never Got to Feel Important

All participants expressed that an integral part of their experience of their upbringing was a sense of never feeling prioritized. They described experiences of frequently being left home alone for extended periods of time at an early age. Cecilia, for instance, remembered waking up to an empty house when she was 5, thinking she had been abandoned. She also recalled looking at the time one evening a few years later, thinking it was strange her mother had yet to arrive home at 9 pm, only to realise that this was not an infrequent occurrence since her mother was often busy with her hobby, horse riding. Similarly, Frida was often left alone for whole weekends because her mother went on trips with her friends.

Several participants described the parent as disinterested in their hobbies, their friends, important life events and other things pertaining to them as people. Elin had an example of this sense of disinterest from her father. He had never, in her almost sixty years of being his daughter, remembered her nut allergy or made any accommodation because of it. Annika mentioned that her mother did not show up for her graduation because she was busy watching TV, and later when Annika was expecting a baby, her mother would not remember the name Annika was considering, even after being told several times. Several participants also felt that their parents' interest was limited to situations that could be advantageous for them. "If it was something she could use, I was always allowed to talk. If I got good grades or something (…) so she could shine through me", Annika said. Frida expressed similar thoughts about her mother when she said "You're a tool for her to use". Other participants took this notion further, expressing that they felt they were not allowed to be their own individuals. As Bella put it: "I was treated like a part of her body, an extension of her. (...) I'm hers, not my own person". Annika said something similar: "I think I've always felt that I am an extension of my mother's life, not my own person."

Several participants told stories from their childhoods in which they had sustained a serious injury, only to be brushed off when they told their parent. Bella, who came to her mother with a self-inflicted cut on her arm so deep it would not stop bleeding, expected her mother to take her to hospital and thought she would get support in dealing with her self-harm. "Instead, it was more like she got angry. 'What are other people gonna think?' and 'we're gonna pretend you broke your arm, because I don't want people to know you did this'". When her sibling had a similar injury weeks earlier her mother immediately called an ambulance, further contributing to Bella's feeling of not being important. Cecilia told a story in which she stepped on glass and cut open her foot in the days leading up to a big football match. Her mother told her she had to play anyway, something Cecilia recalled as a frequent occurrence when sick or injured.

> It was always like ‘You have to go because people will think you’re lazy’ or ‘people will think you’re not trying and then what will they think of me and how I’m raising you’ so it’s like- you never got the freedom to do what you really felt like, or take care of yourself, because it’s more important to look good in the eyes of other people. (Cecilia)

When Cecilia would not agree to play, her mother started yelling at and shaking her, the fight ending with her mother telling her “Get out, I never want to see you again. I don't care what happens to you as long as I don't have to see your face." After leaving the house for a short while her mother yelled that dinner was ready and acted as if nothing had happened. Her mother letting the incident pass with no comment further contributed to Cecilia’s feeling of not being important. “It probably affected me even more than the things she said, because it felt like I was really just dirt.”

It seems a core feature of the experience of growing up with a narcissistic parent is the feeling that your needs never take priority over your parent’s own interests, especially that of preserving a good image. Several participants expressed that they felt this disinterest must be due to something being wrong with them, specifically. This feeling was often intensified by the parent having a favoured sibling who did not receive the same treatment as the participants. Cecilia put it like this: “I always put the blame on myself and if something went wrong I could always say ‘it’s my fault because I am a bad person’.” This could be interpreted as feeling that the way they are treated is their own fault in some way and that they have internalized the idea of not being important or good enough.

The participants relayed several ways in which this aspect of their upbringing had impacted on their sense of self throughout their lives. Several reflected on the fact that they had learned that help would not be available when they needed it, so they would have to rely on themselves. “I have become extremely self-reliant. It’s very important to me that I can fend for myself”, Frida said.

Other participants expressed that they felt unable to assert themselves in many situations. Diana said she had a hard time knowing what her own opinions were: “I very easily get pulled into what other people think, because I don’t have my own opinions. I don’t know who I am”. Elin often struggled with feeling like her opinions were not worth voicing. “I think that somehow my brain has been thinking ‘no, it’s no good what you think’, so it’s hard for me to have an opinion, because I know what I think is gonna be stupid anyway”, she said. This sense of not being good enough was shared by many participants and Cecilia expressed “It always circled back to what was wrong with me and that I don’t deserve happiness” while Annika said “I think I’ve been pretty mean to myself because I haven’t thought I was good enough. I’ve never gotten that reassurance that I’m good enough”. Diana said that she was always made to feel she was not accepted by her family. “I always felt excluded, it was always those three against me”. When she argued against this treatment her mother told her that she was overreacting or being too sensitive.

The feeling of not being good enough was perceived to influence their relationships as adults. Several participants felt they had to earn the affection of partners by not being an inconvenience or by taking the role of caretaker. Elin described feeling responsible for the emotional climate in her marriage: “When I was married, I was a clown. As soon as my husband was angry I tried to lighten the mood like ‘Woohoo! Let’s do this, look how much fun we’re having!’”. Bella told us she had a hard time trusting affection in relationships, because she was used to being let down if she showed vulnerability as a child: “I can hardly trust people around me with my feelings and my burdens because I have always been let down every time I show even the smallest hint of weakness”. Cecilia reflected on how her friendships have been impacted, and described that she often monitored her behaviour to ensure her friends would

not leave her. It thus seems a core aspect of the relationships of adult children of narcissistic parents is a sense of having to mold oneself into something the other person will like and expending a lot of mental energy on trying to "earn" love, affection and kindness, because of the belief that one's own self isn't enough in itself.

Theme 2: Isolation and Control

The second theme, *Isolation and control*, is about the ways in which the parent exerts their power and control over the child, creating an experience of feeling isolated. Several participants reported that they had seldom spent time with other families or been allowed to have friends at home. Annika described that she always followed the same schedule as her mother, watching the same TV-shows though they were not age-appropriate and had the same bed-time as her mother. Her mother rarely let her have friends over. "I haven't had a lot of friends of my own to play with. I have mostly just been a conversation partner for my mother," she said. Annika's mother also prevented her from having contact with her father in the divorce, further contributing to this feeling of Annika's: "I would say we were pretty isolated". Frida also expressed that her mother tried to isolate her from her father after their divorce: "In the divorce, she tried to turn me against my dad. Fed me with 'dad is a psychopath' and 'dad doesn't care' and 'he doesn't want to be in contact with you'". For Diana, the isolation created by her mother was emotional rather than physical: "She created a rift between me and my brother and me and my father. She talked poorly about my father all of my life so I never had a good relationship with him." Bella also felt that she was kept isolated by her mother, something that Bella had related to the family's culture. "I thought 'this is expected'. She isolated us from all other people around her. (...) We never met other families within that culture that didn't have such a bad type of dynamic in their home," she said. For Bella, having friends at home was also an issue, and when it did happen, her mother would ignore them while they were there and then forbid Bella from inviting them again. "Once my friends went home she had a long list of things she didn't like about the friend that was over to then say 'you're not allowed to take them home anymore because I don't like them,'" she recounted.

The parent upholding a facade when in public or with other people was also a recurring theme in the interviews. "Mum has always been very good at keeping up a facade and she was always very sweet when people came over," Annika recalled, while Frida said "She is so well liked and such a sweetheart. Everyone loves her". The participants expressed that the discrepancy between their home life and the way their parent acted in the outside world led to people not realizing that anything was amiss. "People thought he was super nice. Could express himself and was orderly and everything. And then it was hell on earth at home," Elin recounted. In the context of feeling isolated, the facade could be interpreted as creating a further degree of separation from other people.

When the participants were asked to describe their parent in three words, the words "controlling" and "manipulative" came up repeatedly. Annika felt this was especially apparent in the way her mother used her physical illnesses to make others feel sorry for her: "[She has] used it to guilt-trip like 'oh no, you don't have to think about your poor, sick mother. I'll just sit here and be lonely, then, if you don't care'". Similarly, Frida described that her mother used "sob stories" to make people feel sorry for her, something Frida has since realized was a way for her to get her needs fulfilled.

> It's just that she is so terribly manipulative, so she succeeds at it. (...) You feel sorry for her. She is so damn good at it. I've gotten a lot of shit, of course. That her daughters refuse to help her and it's so awful because now she has no one and what is she going to do and all of that. And I have so many suicide letters that have come, and so does grandma. 'If I don't get money I'll kill myself. I can't live like this' and 'am I meant to end up on the street?'. I have a whole bunch of those kinds of letters. (Frida)

Bella expressed that her mother saw her as a possession she could control however she wanted to. She recalled that her mother played her and her siblings out against each other: "At home it was at that level that mum used us to fight against each other, even. She used to go and whisper in different siblings' ears to make us be at odds with each other" Elin expressed similar sentiments about her father, saying "He is so manipulative (...) he still controls me. I am like a puppet on a string, is what it feels like sometimes". Many participants also expressed that the controlling and manipulative tendencies in the relationship instilled a sense of unease in them due to the unpredictability of their parent's reactions. "I said at some point that my father is like a crocodile. I don't remember this, but my friend did. I guess it was because I thought he was swimming all calmly and then just like *chomp* (gestures the snapping shut of a crocodile's jaws)," Elin recounted.

Several participants felt that they were overly attentive and vigilant in regards to other people's moods as adults. "I am very quick at being like 'something is wrong here' and normally there is, and then you can talk about it, but sometimes people can think I'm too quick with asking how everything is," said Cecilia. Elin's experience was similar: "I was always afraid. (...) Every time I walk into a room I scan it. How does it feel, what vibes am I getting? I'm like a scanner, like beep beep beep". The hypervigilance in adulthood was understood by the participants to be linked to the controlling home environment they had experienced. "I tried to control myself in the same way that my mother had always controlled me," Cecilia said.

Another aspect that participants experienced as controlled by their parent was the narrative surrounding their upbringing and their life. Elin talked about her father making her doubt her experience of her childhood.

> When I tried to confront him about [being abusive towards her mother] he said "No, it wasn't like that at all, you've dreamt it" And he is so good at it, I know once I had to call my siblings and ask "Did I dream this?" (...) He makes you think "I'm the one that's crazy". (Elin)

Annika expressed similar thoughts when she talked about her mother turning against her father in the divorce. "Because I've been fed with stories about how horrible he was, it has in a way become a sort of reality, that my father was awful", she said. A way to interpret this aspect of the participants' experiences could be that they felt their parent was trying to control their perception and understanding of reality itself.

Some participants expressed they felt controlled by their narcissistic parent also as adults and that this still set the tone for their relationship with them. For instance, both Bella and Elin reflected on not feeling able to break contact with their respective parents, because they knew it would lead to attempts to manipulate them to return. "Then he would say that I am the worst person on earth. 'Are you, a Christian, going to do that?' and 'my neighbours are nicer than you'.(...) I get such a guilty conscience. Because how can I leave my own father?" Elin said. The participants also reflected on how this aspect of their family life had impacted other relationships in their lives. Both Diana and Frida had been in romantic relationships with

people who reminded them of their parent and exhibited similar controlling behaviours, while Cecilia described that she sometimes reproduced the same patterns as her mother in her friendships, getting defensive to control situations in which she felt insecure. Annika expressed that the care-taking behaviours her mother used to demand had become a repeating pattern in her life: “I’m so drilled to take care of my mother and always be there. So I got trained in veterinary care to take care of wounded animals. And then I would spend my free time taking care of wounded men,” she joked. It seems isolation and control play a part in the way they view their experiences of their childhoods and how they have shaped their lives as adults.

Theme 3: Love is a Transaction

A recurring theme in the interviews was the feeling that love and affection were conditional. Many participants expressed that receiving love and affection was contingent on doing things for their parent or achievements at school or in sports. For some, this was made explicit when they were young. “If she gave me something, it always came back some week later like ‘you got this from me, don’t you think I deserve something in return?’” Annika said. For Bella, it was also clear that love and affection were not a given but instead hinged on her doing certain things for her mother. “Her love was very conditional, it was ‘I love you if you do these steps, otherwise it can be taken away in an instant’”, she recalled. This experience of love being conditional and having to be earned instilled a sense where love was akin to a transaction. Bella put it like this: “When she shows love, like ‘oh let me take care of you’ or ‘how are you, darling?’, it’s used as a currency. Like she’s done me a favor” while Annika said “it is a transactional relationship to her fellow human beings”.

For other participants, the sense of love being transactional was not made as explicit but communicated indirectly through the parent’s actions and behaviours. The recurring theme of being used by the parent to prop up themself and boost their own self-esteem prompted some participants to infer that being valued by their parent had certain conditions.

> People should like her and think she is an amazing person, an amazing mother and wife and whatever else it can be, and then it’s also very important that we kids behave in a way that doesn’t burst her bubble (...) it shouldn’t really matter, but it did and still does matter a lot to her. (Cecilia)

While participants felt that their relationship to their parent was transactional, they also pointed out that it was not reciprocal. They felt they were expected to do things for their parent but not allowed to ask for anything in return. Thus, while love and affection were framed as a transaction, it was not an equal give and take. “The natural thing of supporting each other just hasn’t existed in my home. Or she’s expected me to be there for her at any time, but not the other way around. Not that she’s given anything back”, Annika said. “Everything was always on her terms”, said Cecilia.

In terms of the effect on their self-image, the participants expressed that the sense of love being a transaction contributed to feeling unsure of themselves and their worth. Annika expressed that she had struggled with performance anxiety. “I thought maybe I would get some kind of praise if I performed very well. Like maybe I would be seen”, she said. Elin also expressed that she often felt pressure to work very hard to feel like she was worth something.

> I have a hard time being lazy. Or, I am very lazy but I have a hard time relaxing … For example, in my work - I do this pretty often - I write down what I am doing, in case someone asks what I have done. So I have it prepared, because

> otherwise they might think I'm not doing anything. And that's while I'm working twenty extra hours. I always work too much, because I can never do enough. It's never enough, I can never be good enough, that doesn't work. (Elin)

The feeling that love is a transaction thus seems to instill that they need to work hard to be deemed worthy of praise and affection. This could be interpreted as a feeling of not having much intrinsic worth.

Some participants reported that they felt a sort of unease or discomfort in other relationships because of the feeling of love being transactional. Annika expressed that she felt unused to not being expected to deliver something to be treated nicely. "I'm almost uncomfortable in equal relationships when everything just works and people act like they're supposed to" … "How should I compensate when someone is nice to me, what can I offer in return?", she said. Bella had similar thoughts when she reflected on recently entering a romantic relationship, saying "Love that doesn't have conditions that is more romantic is very new to me".

Another way that participants expressed this had impacted them as adults was in terms of boundaries with other people. Bella expressed that she was used to always having to do what her mother asked without getting anything in return. As an adult, she did not feel like she could deny people requests or set boundaries about things she did not want to do.

> Even if I know I'm not comfortable with something it takes a really long time to say no and most of the time I'm willing to turn myself inside out for someone if they need help, but I don't speak out if it gets too much for me. (Bella)

In a similar way, Elin said she did not feel like she had a right to turn her back on people who came to her for support, even when they were being demanding.

> Many people who like to be validated come to me. I have friends who will call me and talk about themselves for three hours. And I'm just like "mmm". And oftentimes these people are very demanding. I feel bad for not calling them, but I don't want to call them because it's a hassle. (Elin)

It thus seems an aspect of the experience is the sense that love is a transaction on unequal terms. This feeling may also affect one's self-image and relationships in adulthood.

Theme 4: Healing through Knowledge and Connection

The journey of processing childhood experiences and healing from them was a topic that came up in most interviews. Almost all participants said that they had tried to gain an understanding of their parent and their behaviour. Many participants expressed an interest in psychology, particularly in relation to their upbringing. Some expressed learning as a way to heal, others wanted answers about their childhood experiences.

Frida and Annika described that they initially felt a lot of anger toward their parent. Through attempts at understanding and learning more about them, they managed to turn their anger into acceptance. Frida said that therapy helped her gain a new perspective on her childhood and her mother's role in it.

> I've been really angry. I've had to work on it a lot, with acceptance. And I needed to have an understanding and knowledge about how this type of personality

> disorder can present and to understand that it isn't me that is the problem. I haven't been sad really, I've been angry. (Frida)

Annika also mentioned letting go of anger after studying psychology and attending therapy. "At first I was very angry. Angry and sad and disappointed", she said. "And after a while I think I let go of being angry and just accepted it. I can't be mad at a dog for walking on four legs, it's just how they work." She also said it felt good to be able to let go of the anger and the energy.

Bella and Cecilia described that their increased understanding led to mixed feelings. They both described that they felt torn between their desire to understand their parent and not wanting to forgive them for their actions. Because of this ambivalence, the experience Bella had of gaining more understanding about her mother was twofold. On the one hand, she said that she realized her mother had been through difficult things and was living her life for the first time. "But on the other hand, this is the first time I live my life too and I wouldn't let my anger and callousness out on other people. You hurt me too and just because you've been through a lot doesn't mean I forgive you for it."

Cecilia expressed that trying to understand her mother was important to her. "I think I'm trying… because at the end of the day, she's just a person (...) there is usually a reason for why people are the way they are", she said. She also expressed that she wanted to learn more so she could process her feelings about her and decide how to move forward with their relationship. "Before I decide to hate her forever I at least want to find out if there's any hope that she can change." … "It doesn't feel fair to just hate without knowing what you hate."

Diana said her search for information was driven by a desire to understand what she had been through. "I've felt through all these years that there was something that wasn't right and I couldn't quite figure out what it was that I had been subjected to." … "I started googling about narcissists and what it means." She found an online questionnaire about relationships with narcissists and got the highest score. "I started to understand, and I leaned back and thought 'This is exactly what I've been subjected to. Finally I can have the answers to all of my questions.'" She expressed a sense of relief at this new clarity.

Most participants described having issues with self-esteem and learning about narcissism seemed to have helped them put their understanding of their experiences into a broader context and changed how they viewed them. For many, the pursuit of understanding and knowledge led to the realization that their parent's behavior was not their fault.

Another avenue leading to a similar change seems to be through relationships with other people. Cecilia said that when she was able to move in with her other parent and his spouse her view of herself began to change.

> As soon as I started to live with them and I got a lot more love and care, I managed to see more of a value in myself, that I actually deserved to be cared for and that people could like me. (Cecilia)

Elin told about her struggles with self-esteem and said that it had helped to have people in her life that saw her differently than her parent.

> The people you've met that had a different view, that saw you in a different way, it's hard to believe them but it still works. I think that even if it's hard, if you have that with you then you're not a hopeless case. (Elin)

Elin also mentioned a deacon in her neighborhood who had an open door policy for struggling teens. She felt that he had made a difference for her growing up. "He was the adult

that was there for me and helped me (...) I think he probably saved me." Having an external support system seems to have had an ameliorating effect on their struggles growing up with a narcissistic parent.

Positive relationships also seemed to have helped participants who entered abusive relationships due to the feeling of normalcy those relationships provided. Frida told about two destructive relationships but that it helped to have friends and a therapist that supported her in leaving the relationships.

> You become better and better at listening to yourself, and also to close friends. You have to have non-judgmental friends that stick with you ... that can help coach me so I end up on the right path. And also the therapist has been fantastic in helping me break free from these relationships. (Frida)

Frida also recounted how her friends had become a family to her that could offer support dealing with a serious illness in lieu of a supporting biological family.

> I will have a couple of months ahead of me where I won't be able to take care of myself with everything. So my friends have become my new family. I have a network with great friends and that's extremely important to me. (Frida)

Theme 5: Grieving a Childhood that Could Have Been

A feeling expressed by many participants when thinking back on their childhoods and their relationship with their perceived narcissistic parent was a sense of deep sorrow. This sorrow concerned the way their lives had turned out due to their childhood experiences as well as how their family life had been when they grew up.

The participants described that they felt a sense of sadness when comparing the childhood they had to that of other people. They expressed that it felt like they had missed something. Some remembered having this feeling from an early age. Cecilia, for example, talked about comparing her mother to other adults when she was a child.

> I felt like "imagine if I had moved in with this friend, imagine how good I would have had it" (...) I remember the feeling of "I don't want to go home to my own mum" because her mum treated me so well (...) so I compared her [my mother] to all middle aged women I stumbled upon, even my teachers. It always made me reflect like "how would this teacher have been as a mum? I'm sure she would have been a good mum" (Cecilia)

Cecilia thus expressed that she wished for a different mother than the one she had, daydreaming about having a life where she was treated well by her mother. Other participants shared this experience of engaging in hypotheticals and imagining other circumstances for themselves. Annika, for example, stated that it was a common occurrence for her in the present to think about what could have been in the past. "But of course I've had a lot of "what ifs" in my head. If I had parents who supported me, what would my life have looked like? What have I missed out on in the long run?". It thus seems this feeling is best described as a yearning for something that is missing from one's life.

For many participants, the feeling that something was missing from their childhood became apparent when they compared themselves to other people. Bella, for example, described her introduction to her sister-in-law's family as a defining moment in her

understanding of her own childhood. She had previously thought that the dynamic in her family was normal and common in her culture. But when she met her sister-in-law's family, who had the same cultural background, she realized they were thoughtful and affectionate in a way Bella was unfamiliar with. "It was like a shock for me because I had never experienced that before. So it came as a shock, like 'wow, is that how a family is supposed to be?', she said. Bella expressed that she felt she was not getting the same things out of her relationship with her mother that other people got out of theirs. "You can tell sometimes, even just in the way people act, where I'm like 'okay, so your parents have loved you all your life'", she said. Frida also described a sense of sadness arising when she compared her experience to that of other people. For her, realizing that her mother had narcissistic traits and had not been the best mother came in early adulthood. Before that, she had idolized her mother and thought of her as her hero. When she learned that her mother had scammed a lot of people], including Frida's grandmother, out of money, her view of her mother started to shift.

> I feel a bit, what shall I say, cheated out of my childhood. I can get sad when I hear others and of course see others who have super nice families and a good relationship with their parents. What incredible support they get. So that makes me sad, of course. That I haven't gotten to experience that myself. (Frida)

It seems a core component of this feeling of grief is the sense that one's childhood was not what it should have been and that there had been something missing. The participants expressed that this made them sad or angry. At the same time, they felt longing, and a wish to experience the parts of a "normal" childhood that had not been present in their own life. This could be viewed as a process of grieving a potential childhood, the one that could have been if things had been different. Annika described it as such when she said the following:

> It became more of a sense of grief after that. Which I have had a bit of a hard time getting over. I don't really know how to move on from it. I will never get the upbringing that I maybe would have needed. (Annika)

In this quote, Annika touched on the inescapable nature of the feeling of having missed out on one's childhood. She said that this grief and sorrow was something she could not really get over. Other participants also remarked on the sense of not being able to escape the influence of their childhoods or expressed a wish to move on from this aspect of their lives. Elin, for example, wondered if she would feel free if her father passed away. "One thing I have been pondering is what happens when he dies? Will I still have these weird symptoms or will I- it'll be interesting", she said. Bella expressed that she would like to get closure on her upbringing, but did not know how. "It's mixed feelings and I don't know how to feel about it. To reach a conclusion and put an end to this chapter. It's sort of hanging in the air" she said. It thus seems a central feature of the experiences is pondering questions about what could have been if things had been different and experiencing feelings of grief about missing out on the love, affection, attention and support they would have needed as children.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the childhood experiences of adult children who perceive their parents as narcissists, and the effect their upbringing had on their current lives. The research questions were the following: How do adult children of narcissistic parents view their experiences of their upbringing? How do adult children of narcissistic parents perceive

that their self-image has been impacted by the parenting they received? How do adult children of narcissistic parents experience that their relationships have been impacted by the parenting they received? However, before discussing the findings, it is important to emphasize the fact that the results of this study concern the subjective experiences of people who perceive their parent to be narcissistic. Only one participant had knowledge of a formal diagnosis for narcissistic personality disorder given to their parent. The participants were recruited based on their subjective presumption that their parent was narcissistic. It is therefore impossible to verify whether the parents would meet the diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

The analysis resulted in five themes: Never got to feel important, Isolation and control, Love is a transaction, Healing through knowledge and connection, and Grieving a childhood that could have been. A recurring theme was that the participants had felt unimportant as a person, and they described having issues with their self-image as a result. All of them also mentioned problems with relationships as adults although those difficulties presented in different areas. Several participants had at one point ended up with partners with similar personality traits as their parent, while others had problems with being able to connect with, and trust their partners. Findings also indicate problems with managing conflicts and not knowing when to set boundaries and say no in a relationship.

The first research question concerns how adult children of narcissistic parents view their experiences of their upbringing. The bulk of the interviews was spent on examining this topic, and the experiences concerning it run through all five themes. General feelings were not being allowed to take priority over their parents, descriptions of a lonely and isolated childhood, and that love was something they needed to earn. Furthermore, they viewed their childhood experiences as something they needed to heal from and they mourned the childhood they never experienced.

The findings concerning feeling unimportant and isolated are in line with previous research on the experiences of adult children of narcissistic parents. Jagasia et al. (2023) found that adult children of narcissistic parents tended to describe their childhoods as devoid of nurturance and security. These experiences overlap with findings from the current study indicating that the experiences from childhood centered around not receiving nurture and support when needed. Jagasia et al (2023) also described that the narcissistic parents engaged in misuses of power, which can be compared to the result in the present study indicating that the parents used different tactics that were perceived to be controlling, isolating, and manipulative. The experience of being isolated from the world by one's narcissistic mother was also featured in Määtä and Uusiautti's (2020) study. The finding highlighting grief over a lost childhood was similar to the theme Jagasia et al. (2023) named "The lost ideal", in which they emphasized the feeling of grief associated with growing up with a narcissistic parent. They draw on the framework "the absent but implicit" by White (2000). The idea behind the framework is that people often understand their experiences by contrasting them against a preferable imagined ideal. They then build a narrative around the experience by comparing it to the ideal. Our participants and the participants in the study by Jagasia et al (2023) both built such a narrative around their yearning for a better parent, a better childhood, and a better life. The results of the present study thus support the finding that grief is a central emotion in the experience of adult children of narcissistic parents.

An overall finding are experiences of being deprived of something. The participants all put their experiences into the frame of what is normal and expected. For many participants, this idea of what is normal only arose once they had been exposed to other families and the ways they interacted. They described that by gaining an understanding of the way childhood looked for other people, they began to understand what was missing from their own lives. The participants articulated a sense of having been deprived in comparison to other children, whose

families were described as “normal” and who were understood to have had a “good childhood”. Viewing other people’s childhoods as “good” and “normal” can be seen as having an implicit ideal. Through forming an idea about what an ideal childhood should look like, the participants thus had something to compare their own childhood to. In doing so, they were able to construct a narrative around the aspects of their childhood they found lacking in contrast to the ideal.

Findings, indicating that the participants found their childhoods lacking in warmth and affection, could be understood by the concept of “good enough parenting”, introduced by Winnicott (1960). This concept is based on the idea that being “good enough” is sufficient to successfully raise a child. While there is no consensus as to what constitutes “good enough” parenting (Choate & Engstrom, 2014; Taylor et al., 2009), research shows that unconditional love, care and commitment, consistency, boundaries and, especially, putting the child’s needs first are important aspects of being a “good enough” parent (Hoghughi & Speight, 1998; Kellett & Apps, 2009; Taylor et al. 2009). These aspects of parenting were lacking in the participants’ narratives. Rather, they highlighted that they did not feel that their needs were put first, and they felt that love, care and commitment were conditioned.

The second research question was “How do adult children of narcissistic parents perceive that their self-image has been impacted by the parenting they received?”. Our analysis points mainly toward a feeling of inadequacy and low self-worth. The feeling that “I am not good enough” was a recurring theme for the participants, who understood this feeling as causally connected to their childhood experiences with their parent.

The participants' feelings of not being good enough can be understood by their experiences of being unimportant to the parent, that the parent held all the power, and that love was a transaction. As adults they described that seeking comfort from others was difficult, that they had to be self-reliant, and they felt they had to earn appreciation and a sense of self-worth through working hard or always being there for others. Several also mentioned that they would always scan their environment for possible threats, having learned to be hypervigilant because their parent’s behaviour was unpredictable. This points to them having formed an image of the world as unsafe and unpredictable, that comfort and help are not readily available, and that they are unworthy of appreciation. Previous research supports the finding that a core aspect of the experience of adult children of narcissistic parents is a feeling of not being good enough. Other studies on the experience of adult children of narcissistic parents highlighted feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth, being made to feel like a burden on the parent, and a long-standing belief of not being good enough (Jagasia et al, 2023; Määtä & Uusiautti, 2020).

The third research question concerned how adult children of narcissistic parents perceived that their relationships had been impacted by the parenting they received. Findings suggest that the participants’ relationships had been negatively impacted. They described having partners that exhibited similar behaviours as their parent, having problems standing up for themselves, expressing their opinion and setting boundaries, feeling distrustful of affection and experiencing difficulties when conflicts arose. Other research points to similar results. Lyons et al (2023) examined personal narratives on Reddit in which adult children of narcissistic parents detailed their experiences in romantic relationships and found recurring themes of low trust, feelings of shame, fear of abandonment and exploitation, commitment issues, poor conflict resolution strategies, sensitivity to criticism and lack of boundaries in the accounts they shared on the forum. Some of these themes were found in the present study, particularly experiences of low trust, fear of exploitation, sensitivity to criticism and lack of boundaries. Jagasia et al (2023) also found difficulties trusting other people, feelings of guilt and shame, and difficulties with boundaries and self-assertion to be central themes in how adult children of narcissistic parents experience their relationships. The participants in the present study also highlighted trust issues, difficulties asserting oneself and not knowing how to set boundaries when relaying their experiences.

Relationships were an area in which the participants' accounts diverged from one another. Most participants described problems in relationships due to their childhood experiences. However, these problems arose in different areas and different ways. Some participants expressed that they avoided being in romantic relationships to protect themselves and felt uncomfortable with affection. Others expressed that they had difficulties asserting themselves and setting boundaries in their relationships, describing an experience of letting friends and partners treat them in ways they did not like. Furthermore, findings show that participants had experiences of relationships they described as destructive. At the same time, findings also suggest that relationships were often experienced as healing. Results from Lyons et al (2023) also show a variety of experiences of how relationships were impacted by growing up with a perceived narcissistic parent. It thus seems the impact on relationships is complex and experiences vary.

While participants with ongoing mental illness were excluded from this study, many participants reported that they had not always been mentally well. It seems that individuals of narcissistic parents often deal with mental health issues, meaning they are likely to seek therapy. It is therefore important that therapists understand what growing up with a narcissistic parent can entail. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the experience of adult children of narcissistic parents and offers insights into the ways in which childhood experiences with a narcissistic parent affect self-image and relationships in adulthood.

Limitations and Future Research

A set of evaluative criteria for IPA research was developed by Smith (2011) that delineates what is required for an IPA study to be deemed of an acceptable quality. One of these criteria concerns the number of extracts from individual participants that should be represented in each theme. For a study with 4-8 participants, each theme should have extracts from at least three participants which applies to our study due to having six participants and extracts from four to six participants in each theme. Other criteria are that the analysis should be coherent, plausible and interesting, that it is sufficiently transparent and that it clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA in that it is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic. These are criteria which we have aspired to meet to the best of our ability. For example, to meet the transparency criterion, we have described the method used in detail and provided our interview guide as an appendix. This way, the reader can follow our course of action and scrutinize the main questions our analysis relied on.

A significant limitation of our study is the fact that we cannot verify that the parents were, in fact, narcissistic. This limitation arose due to practical, logistical and ethical constraints caused by the scope and context of the study. The findings are based on a subjective judgement by the child that their parent was narcissistic. Therefore, the results should be interpreted carefully and with their inherent subjectivity in mind. The findings are also limited to the child's experience and thus only capture a one sided perspective. Future studies could focus on the parent's point of view.

There could be limits to the transferability of our results, specifically regarding gender. Our participants were exclusively women, which may have impacted the results. Additionally, five out of six participants identified their mother as their target parent. It is possible that there are gender differences, both in how narcissism affects parenting and in how it is experienced by the child. Therefore, it could be that these results do not capture the experiences of male adult children of narcissistic parents or fully represent adult children of narcissistic fathers. In terms of age, socioeconomic background, family structure and culture the participants differed from each other, thus covering a wide range of experiences and life situations. However,

because people with ongoing serious mental health issues were excluded from this study, we may have missed cases where the impact of childhood experiences was particularly severe.

While we engaged in the practice of bracketing our preconceptions and were careful to keep our interpretations grounded in the participants' words, our biases are, to a degree, inescapable. The fact that one of us authors have extensive knowledge in the topic of narcissistic parents, follow up questions could have been influenced. To circumvent the influence of our preconceptions, our method involved parallel coding. We coded the data independently at first, enabling us to cross-check our interpretations for any discrepancies.

Our methods of recruitment might also have affected the results. A majority of our participants were contacted through a social media group on narcissistic partners which should increase the likelihood of participants being well versed in the terminology and perspectives that accompany the subject matter on different forums. It is possible that participants who have not researched the subject of narcissism would give a different account of their experiences which could affect the selection and representation of our themes, especially the theme "Healing through knowledge and connection". Future research could explore the difference in how the experience of growing up with a narcissistic parent without having much knowledge affects how participants view their upbringing and how it has affected their adult life.

Conclusion

Growing up with a narcissistic parent can have negative consequences in several major areas of life that do not end with childhood. This became evident in the experiences described by the participants in this study, whose accounts detailed the impact of not being allowed to feel important, feeling controlled and isolated from the world by one's parent and learning that love is conditional. This study shows that adult children of narcissistic parents perceive the way they view themselves, their capabilities, their relationships and their own worth to have been affected by their parent in ways that persist into adulthood. This can be understood as an effect of parenting on one's view of self and others. The path to healing can be found through learning and connection with healthy individuals that can shift the structure of these views to include self-compassion and trust. This study also finds that feelings of loss and grief are a central component in the experience of growing up with a narcissistic parent.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Poster

Did you grow up with a narcissistic parent?

Hi! We're two psychology students that are writing our master thesis on parents with narcissism. The aim of the study is to deepen the understanding of what it is like to grow up with a parent with narcissism. We will ask questions about your personal experience of your childhood and how it affects you today.

We are seeking people to interview who are over 18 years of age, speak Swedish and has grown up with a parent that they perceive as being narcissistic. In accordance with ethical guidelines and the importance of safeguarding sensitive information we are only looking for participants who are not currently in contact with primary health care or psychiatry due to a mental health diagnosis.

The interview can take place at the Gothenburg Institute of Psychology or be done digitally for the ones who prefer this option. The interview takes around 60-90 minutes and will be recorded and transcribed. Participation is voluntary and you can choose to end your participation at any time without needing to explain why. We will follow the Personal Data Act and have routines to safeguard your anonymity.

The study is done under the mentorship of Jennifer Strand, associate professor at the Gothenburg Institute of Psychology (jennifer.strand@psy.gu.se)

If you are interested in participating or have questions about the study you are welcome to contact us at our email addresses below.

With pleasant regards

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APPENDIX B

Information letter

Do you want to contribute to research on narcissistic parents?

We are two psychology students at Gothenburg University that are writing our master thesis on the experience of growing up with narcissistic parents this spring.

Research on this subject is so far limited. The few studies that have been made suggest that the type of parenting that is the hallmark of parents with narcissism can have consequences for the ones affected.

To increase the understanding of what it is like to grow up with a parent with narcissism we want to interview people who have lived under these circumstances to get their opinion on their upbringing and how this affects them today.

Who can participate?

- People who have grown up with at least one parent that you suspect had narcissistic traits
- People that do not have current contact with primary health care or psychiatry due to a mental health diagnosis (due to ethical concerns)

What does it mean?

To contribute to this study includes participation in an interview, either by Zoom or in person at the Gothenburg Institute of Psychology. The interview will take around 60-90 minutes. During the interview you will get to answer questions that pertain to your personal experiences when it comes to your upbringing and your parent. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Participation is voluntary and can be ended by you at any time without needing to explain yourself. The result will be published anonymously and routines exist that will safeguard your anonymity. The result of the study will be presented at a seminar that is open to the public and archived in the university of Gothenburg's database. If you want to recieve the study once it is finished you can contact us and we will send it to you.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Background questions

How old are you? How do you spend your days?

What did your family look like growing up? Did you grow up with both your parents, a single parent? Did you grow up with siblings? Which parent did you perceive as narcissistic?

Did your parent have a diagnosis? Do you know if they were in contact with the psychiatric healthcare system? Was there any other type of mental illness?

Main questions

How would you say the things you just told me affected their parenting? How was the family dynamic impacted?

Could you describe your parent in three words? Can you think of a situation where your parent was/did (word)? / Can you think of an event where (word) applied particularly well?

How has your view of your parent changed over time? Do you notice any differences when you talk to other people about their upbringing? Has this affected how you view your own parent(s)?

If you got sad, what did you do?

Thinking about other important/close relationships in your life, can you see traces of your relationship to your parent in them? Do you think they have been affected by the way your home life was like growing up?

Did you ever bring friends home? How did that go? What did your friends think of your parent?

If a conflict arises in a relationship, how do you handle it?

How did you view yourself as a child? How do you view yourself today? How do you think your self-image has been affected by your upbringing?

Can you describe a time when something happened that affected your self-image?