Grandiose Versus Vulnerable Narcissism: The Source of Ego Threat as a Factor in Predicting Level of Reactive Aggression

Previous research has demonstrated that a distinguishing characteristic of narcissism is the propensity for aggression in response to an ego threat. However, no research to date has investigated differences between narcissism subtypes (grandiose and vulnerable) in reaction to ego threat as a function of relationship to source of threat. The current study investigated level of aggression in response to being ostracized as a function of narcissism subtype, relationship to rejecter, and relationship to target of aggression. Participants, recruited from an introductory psychology course, completed narcissism measures, Cyberball to induce a rejection experience, and a variant of the White Noise Aggression Paradigm to measure level of reactive aggression. It was hypothesized that individuals with higher levels of grandiose narcissism would demonstrate higher levels of aggression only when the rejecter and target of aggression was a peer, whereas individuals with higher levels of vulnerable narcissism would demonstrate higher levels of aggression only when the rejecter and target of aggression was a romantic partner. This research improves our understanding of the interaction between personality and interpersonal relationships on threat perception and response to that threat.