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Are Universities Creating Millennial Narcissistic Employees? An Empirical Examination of Narcissism in Business Students and Its Implications

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Abstract

The authors investigate whether narcissism levels are significantly higher in undergraduate business students than psychology students, whether business schools are reinforcing narcissism in the classroom, and whether narcissism is influencing student salary and career expectations. Data were collected from Millennial students (*n* = 536) and faculty at an AACSB-accredited comprehensive state university. Results indicate that the current generation of college students has significantly higher levels of narcissism than college students of the past, business students possess significantly higher levels of narcissism than psychology students, narcissism does not have a significant (positive or negative) relationship with business school classroom outcomes, and narcissists expect to have significantly more career success in terms of ease of finding a job, salary, and promotions. Considering the well-documented and profoundly negative implications of narcissism for workplace environments, this finding suggests a need for future research on the impact of increasing student narcissism in business students and on successful intervention strategies.

Three of the defining descriptors often affixed to the Millennial Generation (those born between 1977 and 2000) are that they are narcissistic and self-involved and that they project a profound sense of entitlement. Recent articles in the popular press are reinforcing the perception of increasing narcissism among Millennials, including a *Newsweek* story on the "narcissism epidemic" titled "Generation Me" (Kelley, 2009), which states that "we've created a generation of hot-house flowers puffed with a disproportionate sense of self- worth." And there are increasing concerns that narcissistic employees are having a negative impact on business in the United States and have even been argued to represent one of the root causes of the global financial crisis, as discussed in a recent article in Bloomberg, "Harvard Narcissists with MBAs Killed Wall Street" (Hassett, 2009).

There is evidence that narcissism levels have significantly increased among U.S. college students over the past 25 years (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). An increase in narcissism among the Millennial Generation raises numerous potential issues for higher education, as detailed in Bergman, Westerman, and Daly (2010). For example, narcissists often dis- play a surprising sense of entitlement and inflated expectations. A 2008 survey of college students found a significant positive relationship between narcissism and academic entitlement, with 66% of students surveyed believing that their professor should give them special consideration if they explained that they were trying hard (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008). In that same survey, nearly a quarter believed that their professor should lend them his/her course notes if they ask for them. Additionally, individuals higher in narcissism often display hypersensitivity to evaluation and potential criticism (Beck, Freeman, & Associates, 1990; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) and are likely to be very poor team players as they tend to blame others for failure, take credit for success, and are overly competitive (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000). Furthermore, there is indirect support for the contention that these increases may be even more pronounced among business students in comparison with those in other disciplines (e.g., Robak, Chiffriller, & Zappone, 2007).

However, what may be especially enigmatic for business school educators is that narcissism may have some benefits for transitory or temporary work environments similar to the higher education classroom (Bergman et al., 2010). Narcissists tend to have higher self-esteem, are more extraverted (e.g., Emmons, 1984), have increased short-term likeability (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004; Paulhus, 1998), show enhanced performance on public evaluation tasks (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and

demonstrate emergent leadership (Blair, Hoffman, & Helland, 2008; Brunell, Gentry, Campbell, & Kuhnert, 2006; Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009). It is possible, then, that narcissists may have some advantage in the business school classroom, where during relatively short academic sessions (a few months), assertiveness, talkative- ness, and overt confidence are encouraged and rewarded. As a result, it is possible that narcissists may be graded or assessed at a higher level than less narcissistic students in the classroom.

In a broader sense, if the product of higher education in business includes disproportionately higher levels of narcissism among our graduates, this may be particularly problematic for the business community. High levels of narcissism have been associated with substantially negative behaviors of particular importance to employing organizations including white-collar crime (Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006), assault (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003), aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), distorted judgments of one's abilities (Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003), rapidly depleting common resources (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005), risky decision making (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004), and alcohol abuse (Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005). Furthermore, as managers, narcissists are likely to build toxic, unproductive work environments (Lubit, 2002).

In summary, a rising tide of narcissism would present significant problems for organizations, their productivity, and long-term viability. Considering the mounting evidence pointing to significant increases in narcissism among Millennials (Twenge et al., 2008), we must begin empirically investigating the impact this rise in narcissism may have on this generation.

This research represents the first study to examine whether business schools have high levels of narcissism among their students. We present results on data collected from 536 undergraduates in the Southeastern United States. We first explore whether narcissism levels are elevated in comparison with historical averages and whether narcissism is significantly higher in business students than in psychology students. We then examine whether business schools are rewarding and reinforcing narcissism in the classroom and investigate the relationship between narcissism and student salary and career expectations. We conclude by discussing the implications of our results for higher education and business.

Narcissism and the Millennial Generation

It is important to note that as we discuss narcissism among the Millennial Generation, we are referring to a normal, nonclinical personality trait. We are not suggesting that this generation suffers disproportionately from a clinical personality disorder (i.e., Narcissistic Personality Disorder; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Substantial research by personality and social psychologists has established subclinical narcissism as a personality trait that normal, healthy individuals possess to varying degrees (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005; Emmons, 1987; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984), and it is this normal personality trait that we examined in this study. Subclinical narcissism appears quite similar to its clinical counterpart; it simply appears to a lesser degree. Thus, like clinical narcissists, "normal" narcissists (referred to simply as "narcissists" from this point) hold an extremely positive, even inflated, view of themselves; believe they are special and unique; and expect special treatment from others while believing they owe little or nothing in return (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Millon, 1996). Although narcissists lack empathy and have few, if any, close relationships, they strongly desire social contact, as social contacts are a primary source of admiration and attention. Because narcissists are unable to regulate their own self-esteem, they must rely on external sources for affirmation (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Thus, narcissists engage in a variety of strategies aimed to maintain their inflated egos, such as exhibitionism and attention- seeking behavior (Buss & Chiodo, 1991), dominance and competitiveness in social situations (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988), anger and self-enhancing attributions in response to criticism (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998), and derogation of those who provide threatening feedback (Kernis & Sun, 1994).

The origins of narcissism in the Millennial Generation are unclear. However, it is likely that some combination of parenting and cultural or societal conditioning is responsible. Millon and colleagues (Millon, 1996; Millon & Davis, 2000) suggest a social learning theory perspective, in that special treatment and overindulgence by parents have resulted in this generation of children valuing themselves independent of real attainments, resulting in enhanced expectations for automatic admiration and praise. Those taking a cognitive theory perspective (e.g., Beck et al., 1990; Young, 1998) believe narcissistic tendencies have emerged from excessively idealizing parents who caused their children to develop overactive self-schemas that include inflated beliefs of personal uniqueness and self-importance. Parents may also systematically deny or

distort negative external feedback to their children, and insulation from such feedback could reinforce and strengthen narcissistic tendencies. Baker, Comer, and Martinak (2008) lament this generation's pervasive incivility and sense of entitlement in academia and beyond and note doting styles of parenting as a potential cause. Other researchers have proposed that Western society's shift toward materialism and individualism may have contributed to increases in narcissism (Lasch, 1978; Twenge, 2006). Meisel and Fearon (2007) argue that generational cohorts possess explicit tacit knowledge that is contextually and culturally derived and note a need for management educa- tors to improve cross-generational understanding. However, the origins of narcissism are speculative, and the reality of enhanced (or reduced) narcissism in business students is currently unknown.

We first examine whether our sample of Millennials has a mean narcissism level significantly higher than historical averages. Twenge et al. (2008) conducted a cross-temporal meta-analysis of 85 samples of American college students and found that narcissism levels have risen over the generations captured between 1979 and 2006. Specifically, they found that scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI—the most widely used measure of subclinical narcissism; Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981; Raskin & Terry, 1988) were positively related to the year of data collection, with students in 1982 having a mean NPI score of 15.02 and students in 2006 having a mean NPI score of 17.29. Thus, by historical standards, we expect our 2009 sample of college students to have an elevated mean NPI score consistent with the findings of a progressive increase over time.

Hypothesis 1: The mean narcissism level of the present sample will be significantly higher than historical averages.

Narcissism and the Business Student

Although narcissism levels have not been explicitly examined in business students, research has found that narcissistic tendencies such as materialistic values and money importance tend to be enhanced in business students (e.g., Robak et al., 2007; Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Simons, & Soenens, 2006). Robak et al. (2007) found that business students were more motivated to make money than students with a psychology major and were subject to more negative mood states, such as anger and depression, which may also result from high narcissism. Similarly, in a comparison of education and business university students, Vansteenkiste et al. (2006) found that business majors more strongly

endorsed extrinsic values (with a particular emphasis on personal financial success), displayed lower levels of well-being, showed more signs of internal distress, and had more substance abuse problems than did education students. In addition, the Vansteenkiste et al. (2006) study indicated that the differences in self-reported well-being and substance use between business and education students were fully explained by the type of values with which each group was primarily concerned (business students cited wealth accumulation, and education students cited helping people in need). Based on this previous research, we wished to directly examine the levels of narcissism among business students versus students in a more "helping- oriented" discipline, namely, psychology. This comparison seems particularly relevant since most of the previous studies on subclinical narcissism (and the majority of those included in the recent meta-analysis; Twenge et al., 2008) used samples of psychology students. If narcissism levels are rising among students in a helping-oriented discipline such as psychology, and the level of narcissism among Millennial business students is even higher, this may support the public's growing concern regarding the impact of narcissism on U.S. businesses.

Some research also indicates significant gender differences in narcissism, with men typically scoring higher on the NPI than women (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; Twenge et al., 2008). However, this gender gap appears to be rapidly closing, as between 2002 and 2007 women were developing narcissistic traits at four times the rate of men (Irvine, 2009). Furthermore, we suspect that the percentages of men versus women differ substantially between business and psychology disciplines, with business students being predominantly male. Therefore, we also explore whether any significant difference between disciplines is the result of a difference in the gender composition of our samples. Overall, we assert that, although gender differences are likely to exist in overall levels of narcissism, being a business student would be a more significant driver of narcissism than gender.

Hypothesis 2a: Business students will have significantly higher levels of narcissism than psychology students.

Hypothesis 2b: Narcissism will be significantly higher in business school students than in psychology students, controlling for gender.

Narcissism and Business Student Classroom Performance

If narcissism levels are significantly higher in business students than in students of other disciplines, then we may be essentially graduating future busi- ness leaders who are more entitled, more exploitative, and less empathic. Therefore, we investigate the possibility that business schools are reinforcing narcissism in the classroom. As discussed earlier, narcissism may have some short-term benefits in a classroom environment. Narcissists possess short- term likeability, show enhanced performance on public evaluation tasks, focus on short-term victories in competitive tasks, are more extraverted, and demonstrate emergent leadership (Blair et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2005; Emmons, 1984; Oltmanns et al., 2004; Paulhus, 1998; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). Short-term likeability, emergent leadership, and enhanced performance on public evaluation tasks may be rewarded in classroom presentations. The classroom also consists of a short-term competitive environment, which may motivate more narcissistic students toward achieving "victory" or better grades than their classmates. It is possible, then, that narcissists may have some advantage in the business school classroom. A previous study (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998) found no relationship between narcissism and course grades among undergraduate psychology students; however, given that we expect to find significant differences between business students and psychology students, we examine the significance of this relationship for Millennial business students.

Hypothesis 3: Business students higher in narcissism will have enhanced classroom performance in terms of class attendance and final course grades.

Narcissism and Inflated Business

Student Career Expectations

Perhaps most directly related to the concerns voiced by the media and many employers is the issue of narcissistic entitlement and expectations. As dis- cussed previously, numerous recent articles and surveys have led to the Millennial generation being characterized as self-involved and entitled (e.g., Hassett, 2009; Kelley, 2009). Entitlement represents one of the primary components of narcissism (both clinical and subclinical; American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Emmons, 1984), which, simply put, means that entitled narcissists believe that they deserve more—more

money, more success, more rewards, more praise. They possess pervasive and unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment and believe that others should automatically comply with their wishes.

In their recent book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, Twenge and Campbell (2009) discuss this issue at some length, quoting managers who bemoan this generation's entitlement and inflated expectations. These managers see this current generation of employees as wanting to do less work for more pay, while expecting more flexibility, work–life balance, and praise. Anecdotally speaking, we often find ourselves as faculty members personally advising our graduating, job-seeking students against asking interviewers what the company can do for them—a question that is often first and foremost on their list. Perhaps most telling, in a recent survey of 2,500 hiring managers, 87% agreed with the statement that younger employees "feel more entitled in terms of compensation, benefits, and career advancement than older generations" (Ngo, 2008). And Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, and Sischo (2006) found that high school seniors in 2000 were much less realistic in their career planning when compared with those from a 1976 sample.

Inflated career expectations on the part of Millennials may be directly associated with increased levels of narcissism. Specifically, we expect that business students higher in narcissism believe that they will have an easier time finding a job than their business school classmates, that they will make more money both at the start of their jobs and after 5 years, and that they will be promoted more times during the first 5 years of their jobs.

Hypothesis 4: Business students higher in narcissism will possess significantly greater expectations in terms of ease of finding a job, salary, and promotion.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Participants were 560 undergraduate business and psychology students at a comprehensive state university in the southeastern United States. Our sample included 31 classes, 16 instructors of business and psychology, and students from all majors within the business discipline. We eliminated participants with incomplete data and those who fell outside of the age range of the Millennial Generation, which resulted in a final sample of 536 subjects. The mean age of our final sample was 21.5 years, with a range

of 17 to 30 years. The sample consisted of 307 males, 225 females, and 4 participants who did not indicate gender (approximately 57% male and 42% female), and 405 business students and 131 psychology students. The enhanced size of the business student sample reflected the larger business student cohort at the university. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no extra credit was provided. Participants completed a survey, administered by a third party during class time, consisting of demographic information including age, gender, and cumulative grade point average (GPA) and several inventories representing our independent and dependent variables. Informed consent was used to collect information regarding participants' classroom performance (i.e., final course grades and attendance) from instructors after the conclusion of the courses.

Measures

Narcissism. To assess narcissism, participants completed the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988). The NPI contains 40 paired statements; each pair includes a narcissistic response and a non-narcissistic response. Respondents were asked to select the statement that best matched their own feelings and beliefs. Items included the following: "Modesty doesn't become me" versus "I am essentially a modest person" and "I can usually talk my way out of anything" versus "I try to accept the consequences of my behavior." Narcissistic responses were summed, and higher scores on the NPI indicated a more narcissistic personality. The NPI has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). Cronbach's alpha was .83.

Career expectations. In total, participants responded to eight separate items asking about their career expectations. Regarding ease of finding a job, participants responded to two separate items: "It will be difficult for me to find a career job after graduation" (7-point scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) and "Consider your search for a career job after graduation; do you think your job search will be easier or harder than that of your classmates?" (5-point scale, ranging from *much easier* to *much harder*). As suggested by the ranges provided, lower scores indicated an expectation of an easier job search.

Salary expectations. Subjects responded to four separate salary expectation items, two assessing starting salary expectations and two assessing salary expectations after 5 years on the job. Each pair of items included one item that asked respondents to estimate the range of their expected salary and one item that asked respondents to rate how they

expected their salary to compare with their classmates. For example, for starting salary, participants responded to “I expect that my starting salary in my first full-time job after graduation will be in the range of $_____ per year” (8 options, ranging from “$10,000-19,999” to “$80,000 or above”) and “Consider your starting salary in your first career job after graduation, how do you think it will compare to that of your class- mates?” (5-point scale, ranging from *much less than theirs* to *much more than theirs*). Two similar items were asked regarding salary after 5 years on the job. For each of these four items, higher scores indicated higher expectations regarding salary.

Promotion expectations. Participants responded to two separate items assessing expectations of promotion. These items were the following: “In the first 5 years of your career, how many times do you expect to be promoted?” (six options, ranging from *none* to *five or more times*), and “How quickly do you expect to be promoted in the first few years of your career?” (six options, ranging from “within the first 6 months” to “within the first 5 years,” plus an option of “I do not expect to be promoted within the first 5 years of my career”). For the first of these items, higher scores indicated higher expectations regarding the number of times they would be promoted. For the second item, lower scores indicated an expectation of being promoted more quickly.

Classroom performance. At the conclusion of the academic session, each instructor was given a list of the students who consented to participate, and the instructor provided the final course grade and attendance for each student. Both variables were in percentages, and higher scores indicated better performance and greater attendance.

Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Overall Mean Narcissism Levels

In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that the mean level of narcissism for our sample of Millennials would be significantly higher than historical averages. To test this hypothesis, we first sought a baseline to represent historical aver- ages and, thus, used, as a comparison, the sample means from studies using the NPI that were conducted prior to the Millennial Generation (born 1977-2000) reaching college age (age 17 years). This

meant using sample means based on data collected prior to 1994. Given the rigorous search and inclusion procedures used by Twenge et al. (2008) for their recent meta-analysis, we used the 10 sample means identified by those authors that were based on data collected prior to 1994 (see Table 2).

Independent sample *t* tests were conducted to determine if the average level of narcissism in the current sample of Millennials, $M = 17.06$, $SD = 6.50$, was significantly higher than the mean in the comparative samples. As can be seen in Table 2, the results indicate that the average level in the current sample is significantly higher than 8 of the 10 comparative studies. Furthermore, the mean of the current sample is higher (although not statistically significant) than the remaining two means reported (Gabriel et al., 1994, and Gustafson & Ritzer, 1995). In sum, these results provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Levels of Narcissism: Business Versus Psychology Students

In Hypothesis 2a, we predicted that the mean level of narcissism for the sample of business students would be significantly higher than the sample of psychology students. An independent samples *t* test was conducted that com- pared the average level of narcissism of the study's business students, $M = 17.67$, $SD = 6.55$, with the psychology students, $M = 15.19$, $SD = 6.00$. Results indicate that the business students' mean level of narcissism is significantly higher than that of psychology students, $t(530) = 3.83$, $p < .01$. Hypothesis 2a was supported.

In Hypothesis 2b, we predicted that the differences in the level of narcis- sism found between the business and psychology students would continue to be significant after controlling for gender. An independent samples *t* test was conducted to determine if the average level of narcissism of the study's male students, $M = 17.81$, $SD = 6.58$, were significantly higher than female stu- dents, $M = 15.95$, $SD = 6.17$. Results indicate a significant difference between males and females, with male students having narcissism levels that are significantly higher than female students, $t(526) = 3.29$, $p < .01$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Narcissism	—													
2. Age	.14	—												
3. Gender	.14	.20	—											
4. Grade point average	−.03	−.22	−.14	—										
5. Final course grade	.05	−.07	.02	.49	—									
6. Class attendance	−.06	−.07	−.15	.24	.15	—								
7. Ease of finding a job	−.17	.09	.00	−.22	−.15	−.06	—							
8. Ease of finding a job, compared to classmates	−.17	.01	−.02	−.13	−.09	−.08	.41	—						
9. Starting salary	.25	−.07	.10	.14	.11	.02	−.33	−.27	—					
10. Starting salary, compared to classmates	.32	−.04	.09	.16	.18	.13	−.36	−.39	.53	—				
11. 5-Year salary	.33	−.05	.12	.09	.11	−.04	−.32	−.25	.73	.55	—			
12. 5-Year salary, compared to classmates	.38	.00	.14	.14	.14	.12	−.31	−.25	.43	.70	.52	—		
13. Frequency of promotion	.24	.13	.20	−.02	.01	.04	−.01	.02	−.02	.11	.18	.19	—	
14. Quickness of promotion	−.24	−.09	−.08	−.02	−.14	.02	.04	−.01	.03	−.06	−.09	−.17	−.60	—
M	17.06	21.54	—	3.03	85.72	90.84	3.38	2.75	3.28	3.88	4.10	3.53	2.19	3.05
SD	6.50	1.68	—	0.46	7.59	9.54	1.70	0.92	0.77	1.39	1.58	0.82	1.01	1.37

Gender is coded as follows: female = 1, male = 2. Correlations greater than .09 are significant at .05; correlations greater than .12 are significant at .001.

Table 2. Sample Narcissism Means Used as Comparisons

Source	Year Data Collected	*N*	Narcissism Mean	*SD*
Bradlee and Emmons (1992)	1989	147	14.99**	6.03
Cramer (1995)	1993	118	14.20**	
Gabriel, Critelli, and Ee (1994)	1992	146	16.44	6.39
Gurtman (1992)	1990	279	14.65**	
Gustafson and Ritzer (1995) Study 1	1992	214	16.01	7.24
Gustafson and Ritzer (1995) Study 2	1992	367	15.93**	7.15
Jackson, Ervin, and Hodge (1992)	1990	301	15.93*	6.99
McHoskey (1995)	1993	423	15.13**	6.60
Raskin and Novacek (1989)	1987	230	15.65**	6.84
Raskin and Terry (1988)	1982	1,018	15.55**	6.66

Cramer (1995) and Gurtman (1992) did not report the sample standard deviations; therefore, single-sample *t* tests were used to compare the studies' means against the current sample's average level of narcissism. Independent samples *t* tests were used to compare the mean of the remaining eight studies against the current sample's average level of narcissism.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

A chi-square test was conducted to investigate whether significantly more males were present in the business sample compared with the psychology sample. Results supported our assertion that a significantly larger proportion of business students were male, 65.1%, compared with psychology students, 35.1%, $\chi^2 = 36.35$, $p < .01$. Given these results, and our finding of a significant difference based on gender, we then tested our assertion that the differences found between disciplines would be mainly driven by differences between the two disciplines and not by differences in gender. A two- way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if the differences between disciplines found in the test of Hypothesis 2a continued to hold after controlling for gender. Results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that, after controlling for gender, there was a statistically significant difference between levels of narcissism in business and psychology students, $F(1, 524) = 9.87$, $p < .01$. Interestingly, results also indicated that after controlling for discipline, narcissism was no longer significantly different across gender, $F(1, 524) = 2.57$, $p = .11$, and the interaction between department and gender was also not significant, $F(1, 524) = 0.89$, $p = .35$. Figure 1 shows the average levels of narcissism in

both male and female business and psychology students. Narcissism levels for female, M = 16.04, SD = 5.54, and male, M = 16.48, SD = 6.82, psychology students were both lower than narcissism levels for both female, M = 17.51, SD = 6.48, and male, M = 19.22, SD = 6.46, business students.

Together, these results suggest that the differences found between business and psychology students reflect differences between the disciplines and not gender. Hypothesis 2b was fully supported.

Classroom Performance

In Hypothesis 3, we suggested that narcissism would be positively related to performance in business school courses. The bivariate relationships between narcissism levels in business students and attendance and final course grades were examined using zero-order correlations (see Table 3). Results indicate hat narcissism is not significantly related to either attendance or final course grades (r = −.06, p = .23, and r = .07, p = .34, respectively). Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

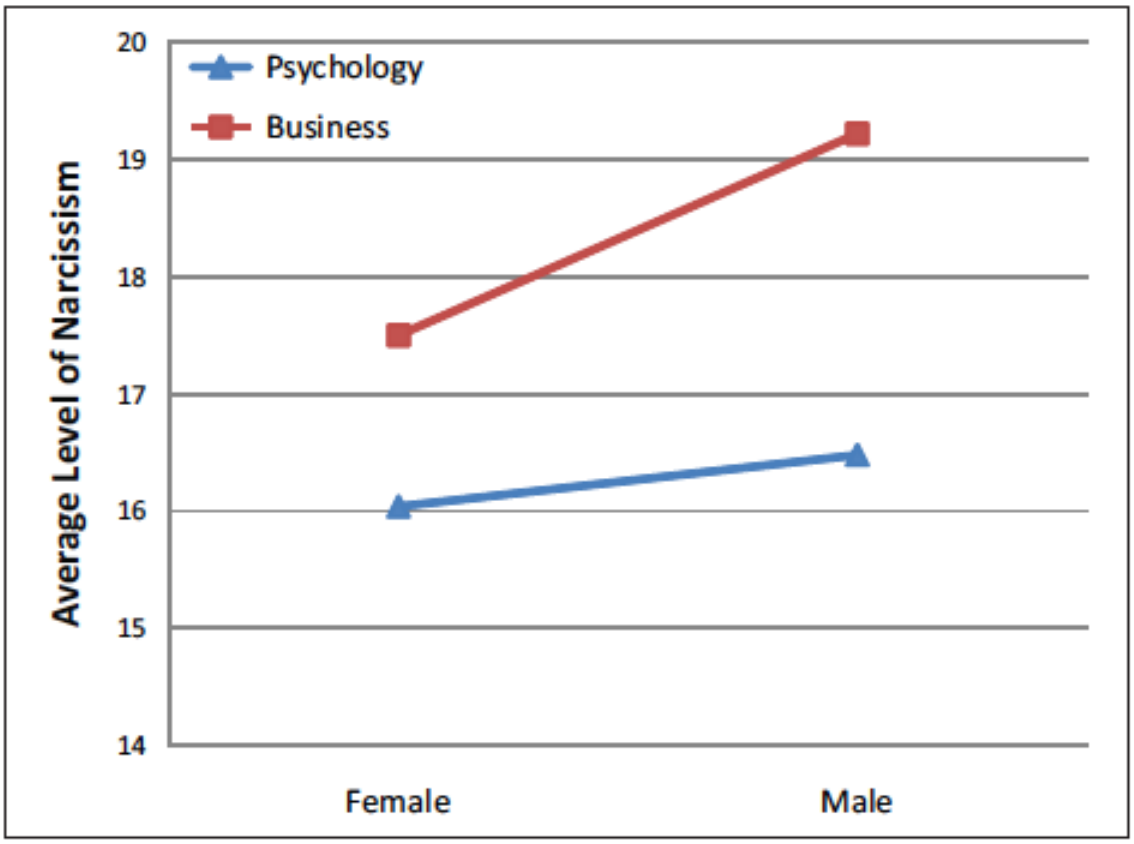

Figure 1. Average narcissism level of discipline by gender

Career Expectations

In Hypothesis 4, we posited that business students with higher levels of narcissism would also have higher career expectations in terms of ease of finding a job after graduation, anticipated starting and 5-year salary, and frequency of promotion. Bivariate relationships between narcissism levels in business students and career expectations were examined using zero-order correlations. As seen in Table 4, narcissism was significantly related to students' perceptions of absolute ease of finding a job, $r = -.16$, $p < .01$, and ease of finding a job compared with their classmates, $r = -.15$, $p < .01$. These results indicate that business students with higher levels of narcissism believe it will be easier for them to find a job after graduation in both relative and absolute terms.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Business Students

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Narcissism	—													
2. Age	.11	—												
3. Gender	.13	.17	—											
4. GPA	−.01	−.22	−.14	—										
5. Final course grade	.07	−.07	.05	.51	—									
6. Class attendance	−.06	−.07	−.14	.26	.22	—								
7. Ease of finding a job	−.16	.13	.01	−.21	−.12	−.06	—							
8. Ease of finding a job, compared to classmates	−.15	.04	.00	−.12	−.09	−.08	.44	—						
9. Starting salary	.23	−.10	.11	.08	.12	.01	−.30	−.30	—					
10. Starting salary, compared to classmates	.27	−.07	.08	.18	.24	.13	−.33	−.42	.54	—				
11. 5-Year salary	.29	−.07	.09	.04	.11	−.03	−.34	−.30	.72	.55	—			
12. 5-Year salary, compared to classmates	.35	−.03	.10	.14	.19	.12	−.31	−.26	.40	.67	.51	—		
13. Frequency of promotion	.20	.11	.17	−.02	.10	.04	.01	.05	−.04	.06	.16	.15	—	
14. Quickness of promotion	−.26	−.12	−.07	−.01	−.11	.02	.04	.00	.01	−.06	−.10	−.21	−.59	—
M	17.67	21.68	—	3.05	85.96	90.52	3.35	2.70	3.30	3.94	4.22	3.59	2.27	2.98
SD	6.55	1.69	—	0.44	7.32	9.60	1.73	0.93	0.77	1.34	1.58	0.81	1.00	1.33

Gender is coded as follows: female = 1, male = 2. Correlations greater than .10 are significant at .05; correlations greater than .13 are significant at .001.

Table 4. Importance of Narcissism and Grade Point Average for Predicting Career Expectations for Business Students

	Importance Estimates			
	r	β	C	RI
Ease of finding a job				
Narcissism	–.16**	–.16*	.0255	.3643
GPA	–.21**	–.21**	.0445	.6357
Ease of finding a job, compared to classmates				
Narcissism	–.15**	–.16*	.0265	.5889
GPA	–.12*	–.14*	.0185	.4111
Starting salary				
Narcissism	.23**	.23**	.0505	.8859
GPA	.08	.09	.0065	.1140
Starting salary, compared to classmates				
Narcissism	.27**	.27**	.0725	.7178
GPA	.18**	.18**	.0285	.2822
5-Year salary				
Narcissism	.29**	.30**	.0875	.9309
GPA	.04	.05	.0065	.0691
5-Year salary, compared to classmates				
Narcissism	.35**	.37**	.1275	.8333
GPA	.14**	.15*	.0255	.1670
Frequency of promotion				
Narcissism	.20**	.20**	.0400	1.000
GPA	–.02	–.02	.0000	.0000
Quickness of promotion				
Narcissism	–.26**	–.19**	.0340	.9444
GPA	–.01	.03	.0002	.0556

r = zero-order correlation; β = standardized regression coefficient; C = general dominance weight or the average squared semipartial; RI = relative importance or percentage of the total explained variance contributed by each variable, which is computed by dividing the C for each predictor by the model R^2. Rounding error may result in these values not summing to unity. To date there is not an accepted statistical significance test for dominance.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Narcissism was also significantly related to the items that assessed students' salary expectations. Significant positive relationships existed between business students' narcissism and absolute starting salary

expectations, $r = .23$, $p < .01$, starting salary expectations relative to their classmates, $r = .27$, $p < .01$, expected salary 5 years into their careers, $r = .29$, $p < .01$, and 5-year salary relative to their classmates, $r = .35$, $p < .01$. These results demonstrate that business students higher in narcissism have higher relative and absolute salary expectations.

Finally, narcissism was significantly related to the items that measured students' expectations for promotion 5 years into their careers. That is, narcissism had a significant negative relationship with expected length of time it will take business students to be promoted, $r = -.18$, $p < .01$, and a significant positive relationship with the number of times business students expect to be promoted, $r = .20$, $p < .01$ (see Table 4). Business students with higher levels of narcissism expect to be promoted more quickly and more often than business students with lower levels of narcissism.

Post Hoc Analyses

It is quite reasonable that business students who perform well in college, as evidenced by a high GPA, will realistically expect to have less difficulty finding a job, receive a high salary, and be promoted quickly and often. It was, therefore, possible that students' performance in college, and not their narcissism, was the driving factor behind their career expectations. Thus, we conducted, post hoc, a series of multiple regression analyses, regressing each of the career expectation variables onto GPA and narcissism. For all eight career expectations, narcissism remained a significant predictor, above and beyond GPA (beta weights are presented in Table 4).

Because GPA also remained significant, a dominance analysis (DA; Azen & Budescu, 2003; Budescu, 1993) was conducted to determine the relative importance of narcissism and GPA in explaining the variance in career expectations. DA computes (a) a general dominance weight (C) for each predictor, which sum to the overall model R^2, and (b) a relative importance (RI) score, which is the percentage of explained variance accounted for by the predictor.

The results of the DA show that narcissism clearly dominated the explanation of business students' salary and promotion expectations (see Table 4). In fact, when considered together with GPA, narcissism accounted for an average of 84.2% of the explained variance in starting and 5-year salary expectations and an average of 97.2% of the explained variance in business students' promotion expectations. These results suggest that

students' narcissism, and not their performance in school, is driving their salary and promotion expectations.

A slightly different picture emerged when examining students' perceptions of ease of getting a job after graduation. As seen by the RI indices in Table 4, both narcissism and GPA contributed substantially. Specifically, GPA dominated the prediction of students' perceptions of the ease of finding a job by accounting for 63.6% of the explained variance. Narcissism, however, dominated expectations regarding ease of finding a job compared with their classmates by accounting for 58.9% of the explained variance.

Discussion

There has been intense interest in the press regarding the Millennial Generation (Fisher, 2009; Levit, 2009). Millennials have been characterized as self- absorbed, overconfident, and entitled, that is, that they possess enhanced levels of narcissism. This research examined narcissism among undergraduate business students and the impact narcissism had on classroom performance and career expectations. Our results indicate that (a) our sample of Millennial college students has significantly higher levels of narcissism than college students of the past, (b) business students possess significantly higher levels of narcissism than psychology students, (c) narcissism does not have a significant relationship with business school classroom outcomes, and (d) narcissists expect to have significantly more career success in terms of ease of finding a job, salary, and promotions. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

Our sample of Millennials had a mean level of narcissism that was significantly higher than the means of 8 out of 10 samples drawn from years prior to the Millennials entering college (in addition, the mean level differences of the nonsignificant two historical samples were also below those of our sample). These results support the research of Twenge et al. (2008), indicating that this current generation of college students has significantly higher levels of narcissism than college students of previous generations. Furthermore, our findings indicate that business students were significantly higher in narcissism than psychology students. Because the majority of narcissism research among college students has been conducted on psychology students, psychology students provide, in effect, a baseline assessment of levels of narcissism over the years. Thus, the historically high levels of narcissism among Millennials may be

understated, as business students were not typically included in these samples.

The significant differences in narcissism between business and psychology students remained even while controlling for gender. Although men often score higher on the NPI than women, our female business students scored, on average, higher than male psychology students; and male business students outscored all others. Is the concern about “a generation of hot-house flowers puffed with a disproportionate sense of self-worth” valid (Kelley, 2009)? Perhaps. What may be even more concerning, however, is that business students (our future business leaders) appear to be even more self-absorbed and entitled than Millennial students in other disciplines. Whether narcissists killed Wall Street may be debatable, but, as discussed earlier, the research clearly finds a long list of significant negative outcomes associated with narcissism—many of which directly relate to business, such as white-collar crime (Blickle et al., 2006), rapidly depleting common resources (Campbell et al., 2005), and risky decision making (Campbell et al., 2004). Additionally, more jobs today require employees to be interpersonally skilled and to be team players in order to succeed. These are clearly problem areas for narcissists.

Given that business students scored significantly higher on narcissism than psychology students, we feared, as business educators, that narcissism may be somehow reinforced in our classrooms. Narcissists in our sample did not receive better grades than non-narcissists; it appears we are not actively reinforcing narcissistic behavior in the classroom. However, the fact that there was not a negative relationship suggests that we do not seem to be attenuating narcissism either. For reasons currently unknown, business schools may be attracting more narcissistic students. A disproportionate student emphasis on extrinsic values and money importance may play a primary role in this phenomenon. Given the substantial negative outcomes associated with narcissism, it is incumbent on us to find ways to assuage these narcissistic tendencies and graduate capable and caring business men and women who represent positive organizational citizens and role models. If we continue to graduate self-absorbed, overconfident, entitled businessmen and businesswomen, it will likely have a significant impact on businesses, the economy, and our environment.

Our research also indicated that narcissistic business students expected to enjoy more career success. We examined four different career expectations: two proximal (ease of finding a job and starting salary) and two more distal (salary after 5 years and promotions) from two different

perspectives (absolute and relative to classmates). For all these, students higher in narcissism had higher expectations than their less narcissistic classmates. Additionally, narcissism remained a significant predictor of these expectations while con- trolling for cumulative GPA (and narcissism was not significantly related to GPA). Thus, narcissists are not basing these career expectations on their actual academic record; these expectations simply stem from their inflated egos. Although these data were collected in the spring and summer of 2009, in the midst of a major worldwide recession, narcissists still possessed high expectations of career outcomes. Perhaps the students have been buffered from the full reality of the recession by being sheltered within the higher education environment. However, as noted by Twenge (2006), “This is a time of soaring expectations and crushing realities” (p. 2). The combination of inflated career expectations and an increasingly competitive labor market ultimately may function to create substantial cognitive dissonance. As narcissists leave school expecting to have little trouble finding a job, anticipating good salaries and fast and frequent promotions, the reality of today’s economy is that this is difficult even for the best and brightest of college graduates. The result may be that the narcissism epidemic is followed by widespread anxiety and depression, and a recent study indicates that this may already be occurring. Twenge et al. (2010) found that recent generations of American high school and college students report significantly more symptoms of psychopathology as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. These symptoms included moodiness and restlessness, feeling isolated and misunderstood, and general symptoms of anxiety such as worry, sadness, and dissatisfaction.

There are a variety of implications of our findings for business schools. As noted previously, significantly enhanced levels of narcissism among business students are likely to be problematic for organizations and society, yet business schools may be disproportionately attracting and graduating narcissists. The narcissistic tendencies of students may need to be dampened in the higher education process, which could also function to change the nature of business schools such that they would be less attractive to narcissists. Suggestions include a curriculum that provides a greater emphasis on external outreach and service to others (including formalized service learning, study abroad opportunities, real-world internships, ethics and social responsibility courses), which may serve to reduce the attraction of the discipline for overly materialistic and self-absorbed students and may also serve to increase empathy and perspective-taking among students, that is, decrease narcissism. Also, business school professors, placed in a position of prestige, may have an

enhanced ability to influence student narcissistic tendencies, as narcissists tend to respond positively to those viewed with respect and of perceived higher status (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Thus, leading by example and modeling appropriate non-narcissistic professional behaviors expected in the workplace is of utmost importance. If faculty are narcissists, or model narcissism in the form of self-aggrandizing, me-first attitudes and behaviors, it may be more difficult to address narcissism in our classrooms.

Within the classroom, developing student interpersonal sensitivity and multiple perspectives on an issue may be enhanced through increased use of student teamwork skills and on giving and receiving constructive feedback. Additional classroom strategies include using peer feedback, role playing, guest speakers, case studies, and frequent reinforcements in class in the form of oral feedback and grading with an emphasis on enhanced sensitivity and interpersonal development. Furthermore, Millennials' desire for rules and structure (Howe & Strauss, 2007) indicates a more salient need for faculty to address narcissists when they behave in an inappropriate manner. Solutions include consistency in grading and interpersonal treatment, an enhanced reliance on the syllabus as an equitable and explicit contract, and interventions that are immediate in dealing with narcissistic classroom behaviors that detract from values, teamwork, or performance of the class (Baker et al., 2008). Finally, business schools may need reduced class sizes to allow for increased faculty interaction with students and should also consider reexamining the use of student satisfaction ratings in faculty evaluations, which may drive faculty to accommodate (rather than confront and address) any narcissistic tendencies of students. Table 5 provides a summary of these recommendations (see Bergman et al., 2010, for additional insights into pedagogy, curriculum, and interactional suggestions for reducing student narcissism). However, it is still unclear if any of these approaches will be effective in curbing narcissism in business schools. An alternative approach to attempting to reduce or mitigate narcissism would be to select it out. Many business schools use interviews and other measurement tools to select based on fit and desirable behaviors and attitudes. Although it may be viewed as a more draconian approach, narcissism could be measured in business school applicants and the results used as a screening tool for selecting students.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although our research included a fairly robust sample in terms of size, students were drawn from only one university. Future research should examine whether other applied disciplines (law, medicine, engineering) or other schools of business have comparable levels of narcissism, and whether higher levels of study (MBA, Masters, PhD) or alternative forms of delivery (part-time, commuter, or online schools) may attract student populations who possess similar narcissistic tendencies. Research that explores the attraction of business schools to narcissists, perhaps rooted in values, would be helpful in focusing intervention efforts. Longitudinal research would also be helpful in determining whether students' narcissistic tendencies are enhanced or reduced in the process of receiving a business education from entry to graduation, and whether specific administrative, curriculum, or course alterations affect narcissism. Additional longitudinal research that follows students from business school into their careers would assist in determining the outcomes of enhanced narcissism for graduates. For example, what is the actual impact of narcissism on job search, pay, promotions, and career success? Research in other contexts indicates that narcissists have short-term "charm" that wears off over time (Paulhus, 1998). It is possible that narcissism may be helpful in the job search and interview process but may result in long-term struggles to earn raises and promotions, moral and ethical issues, and higher levels of turnover.

Table 5. Recommendations and Strategies to Reduce Narcissism in Business Education

Level of Intervention	Recommendation	Purpose
Administrative	Student selection processes	Reduce enrollment of narcissistic students by using narcissism questions or measures in student selection and recruitment processes
	Reduce class sizes	Improve ability for faculty identification, interaction, and involvement in addressing narcissism
	Reduce grade inflation	Reduce student entitlement and grandiosity perceptions
	Train faculty to recognize student narcissism	Enhance awareness of narcissism in students
Curricular	Formalized service learning	Enhance empathy within students
	Study abroad opportunities	Enhance empathy within students
	Increase opportunity for real-world internships	Reduce grandiosity of students, model less narcissistic behavior
	Ethics and social responsibility coursework	Enhance empathy within students
Student support	Provide education for students on narcissism and its effects	Enhance awareness of narcissism among students
	Provide self-assessments of narcissism for students	Enhance awareness of narcissism within students
	Counseling information provided to students	Provide intervention opportunities for students
Classroom	Enhanced instruction on giving/receiving feedback	Reduce hypersensitivity to evaluation
	Enhanced use of peer feedback	Reduce hypersensitivity to evaluation
	Increased use of guest speakers	Provides role models of non-narcissistic behavior in the workplace
	Enhanced use of case method and Socratic method	Enhance student empathy, reduce grandiosity and self-orientation, and improve teamwork skills

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Level of Intervention	Recommendation	Purpose
	Increase frequency of student grading and assessment	Reduce hypersensitivity to evaluation
One-on-one interactions	Faculty modeling of appropriate non-narcissistic behavior	Provides template for non-narcissistic behavior (through building a working alliance, careful challenging, and modeling)

Currently, it is an open question as to whether the realities of the business world serve to dampen or enhance narcissism. Or, as mentioned previously, do narcissistic students fall into states of anxiety or depression when con- fronting the dissonance of reality not matching their inflated expectations? Research linking narcissism and entitlement using an equity sensitivity mea- sure (Sauleya & Bedeian, 2000) could be informative and could provide educators with insights to the consequences of allowing unrealistic career expectations of highly narcissistic students to go unchecked.

Furthermore, is increasing narcissism among business students a cross-national phenomenon? Ronningstam (2005) notes that cross-cultural studies are beginning to indicate a comparable prevalence of narcissism in non- Western cultures. Research on the link between narcissism and student out- comes from non-Western cultures may be informative. Given the role that parents are thought to play in the development of narcissism, the potential for enhanced narcissism among the generation of children resulting from the one child policy in China may be a fruitful area of research.

Finally, as Millennials enter the faculty ranks, will they be disproportionately narcissistic? If so, the effect of narcissistic faculty on student learning and development represents a fertile area for future study. These are critical questions to be answered, as the Millennial Generation is as large in number as the Baby Boomer Generation, and will very soon represent a major force in the changing business environment and future competitiveness of the U.S. economy.

In summary, this research represents the first study to document significantly enhanced narcissism in business students and to verify associated enhanced workplace expectations. As noted by Baker et al. (2008), we, as faculty, must accept our responsibility to prepare students for the business world. Considering the well-documented and profoundly negative implications of enhanced narcissism for workplace environments, this finding should be a clarion call to business education for future research on its implications and successful intervention strategies.

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