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Understanding and Exploring Narcissism: Impact on Students and College Campuses

Emily J. Hudson
Claremont McKenna College

CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

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SUBMITTED TO:

PROFESSOR WEI-CHIN HWANG

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

EMILY J. HUDSON

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Abstract

"Narcissist" is a term that may be used lightly to describe or label someone that is self-centered. However, research that suggests a possible increase in narcissistic personality tendencies among college-aged American students has a very real and serious impact on society. The goal of this paper is to examine the evolution of the concept of narcissism and its detrimental effects on society. This will then be applied to the impact that narcissism has on college students and campus environments. It is important to note that individuals high in narcissistic traits encounter many problems including difficulties with interpersonal and professional relationships, and poor insight and self-awareness. Moreover, students high in narcissism are in danger of academic failure, especially in certain prestigious collegiate environments that are more likely to foster narcissistic tendencies.

Understanding and Exploring Narcissism: Impact on Students and College Campuses

Personality is an inherent part of human nature. When personality features become more extreme and abnormal, they have the ability to manifest themselves as personality disorders. One of the most prominent abnormalities in personality characteristics among college students is narcissism, which is among the most difficult to treat and thus in need of greater research (Stovall, King, Wienhold, & Whitehead III, 1998). This paper examines narcissistic personality tendencies in the context of the evolution of their concept over time and their detrimental effects on society. It then shifts focus to apply this examination to college students and campuses in the United States. Despite the dispute about the changes in levels of narcissism over the past few decades in college-aged individuals, there are logical environments in which narcissism has the ability to be cultivated among students. This issue is relevant in American society today because college-aged individuals are future leaders, and narcissism is very detrimental to society as a whole and can render narcissistic students unsuccessful in their academic endeavors and beyond.

Jean Twenge is the leading psychologist in the study of narcissism in the college-aged American population. Twenge's research reveals that the rates of narcissism among the college-aged population are on the rise (Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). Among college students, Twenge at al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of narcissistic personality traits as shown through scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. The study included the scores from four-year American institutions from the years 1979-2006. There were a total of 16, 475 subjects studied, and the authors found an upward shift in

scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, meaning that the average college student now embraces, on average, two more narcissistic tendencies than did his peers a couple decades ago (p. 889). That is, on average, today's college student is at least a bit more narcissistic. Further, Twenge and Campbell (2008) conducted a study based on responses of high school seniors from the year 1975 through the year 2006 and found that, in general, narcissistic personality tendencies are on the rise in that population as well. Unrealistic expectations among this population have increased, a concept that will later be discussed as a narcissistic tendency.

Twenge has proposed many theories to account for an increase in narcissism, many of which center around cultural changes. Now, from a young age, Americans are taught that they are very special and unique individuals (Twenge & Foster, 2010), which may be causing increases in self-esteem, extroversion, and assertiveness, which are key elements of narcissism. Further, today's American society places a large emphasis on materialism and wealth, thus encouraging focus on pleasures and success for individuals. Another facet of American culture today is technology. Websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Myspace, and Twitter create spaces for individuals to enhance themselves and show themselves to the rest of the country and world (Twenge et al., 2008). These changes in American culture could be facilitating a change in personality traits among young Americans, and Twenge proposes that this narcissistic shift may have negative consequences on society.

In contrast to Twenge's findings and theories, Trzesniewski, Donnellan and Robins (2008) did not find an increase in narcissism among college students, but this could have been because of sampling differences (e.g. only Northern Californian college

students were assessed). They criticized Twenge on three counts. First, they believed that she overgeneralized her findings- that she unrealistically believed that every single college student is becoming more narcissistic. Second, they suggested that since she analyzed aggregated data and group means instead of individual data, her results could have been skewed. Lastly, they criticized her use of the NPI (which will be discussed in the next section of this paper). They argued that the use of this test renders it difficult to analyze changes in scores as signifying a change in overall narcissism. There is much dispute as to what the scores on the NPI actually mean. Further, Rosenthal and Hooley (2010) argue that the rise in narcissism that Twenge has observed may not be as negative as she makes it out to be. The increase could be positive in that it could reflect a boost in self-esteem among college-aged individuals, and thus could be good for society.

No matter what the finding or criticisms of it, if there is a growing amount of narcissism in college students, this is extremely detrimental not only to society but also to narcissistic individuals at the academic level. And whatever the finding-whether there are more narcissistic individuals now than there were a few decades ago- there are certain contemporary collegiate environments that can lead to the cultivation of a narcissistic student.

The Evolution of Narcissism

The evolution of the concept of narcissism started centuries ago with a simple story. The myth of Narcissus, told by both the Roman poet Ovid and by the Greek poet Conon, is a well-known one (Greek Myths & Greek Mythology, 2012). In short, it is the tale of a beautiful young man who falls hopelessly in love with his reflection in a pond. Upon finding that he can never get love back from this mysterious reflection, he either

kills himself, as Ovid conveys, or dies of sorrow, as Conon proposes. Narcissus does this

because he does not believe that anyone will ever be as good or as beautiful as the

reflection, which ties closely to the concept of narcissism as it is known today.

Ever since Narcissus's story became well known, a number of prominent mental

health care practitioners have studied narcissism. Sigmund Freud, among other early

psychoanalysts, examined the term of narcissism in a looser sense than it is seen today.

He believed that narcissism could be closely tied with high self-esteem, because it can

include normal, affirmative feelings about the self, and because narcissists can be strong

and self-assured in healthy ways (cited in Pulver, 1970). Further, Freud argued that the

inherent desire to care for the self gets confused with one's sexual desires for other

humans, which can result in a sexual desire aimed at the self. This desire creates normal

narcissism. Pathological, or abnormal, narcissism arises when the individual's sexual

desires are not for others, but rather are only for the self. This produces fantasies of

power and excessive self-enhancement. Pathological narcissism is an extreme, distorted

version of the normal narcissism that everyone possesses (Freud, 1914).

In addition to Freud, Heinz Kohut was another prominent psychologist to present

strong feelings about narcissism and what it means to be a narcissist, and he based many

of his theories upon Freud's. According to Kohut, children have a natural and normal

dependency upon caregivers. Young children look up to caregivers as ideal role models

and this image is called the "parent imago." In order to develop a healthy sense of self

and personality, the child needs to have his own self-worth mirrored back by these

caregivers. In other words, the caregiver needs to, to some extent, let the child know that

he is worth something and is competent. If this doesn't happen in childhood, the

individual develops a grandiose fantasy, that is, a fantasy in which he is actually worth a

lot despite never being told so. This can lead the individual into narcissistic personality

tendencies that can become pathological, because the individual is always searching for

that reflection of self-worth that he never got in childhood (Kohut, 1966). Further, Kohut

believed that narcissism is a failure to possess healthy internal self-esteem and that it

arises from the childhood environment, rather than from the individual himself (Watson,

Little, Sawrie, & Biderman, 1992).

Proceeding Freud's and Kohut's theories, more psychological focus was put on

narcissism. In 1980, Narcissistic Personality Disorder was introduced into the Diagnostic

and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM-III (American Psychiatric

Association, 1980). The abbreviated criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder

according to the DSM-III are as follows:

> A. Grandiose sense of self-importance or uniqueness.
> B. Preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success power, brilliance, beauty, or
> ideal love.
> C. Exhibitionism.
> D. Cool indifference or marked feelings of rage, inferiority, shame, humiliation,
> or emptiness in response to criticism, indifference of others, or defeat.
> E. At least two of the following characteristic disturbances in interpersonal
> relationships:
> > (1) entitlement: expectation of special favors without assuming reciprocal
> > responsibilities
> > (2) interpersonal exploitiveness
> > (3) relationships that characteristically alternate between the two extremes
> > of overidealization and devaluation
> > (4) lack of empathy (Raskin & Hall, p. 159).

The American Psychiatric Association estimates that less than 1% of the population

suffers with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and that of this group, about 50-75% are

men (Dobbert, 2007).

In response to the introduction of Narcissistic Personality Disorder to the DSM-III, Raskin and Hall (1979) created the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Based off of the criteria in the DSM, they wanted to find a way to measure narcissistic personality traits. They did not aim to measure the disorder, but rather aimed to look at its characteristics in the "normal," general population, to see if they exist as personality tendencies outside of a clinical, pathological disorder. In creating the inventory, Raskin and Hall (1979) started with 223 items and reduced them to 80 items. These items were created as a sample of each of the criteria laid out in the DSM-III for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Each item is a pair of statements, one is narcissistic and the other is non-narcissistic. These researchers tested the reliability and validity of the NPI many times. Most importantly, they found a significant correlation between the NPI and the Eyseneck Personality Questionnaire. It was specifically found that the extraversion and psychotism scales from this personality inventory have a correlation, and thus a close relation, to narcissism. These two personality characteristics paint the portrait of a person who is social and outgoing but is very self-absorbed and manipulative (Raskin & Hall, 1981), which is a basic description of a narcissistic individual.

There have been criticisms of the NPI. Rosenthal and Hooley (2010) conducted two studies to better understand the relationship between specific items on the NPI and various psychological traits. They questioned whether many of the items accurately differentiate between narcissistic and non-narcissistic traits. In their first study, it was found that the certain items on the NPI that were designed to measure narcissism do not really measure narcissism, but rather are measurements for self-esteem. Moreover, while some literature suggests that the NPI may be linked with good psychological health

(Maxwell, Donnellan, Hopwood, & Ackerman, 2011), Rosenthal and Hooley (2010) disagree with the finding. They suggest that narcissism cannot be linked to psychological health based solely on results from the NPI because of the confound that some of the narcissistic items have with self-esteem. By removing items that they believe measure self-esteem instead of narcissism, the relationship between psychological health and narcissism as indicated by the NPI is reduced. These researchers further suggest that the interpretation of NPI scores needs to be re-examined. They suggest that the NPI measures "less extreme levels of characteristics associated with clinical narcissism and self-esteem rather than measuring a unitary construct of normal narcissism" (p. 461). For example, the authors find the statement "I am assertive" to be a problematic item. This statement may not be necessarily related *only* with narcissism, but rather may be more closely tied with self-confidence (p. 461).

Despite these criticisms, the NPI is currently the most frequently used measure of narcissism in psychological research (Rosenthal & Hooley, 2010), as it may measure the more normal, though potentially problematic, narcissism that is more prevalent in the general population as opposed to the pathological narcissism (Jackson, Ervin, & Hodge, 1992) that is Narcissistic Personality Disorder. For the duration of this paper, the term "narcissism" will refer to this potentially problematic and prevalent aspect of narcissism instead of narcissism as a clinical disorder.

Defining Narcissism is a Complex Process

Defining narcissism is difficult, and many researchers have presented complex ideas of its exact definition. Many have suggested that there may be a continuum of narcissistic personality tendencies (Watson et al., 1992) and that it should perhaps be

measured multidimensionally and in conjunction with other personality traits (Jackson et al., 1992). There are a few important traits that define narcissism, though.

First and foremost, individuals high in narcissism have a grandiose sense of self-importance (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009). They believe that they are better than everybody else, and this self-concept, however unrealistic it probably is, guides them in their daily lives (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). As Vazire and Funder (2006) note, "much of narcissists' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses are in the service of defending and affirming an unrealistic self-concept" (p. 155). Enhancing their self-concept underlies most everything that narcissistic individuals do. Moreover, they are constantly looking for the world to reflect back this notion of grandiosity (Baker, 1979). Narcissistic individuals depend heavily upon positive feedback from others (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998) and are not able to tolerate things that threaten the grandiose self, such as negative, critical feedback or failure (Baker, 1979). Their quest for grandiosity may also be blinding. Robins and Beer (2001) found that people with narcissistic tendencies assess themselves more positively than their peers assess them. Again, everything is about keeping the positive self-concept in tact, even if it is unrealistic. Further, narcissistic individuals tend to attribute success internally and failure externally (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). That is, if something goes well in their lives, they take the credit for it, whereas if something does not go well, they blame it on other factors outside of their control. This relates back to their excessive need to self-enhance and to preserve a highly positive view of themselves.

Those with narcissistic tendencies are impulsive and can lack self-control (Vazire & Funder, 2006). This lack of self-control may contribute to their excessive need for self-

enhancement in that they are psychologically unable to stop their arrogance (Robins &

John, 1997). Further, impulsivity is linked with an inability to delay gratification.

Narcissistic people may lack the ability to delay pleasurable outcomes in the short-term

in favor of gratification in the long run (Robins & Beer, 2001). This inability to delay

pleasure shows up in many areas of life, as will be discussed later in this paper. Further, it

has been suggested that this impulsivity may actually be biological, in that it is linked

with low levels of serotonin (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Perhaps in order to treat this

aspect of a narcissistic personality, chemicals in the form of medications must be used.

People high in narcissism are generally extroverts. Others perceive them as

sociable people free of social anxiety. Narcissism is not positive in regards to

interpersonal relationships, however. While narcissistic individuals generally do have

friends, they mostly keep them around in order to self-enhance through admiration,

dominance, and competition. In romantic relationships, they seek partners that will inflate

their egos and are constantly looking for new partners to keep up this pattern of ego

boosting. Otherwise, narcissists have a much smaller need for intimacy than do non-

narcissists, and generally rub people the wrong way. Those with narcissistic personalities

are unlikeable because they "like themselves in unlikeable ways" (p. 366). They are

willing to diminish others who are close to them in order to keep their own high self-

perception in tact (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002), and are sometimes called

"disagreeable extroverts" (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004;

Budzek & Tamborski, 2009). Further, in a study that showed participants videos of

narcissists, healthy people, and dependent people, narcissists were viewed the most

negatively and none of the participants expressed interest in interacting with them

(Carroll, Corning, Morgan, & Stevens, 1991). Narcissistic individuals generally

negatively affect those around them and have difficulty in the realm of interpersonal

relationships.

Differentiating Between Narcissism and High Self-Esteem

Though there are a few concrete aspects that define a narcissistic individual, such

as grandiosity, impulsivity, extroversion, and distorted personal relationships, the biggest

difficulty in defining narcissism comes with its relationship with self-esteem. Narcissism

and high self-esteem tend to tend to be very highly correlated (r= approximately 0.40-

0.60) (Brown & Bosson, 2001), and both indicate that the person has a high, very positive

self-opinion. Both concepts also correlate with extroverted personalities, a (sometimes

unrealistic) belief that one has "better-than-average intelligence" (Campbell et al., 2002,

p. 364), and with individuals seeking leadership roles. Many associate narcissism

exclusively with very high levels of self-esteem (Campbell et al., 2002). However,

psychologists Brown and Zeigler-Hill (2004) suggest that there are important differences

among self-esteem inventories and that they are not necessarily interchangeable, as they

may focus on different facets of self-esteem in relationship to others, and that narcissism

is correlated only with the ones that have a focus on dominance and power over others.

Perhaps the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem becomes distorted

depending upon which self-esteem inventory is used to measure the relationship.

Despite some similarities, there are a few major differences between high self-

esteem and narcissism. First, high self-esteem and narcissism differ with regards to the

value systems that they relate to- specifically with the communal and agentic systems. A

communal value system is linked with social connection and self-enhancement in areas

such as kindness and agreeableness. In contrast, an agentic value system is associated with social dominance and self-enhancement in areas such as extraversion and intelligence. People high in self-esteem relate with both value systems, whereas people with narcissistic personalities only relate with the agentic value system (Campbell et al., 2002). That is, narcissistic individuals place much more emphasis on the self than do high self-esteem individuals. This self-emphasis is shown further in the finding that those high in narcissism desire admiration whereas individuals high in self-esteem want popularity (Campbell et al., 2002).

Another major difference between high self-esteem and narcissism is that although both have explicit self-esteem, only high self-esteem individuals also have implicit self-esteem. High self-esteem is genuine and real, because the positive self-concept exists on the inside as well as on the outside (Brown & Bosson, 2001). Myers and Zeigler-Hill (2012) conducted a study on college-aged women to explore how narcissistic individuals actually feel internally. The study included a procedure where participants were hooked up to a lie detector- in order to (hopefully) force them to tell the truth- and were asked how they feel about themselves. Participants high in narcissism reported lower self-esteem than non-narcissistic individuals. These findings suggest that people higher in narcissism do not feel good about themselves deep down, and may only be wearing a mask of self-confidence. Furthermore, Rhodewalt and Morf (1998) argue that narcissistic people actually have a very fragile self-concept that is vulnerable to destruction. On the outside they may appear tough, but on the inside narcissistic individuals are very delicate.

It is these issues that must be tackled when examining narcissistic individuals'

impact on society. The mask of confidence that narcissistic individuals wear plays a large

role in their detrimental effect on those around them and on themselves. Society must not

make the mistake of confusing a narcissist's façade with high self-esteem.

The Few Benefits of Narcissism

Narcissism may, in some ways, be adaptive and beneficial to both the individual

and to society, though it is highly debated. Watson et al. (1992) suggest that there may

indeed be some adaptive elements to narcissistic personalities. There is some literature

that suggests that normal narcissism is psychologically healthy as long as there is a strong

connection with high self-esteem. Sedikides et al. (2004) propose that as long as this

overlap exists, narcissism is inversely related with depression, loneliness, anxiety, and

neuroticism. Brown et al. (2009) found a positive correlation between grandiosity- a key

aspect of narcissism- and subjective well-being and mental health, leading them to

conclude that some amount of grandiosity, and therefore narcissism, must be healthy.

Many of these findings do come with the warning, though, that there is trouble in linking

narcissism with health because of the inherent difficulty in desegregating narcissism from

high self-esteem.

Furthermore, Narcissistic individuals seem to have a very strong armor in regards

to their sense of self. It is no secret that they view themselves very positively (Campbell

et al., 2002). Because of this aspect of narcissism, narcissistic people ignore negative

feedback, so as not to let it damage their positive views of themselves (Morf &

Rhodewalt, 2001). This may be an adaptive characteristic in that individuals high in

narcissism do not let negative critique pull them down- they are still able to believe in themselves even in the face of feedback that contradicts their positive sense of self.

Narcissism can be further beneficial when it is connected with leadership. Narcissism has a fundamental connection with leadership in that the two concepts have a few key traits in common: dominance, extraversion, confidence, and power. Because of these overlaps, narcissistic individuals could be more likely to become leaders. Nevicka, Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain (2011) found that in team tasks, individuals higher on narcissistic traits emerged as leaders. Furthermore, many leaders of countries and businesses display narcissistic tendencies. Narcissistic people are drawn to these high profile leadership jobs, and tend to thrive in them because of their relentless desire for glory, power, and to show how competent they believe that they are (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). They also perform better in the public eye than do non-narcissistic people (Young & Pinsky, 2006).

Historically, American presidents have been known to display narcissistic characteristics. For example, President Franklin Roosevelt was among the most narcissistic of America's presidents as perceived by the public (Deluga, 1997). Researcher Ronald Deluga (1997) predicted that narcissism in American presidents would be associated with both charisma and positive performance as rated by citizens. This hypothesis was supported in that presidents high in narcissism showed more inspirational and influential leadership and were also rated higher on performance during their presidencies. Through this research, it can be seen that narcissism can be desirable and advantageous, especially in a leadership role.

From a practical standpoint, society needs leaders. The American society is especially focused on having a government full of people that the population admires and wants to follow. Those with narcissistic personalities may be designed for these roles to some extent. Thus, narcissism is at least somewhat beneficial because it is linked to leadership and to the emergence of leaders (Nevicka et al., 2011). It is important to note that narcissism in *small doses* can be adaptive and beneficial. Narcissism on a larger scale, however, is very disadvantageous for society.

Narcissism's Detrimental Impact on Society

While the emergence of leadership can be a beneficial quality of narcissism, it can also be bad for society. A leader that is highly narcissistic would be bad because of the very negative aspects that accompany narcissism such as exploitative tendencies, lack of ability to accept criticism, and arrogance. However, followers tend to perceive narcissistic individuals as good leaders, even though they may not be great performers because of incompetencies that they fail to recognize (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). This is a huge problem, because if followers think that narcissistic individuals are good leaders because of the mask of competency that they wear, but are not actually completely competent, then followers are stuck with an incompetent person leading them. Narcissist people can fool other people, and no one wants a fake leading them.

Further, the extreme self-confidence of a narcissistic personality can pose a problem in that narcissistic leaders may be convinced that their followers have nothing to contribute to the organization. As Deluga (1997) so poignantly observed about narcissistic leaders: "the leader is primarily interested in achieving personal outcomes, often at the expense of the social system, organization and followers. Their inspirational

vision becomes essentially a monument to themselves" (p. 61). If the leader is only invested in his own interests, society fails. Narcissistic leaders might leave their followers behind. As psychologists Brown and Zeigler-Hill (2004) note, "narcissists often go to great lengths to glorify themselves even when doing so undermines their relationships with others" (p. 585). Thus, if a leader is narcissistic and is looking to gain glory, his relationships with his followers could become non-important, which completely undermines the reasons that the followers chose that leader in the first place.

As well as having the potential to be harmful leaders, narcissistic people are more likely than non-narcissistic people to not experience guilt, thus leading to many instances of immoral behavior (Brunell, Staats, Barden, & Hupp, 2011). They are also prone to taking risks (Lakey et al., 2007), and both of these aspects could contribute to behaviors that can later become addictive, such as drug-use, gambling and compulsive shopping, and other questionable behaviors such as crime in the workplace. In studies linking narcissism with addictive behaviors, it has been found that narcissism predicts more alcohol use in college freshmen and is strongly linked to binge drinking (Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005). Rose (2007) further suggests that narcissism poses a risk for addictive behavior, such as compulsive shopping. The focus on self-inflation and rejection of negative critique, such as "this behavior is bad for me," contributes to a maladaptive thought process and inflexibility in changing behaviors that lead to impaired responses to risk and other negative outcomes (Lakey, Rose, Campbell, & Goodie, 2007).

Individuals with narcissistic personalities may be susceptible to money problems as well as addiction problems. It is no secret that the American economy is not currently "booming". Credit card debt has approximately tripled from 1990 to 2002 for the average

American. Researchers are examining the link between impulse control and the need to spend money, or compulsive buying. Rose (2007) conducted a study in which he found a positive correlation between narcissism and compulsive buying. People high in narcissism indicated on a survey that they "often buy things that they cannot afford" (p. 579). This link makes sense, because narcissistic individuals do tend to value wealth and luxury and suffer from a lack of impulse control. The mixture of these aspects can lead to the desire to keep spending money on material objects and the inability to stop doing it. If the American public has citizens who are spending money that they do not have in compulsive ways, this negatively affects the economy, and puts the United States as a whole into an even deeper debt hole. Furthermore, narcissistic people engage in gambling more often and spend more money while gambling than do non-narcissistic people. Lakey, Rose, Campbell and Goodie (2007) suggest that the inflated ego and self-confidence of the narcissist most likely get in the way of being able to process the risks associated with high-stakes gambling. This risky gambling behavior also demonstrates another narcissistic tendency: focus on short-term reward rather than on long-term consequences. While gambling, small wins in the now usually outweigh potential large losses later.

The workplace is an environment in which narcissism can also be especially negative. Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender and Klein (2006) conducted a study on white-collar crime in Germany. White-collar crime is deceptive and non-violent, and is usually used for some financial gain. Through examining crimes committed by high-ranking individuals in white-collar businesses, the authors found that white-collar criminals had stronger narcissistic personality tendencies than did non-criminal managers. Criminal

behavior is obviously a serious problem within the workplace and society in general, and narcissistic people may be more likely to be involved in it. Furthermore, *China Post* writer Kevin Hassett (2009) suggests that narcissists do not have proper skepticism towards their strategies, and thus destruction can ensue in a workplace setting. He also hypothesized that an increase in the number of people on Wall Street from ivy-league MBA programs starting in the 1990s helped contribute to and led to the collapse of Wall Street and the ensuing financial crisis of 2008 because of their narcissistic tendencies. Their overconfidence in themselves and their strategies could be very destructive.

There are numerous jobs that cannot tolerate a narcissistic individual. This includes, but is not limited to, jobs that require one to have a realistic knowledge of his own abilities, work well in team contexts, and in jobs where one is frequently assessed by others (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006). This list cuts out a lot of careers, and for narcissistic individuals that are already involved in careers that adhere to these aspects, the company or organization could really be suffering because of the narcissist.

Narcissistic Students Struggle in College

It is easy to see the multitude of ways in which narcissism is bad for society. Nevertheless, narcissism has a unique impact on college students that needs to be further explored. In general, academic failure often happens to narcissistic college students (Baker, 1979). Over the course of four years in college, narcissistic students tend to become increasingly unhappy and disengaged from their studies, and they may be "academic underachievers," in that they may be very intelligent, but do not achieve their full potentials in a school- especially college- setting (Robins & Beer, 2001). The difficulties that narcissistic students have with school have been studied extensively. For

example, Vigilante (1983) conducted a study on graduate students studying social work

that had narcissistic personality traits and found that they had a more difficult time

learning than their non-narcissistic peers.

In contrast with non-narcissistic students, those high in narcissism struggle with

the ability to emotionally self-regulate, set goals, and motivate themselves to complete

their work (Bembenutty, 2007). In addition, those high in narcissism tend to be deficient

in many traits that support college student success. For example, humility in college

students has a positive correlation with higher course grades. Rowatt et al. (2006)

characterize humility as "being humble, modest, down-to-earth, open-minded, and

respectful of others, and less arrogant, immodest, conceited, close-minded or egotistical"

(p. 199), which seems to be the exact opposite of a narcissistic person. There are a few

core aspects of the narcissistic personality that lend themselves to destructive learning

styles in students. Among these are 1) overestimation of performance, 2) lack of delay of

gratification, 3) lack of advice seeking, and 4) negative reactions to setbacks. These

aspects are detrimental to the student while in college and makes the student ill-prepared

for their futures beyond college.

1) Overestimation of Performance

Very high predictions and expectations of college GPA correlate with narcissistic

and egotistical self-views. This self-enhancement does not necessarily lead to successful

academic performance, though. Robins and Beer (2001) found that self-enhancers do not

have higher GPAs at the end of college than do non self-enhancers and actually found a

slightly higher college dropout rate among self-enhancers. In the short-term, being a self-

enhancer is adaptive, as self-enhancers have more positive views of themselves. Over

time, however, this self-esteem decreases, leading to negative long-term outcomes for those with narcissistic personalities. This unrealistic overestimation of expected grades and performance may have a stable and consistent personality component embedded in it. Kennedy, Lauton and Plumlee (2002) suggest that a defensive mechanism called an "ego-defensive tendency" might play a role in overconfidence of performance. This is an indication that the overestimation of performance could be due to wanting to promote and defend the self-concept.

Narcissistic individuals tend to have unrealistic expectations for their futures as well. In a study that observed students with narcissistic personality tendencies, it was found that these individuals were more likely to have inflated expectations about their careers, salaries and promotions after graduation. The inflated egos of narcissistic individuals lead them to have high, usually unrealistic expectations for future jobs (Westerman, Bergman, Bergman, & Daly, 2012). They possess an unrealistic thought process about their academic performance and future career paths, which is very maladaptive. Though it is objectively good to be optimistic about one's abilities, at some point, a realistic evaluation must come into play in order for success to ensue.

2) Lack of Delay of Gratification

A psychological aspect that can also be a learning strategy known as delay of gratification is important in achieving academic success. For example, a good student might not go to a concert so that he can stay in to study for an exam. He delays his gratification in that he will probably get a higher grade on the exam because he did not attend the concert instead of studying. Bembenutty (1999) proposed that students who do not practice delay of gratification are not as involved in their academic tasks and thus are

not as successful academically as those who can delay gratification. Delayed gratification is also associated with impulsivity (Vazire & Funder, 2006), which narcissistic individuals also have trouble controlling. If a narcissistic student cannot delay gratification, he may be at risk to not complete assignments on time or to not study hard enough when he is faced with a pleasurable distraction. Continuing with the concert example, he may opt to go to the concert in order to experience short-term pleasure instead of staying in to study for the long-term gratification of a good grade.

3) Lack of Advice Seeking

Another area of research on college student success lies in the advice seeking tendencies of students. Faculty-student interaction is generally positive and important in the college education process. It can help students both academically and professionally and plays a large role in the academic success of many students. Receiving feedback from professors is beneficial, and students who are more involved in their learning and involved with their professors tend to do better in college (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Now, a key aspect of narcissism is a distinct inability to accept any critical feedback that is self-relevant. This makes them unlikely to pursue academic relationships with professors outside of the classroom for fear of taking a hit to their inflated egos. This can be very detrimental. Komarraju et al. (2010) argue that students who are alienated from professors may also experience a lack of motivation. It is clear that this is a problem that students high in narcissism face. Narcissistic students are in a destructive cycle where they cannot accept criticism or feedback without becoming defensive, and so do not seek academic guidance from professors. However, not going to

professors may make them feel alienated and less motivated which in turn affects their chances of academic success.

Moreover, people who feel anxious are more open to seeking and receiving advice. Anxiety is mediated by a drop in self-confidence, and conversely, high self-confidence does not lead to advice seeking or receptivity (Gino, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2012). Thus, people who are high in external self-confidence such as narcissistic individuals are not likely to seek help in order to maintain the façade of self-confidence. Further, researchers Mattern and Shaw (2010) found that students who knew that they were below average in their academic abilities desired academic help. This finding goes along with the consistency principle: "students with more negative self-beliefs are more likely to seek help" (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). So, those who do not hold negative self-beliefs, such as those with narcissistic personalities, will most likely not seek that academic help, even if they actually need it. Moreover, individuals high in narcissism tend to react emotionally and angrily to feedback that is not consistent with their grandiose self-views (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). This would make taking even the most gentle and constructive criticism a problem. Interacting with professors in a constructive way is an essential part of academic success. Narcissistic students miss out on this important aspect during their education and thus most likely are negatively affected in their academics.

4) Negative Reactions to Failure

College is a tedious entity. It is full of both setbacks and successes and can definitely be a difficult journey. Failure is an inherent part of the journey that is college education, as not everyone can be perfect every single time when learning new things.

This aspect of education is especially troubling for students high in narcissism. Narcissistic individuals react to failure in much more negative ways than do non-narcissistic individuals, such as with overwhelming anxiety and anger. Baker (1979) says that "failure is felt as catastrophic" for narcissists (p. 419). This may be because of their attribution style. They tend to attribute success to their own skills, which is objectively a good trait. Where this leads the narcissistic person astray, however, is that after a success, he tends to think that he will always find success in subsequent tasks. Rhodewalt and Morf (1998) found that when individuals high in narcissism are met with a failure after a success, they react with anger. This anger comes when the grandiose self-image is threatened, as it so often can be during the journey of college education. Furthermore, students that meet academic failure may react by withdrawing from school all together and instead engage in pleasurable, gratifying activities such as sex, sports, and television (Robins & Beer, 2001). This is conceivable for a narcissistic student, considering both a narcissist's lack of ability to delay gratification and lack of ability to productively deal with failure and setbacks.

Again, as is seen in the advice-seeking aspect of academics, narcissist students are drawn into a negative cycle: academic setbacks challenge their sense of self, and so they may avoid school and stop studying in order to get away from the challenge to their self-esteem. This, however, leads to even worse grades and thus even worse self-esteem. Baker suggests that the only way to preserve the grandiose sense of self while studying is to either do really well in a class or on a test by luck, which boosts the self-esteem, or to fail and blame the failure on the difficulty of the test or class (Robins & Beer, 2001). Both of these strategies however do not lead to a healthy academic outcome. Neither one

of them even entails the student studying hard and learning. Academics get sacrificed for

the sake of the narcissistic personality. The fact that narcissistic people have a hard time

dealing with setbacks and obstacles is very detrimental not only in their college careers

but also in life. Life and the "real world" outside of college are full of obstacles that

people must learn to overcome.

Certain Collegiate Campuses Foster Narcissism

As previously mentioned, Kohut (1966) proposed that narcissism arises from an

environment, and not only from an individual. This next section examines certain

environments, specifically American collegiate environments, where narcissism may be

prone to cultivation. It is difficult to generalize a finding to a whole population as

Twenge attempted to do in her many studies about narcissism increases among American

college students, which is why it may be best to apply the finding to a specific population

instead. While narcissism among all college students in America could be a bit far-

fetched, increasing rates of narcissism among certain high-caliber, prestigious institutions

is logical.

Before advancing, the question, "Why college?" must be addressed. Though both

high school and college constitute educational journeys, college is a completely different

atmosphere from high school, and is an important gateway between the teenage years and

adult life where individuals can really cultivate their senses of self and personalities.

Furthermore, attending college is almost an American norm now. In 2009, 41.3% of the

American college-aged population (18-24 years old) was enrolled in American colleges

and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). College is an

environment that growing numbers of the population are experiencing, and is a good stage for psychological research.

The focus on prestigious universities arises because they require admitted students to experience academic success in high school. If narcissistic personality tendencies had completely manifested themselves during high school, the student would not have had a chance to get into a top college or university, as shown by the damage that narcissism can do to the academic success of a narcissistic individual. Certain prestigious institutions may foster environments that can cultivate narcissistic tendencies in their students. They may provide opportunities for narcissistic personalities to develop. Six institutions were chosen because of their academic excellence as shown through national rankings (e.g., America's Top Colleges, 2011) and their big names within American culture. This list of schools is by no means exhaustive, and serves only as a group of examples of campuses that may have characteristics that foster narcissism. The six schools that will be examined are: Harvard University, Yale University, University of California Los Angeles, University of California Berkeley, University of Southern California, and New York University. These schools will be examined through the lenses of: 1) overestimation of performance, 2) delay of gratification, 3) advice seeking tendencies, and 4) reaction to failure, which, as previously discussed, are aspects of learning that can lead to failure in already narcissistic students.

1) Expectation to do Well: Overestimation of Performance

All of the universities and colleges that will be discussed pave the way for overestimation of performance during college, which is a trait of a narcissistic student. All six of these institutions frequently rank among the highest institutions in the country

according to news sources such as Princeton Review, US News, and Forbes (The

Princeton Review, 2012; America's Top Colleges, 2011; Best Colleges 2012, 2012).

These big name American institutions possess excellent academic reputations, and these

reputations could foster a false sense of self-excellence in the students that attend them.

The reputation of the prestigious school could further create attitudes of entitlement and

over-inflated senses of self in its students. With an unrealistic sense of self may come the

tendency to fall back on and depend upon the grades that got the student admitted into the

college in the first place and to use those when estimating one's future performance at the

school. The fact that the student was accepted into these universities in the first place

could set the foundation for an expectation that the student will automatically and easily

do well there.

The selectivity of all of the schools and the average GPA of the incoming

freshman classes are indicators of the objective ability of the students who are admitted to

achieve academic success. From these aspects would stem the notion and expectation to

succeed in college. For example, Yale is one of the most selective colleges in the nation,

as in 2010 it admitted only 8% of its applicants, and "more than three quarters of its

admitted students were in the top 10% of their high school classes" (College Data: Your

Online Advisor, 2012). Similarly, UCLA is one of the most highly applied to universities

in the United States, attracting over 60,000 applicants each year, with roughly one in

every four applicants admitted (UCLA Admissions, 2012). Even further, the average high

school GPA of a freshman that attends Harvard is 4.0 (The Princeton Review, 2012).

These statistics show that great students get admitted and attend these schools. They also

demonstrate, though, that a student who attends these schools may be prone to ego-

inflation purely based on the prestige and selectivity of the schools. The narcissistic

tendency of overestimation of performance may come into play. More problems lie in

environments that may further cultivate narcissistic personality tendencies upon

integration into the campus life, such as distracting settings.

2) Delay of Gratification in Seductive Environments

It has already been noted that those with narcissistic tendencies have trouble with

delaying gratification. Now, think about a student attending college in a vibrant area, or

one with an emphasis on Greek, social, or sport culture. With distractions abound, a sharp

focus on academics would be difficult for even the most non-narcissistic students.

Institutions such as New York University, University of California Los Angeles, and

University of Southern California are environments in which delaying gratification would

be difficult because of their surrounding city environments, their focus on Greek and

social life, and their sport cultures.

An alluring city environment may play a role in delay of gratification on college

campuses. NYU ranks in the top ten of the Princeton Review's "Great College Towns"

(The Princeton Review, 2012), which makes sense, seeing as it is in the heart of "the city

that never sleeps." Its dorms and classrooms are scattered throughout the vibrant city,

creating no real divide between campus and city. It is easy to conceive of millions of

distractions that students at NYU must face everyday. Similarly, UCLA and USC are

both located in one of the most beautiful and fun cities in the United States: Los Angeles.

With great beaches, shopping, and nightlife, anyone can find an enjoyable activity. The

two cities that NYU, UCLA, and USC are placed in offer a multitude of distractions.

These environments may push students to focus more on short-term gratification, such as

experiencing all that the cities have to offer, in favor of maintaining a sharp academic focus.

In addition to a seductive surrounding city, both UCLA and USC also have prominent Greek and sport cultures. About 13% of women at UCLA participate in sororities, and about 13% of men participate in fraternities, which places close to 7,000 UCLA students in Greek life. The Greek life at USC is even more prominent than that of UCLA, with about 20% of women involved with a sorority and 21% of men involved with a fraternity. This also places about 7,000 undergraduate students in Greek life, but it is a very large chunk of the undergraduate population of 17,000 (College Data: Your Online Advisor, 2012). With the heavy emphasis on social life provided by the sororities and fraternities, social distraction inherently exists on both campuses. Furthermore, both schools have prominent athletic programs. UCLA has arguably the top athletic program in NCAA Division I, as shown by its being the first school to reach 100 National Championships (The Official Website of UCLA Athletics, 2012). And with a football team, among other sports, that is constantly ranked top 25 in the nation (USC Trojans-Official Athletic Site, 2012), USC's athletics are a breeding ground for school spirit, with its students being known for having "tons of Trojan pride" (The Princeton Review, 2012). There is a large emphasis on school spirit at both athletically minded schools, and attending sporting events can be a major distraction for students.

The environments of NYU, UCLA, and USC are full of gratifying distractions, and students can easily get caught up in them. A couple of examples may include a USC student opting for attending a Trojan football game instead of studying for an exam because of the enticing Trojan pride culture, or an NYU student exploring the wonders of

Manhattan instead of writing a paper. With a narcissist's propensity to indulge in short-term pleasures without considering long-term consequences, NYU, UCLA and USC serve as examples of collegiate environments where narcissism could have an opportunity to cultivate.

3) Advice Seeking at Large Schools

Seductive collegiate environments are not the only risk factor in the cultivation of students high in narcissism. Large schools may also cultivate narcissism. Bigger universities and colleges have more undergraduate students and thus have larger, more disproportionate faculty-student ratios than do smaller schools. They also offer a multitude of classes, with huge class sizes. Larger schools provide environments that allow students to never interact with faculty, thus leading to a propensity for less advice seeking and receiving. As was already discussed, lack of seeking advice and feedback from professors is a key academic shortcoming of narcissistic individuals. Thus, larger schools may be places where narcissism is fostered.

The University of Southern California, University of California Los Angeles, and University of California Berkeley are all examples of large high-caliber institutions in the United States. The undergraduate population at USC is about 17,000 students (The Princeton Review, 2012). The average class size is about 26 students, which is not too big in proportion to the number of students who attend the school. They offer about 150 undergraduate majors (USC Admissions, 2012), which is an overwhelming amount. A bit bigger, UCLA has about 26,000 undergraduate students and about 13,000 graduate students on its campus with a student-to-faculty ratio of around 17:1. Approximately 22% of its classes have more than 50 students enrolled in them, and the school offers 126

undergraduate majors (UCLA Admissions, 2012). Berkeley is similar to UCLA in its large numbers. Its undergraduate population is made up of about 25,500 students (College Data: Your Online Advisor, 2012) with a student-to-faculty ratio of about 15:1. 25% of Berkeley's classes have over thirty students in them. Berkeley offers over 7,000 courses (for both undergraduates and graduate students) on its campus (Berkeley Admissions, 2012) and close to 100 undergraduate majors (College Data: Your Online Advisor, 2012). These numbers are among the biggest in the nation, and among the largest of the prestigious universities that will be presented in this paper. When examining numbers like these, it is easy to conceive of students getting lost in the sea of so many other students at institutions such as USC, UCLA, and Berkeley.

Bigger schools offer more opportunities to avoid personal contact with professors and thus to gain feedback and constructive criticism from them. It is easy to miss out on valuable academic one-on-one interaction with professors. Faculty members have to devote their attentions to larger amounts of students, and thus might not hold their students accountable for meeting with them. Bigger schools are dangerous to individuals who may have some narcissistic tendencies, because they allow these individuals to cultivate their narcissism even further through avoiding advice seeking, which can lead to academic failure.

4) Reaction to Setbacks in High Pressure Environments

College is difficult, and the academics at prestigious universities and colleges are taxing and full of obstacles for students. Institutions where there is a high amount of pressure to do well, such as Harvard and Yale, especially set students up to face hardships in their academic careers. Both schools have a heavy focus on excellence,

which can contribute to a highly pressurized environment that is not failure-friendly. In environments where failure is so unacceptable, narcissism among students may be cultivated in that an unhealthy and unproductive reaction to setbacks is fostered. An unwavering emphasis on excellence repels any opportunity for productive reaction to failure.

Harvard is a prime example of a high-pressure college environment. Its admission staff aims to admit only the "best" students, who are "unusually strong across the board." There is a very large focus on excellence in academics, extracurricular activities, and personal qualities (Fitzsimmons, 2009). Upon getting accepted into Harvard, it is expected to uphold these notions. Harvard also has a very historical tradition of excellence, as it is the oldest university in the United States (founded in 1636), and has some very prestigious alumni. Among them are seven U.S. presidents and upwards of 40 Nobel laureates (Admissions Consultants: College, 2012). Yale is similar to Harvard in its tradition of excellence. It was founded in 1701 among the first American universities (College Data: Your Online Advisor, 2012), and amid its alumni are many U.S. presidents, senators, CEOs, actors, as well as many other distinguished disciplines (Notable Yale University Alumni, 2012). In both schools, there is the expectation to graduate and become a very distinguished person in society. Further, Yale's admissions department also strives to find the finest students to fill its classrooms, and admits only the "best and brightest who will take advantage" of the exceptional Yale education (Yale Admissions, 2012). Both schools have led the country in academics for over 300 years, and so the pressure to do well at them and beyond is immense.

A school that poses a multitude of academic challenges and couples those challenges with an emphasis on excellence among the student body creates a highly pressurized environment. Moreover, a school that rejects failure creates the same attitude in its students. So, when students are met with academic setbacks or shortcomings, they have the propensity to react in very unhealthy, possibly narcissistic, ways as a direct result of the school's ingraining this attitude in them. Any sort of failure becomes unwelcome to the student, possibly creating emotional reactions such as anger and anxiety, which are key aspects of students with narcissistic personalities. Narcissistic personality tendencies could arise in such environments when there are continuous academic setbacks tied with the school's attitude that failure is not acceptable. Schools like Harvard and Yale can cultivate narcissistic students because of these aspects.

Conclusion

Narcissism possesses numerous detrimental characteristics for both society and individuals. Narcissism in college students is a very real problem, as it can lead to academic failure and can produce ill-prepared individuals for endeavors beyond academics. By applying the aspects that lead students high in narcissistic tendencies to academic failure, certain collegiate campuses were identified as possible sources of the cultivation of narcissism.

In a broader scope, American society as a whole will suffer from a possible increase in narcissistic personality tendencies in an entire generation of its citizens. Even though Narcissistic Personality Disorder is very rare, narcissism may be an inherent part of today's American youth. If the United States wants to develop capable, confident, productive members of society for the next generation, something needs to be done to

thwart the narcissistic revolution. An intervention program or a student service program would not only benefit narcissistic individuals but also the American society as a whole. However, more psychological research needs to be done to determine the best way to treat narcissistic individuals in a society that promotes individuality and uniqueness such as the United States.

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