

# Narcissism in Management Education

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*Narcissism levels in U.S. college students have steadily risen over the past 25 years (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), and these increases may be even more pronounced among business students in comparison with those in other disciplines (e.g., Robak, Chiffriller, & Zappone, 2007). This increase in narcissism has implications for both student classroom behavior and the manner in which we, as faculty, effectively teach and manage our classrooms. We explore the personality trait of narcissism, its potential manifestations in the classroom, and offer suggestions for management educators in dealing with more narcissistic students.*

*"What we must decide is perhaps how we are valuable, rather than how valuable we are."*  
—F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Crack-Up*)

A recent cross-temporal meta-analysis found that narcissism levels have risen steadily among U.S. college students over the past 25 years (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), and Americans score higher on narcissism than people from other world regions (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Almost two thirds of recent college students were reported to be above the mean 1979–1985 narcissism score, and the mean narcissism score of 2006 college students on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) approached that of a celebrity sample of movie stars, reality TV winners, and famous musicians (Young & Pinsky, 2006). Other meta-analyses have demonstrated a clear rise in individualistic traits related to narcissism, including reported self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2001); assertiveness (Twenge, 2001a); and extraversion (Twenge, 2001b). In reference to F. Scott Fitzgerald, university students in the U.S. in recent years seem to be focusing disproportionately on "how valuable they are," rather than "how they may be valuable." What impact (if any) this phenomenon of increasing narcissism may have upon our management classrooms is an open question.

## What is Narcissism?

The term *narcissistic* is often used to describe activities, behaviors, or experiences that serve to maintain or enhance a grandiose, yet vulnerable self (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rodin & Izenberg, 1996). Those with a narcissistic disorder are unable to regulate their self-esteem, and, thus, become dependent upon social sources for affirmation. They then engage in activities or behaviors that assist them in maintaining their inflated sense of self. Essentially, those high in narcissism display a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, self-focus, and self-importance (Carson, Butcher, & Coleman, 1988; Millon, 1996). They are preoccupied with receiving attention, and expect special treatment from others. They typically disregard others' rights and feelings, and are unable to take the perspective of others. Empathy is considered a necessary ingredient of mature relationships, which perhaps partially explains the inability of narcissists to form or maintain close ones. They have a sense of entitlement—often astonishing to others—which they consider as simply congruent with their special status.

Narcissism as a pathological or socially aversive personality trait is often contrasted to "healthy" narcissism (e.g., Bentley, 2005; Greenberg, 1998; Ronningstam, 2005). "Healthy" narcissism is a positive self-regard resulting from a realistic assessment and acceptance of one's strengths and weaknesses. Individuals with defensive or unhealthy narcissism appear to have high

self-esteem, but their sense of self-regard is a façade used to hide and compensate for an underlying sense of worthlessness and inadequacy. This high self-esteem is not based on any realistic assessment or acceptance of oneself, thus, it is vulnerable to slights and failures. When the façade of self-importance and superiority is disturbed, the individual feels incredible shame and humiliation (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Ronningstam, 2005). To defend against these feelings, narcissists typically externalize blame and angrily turn on their "attackers." Many narcissistic behaviors consist of overt displays of grandiosity; however, in some cases, the narcissist's need for praise and admiration is covert and manifests as apparently self-sacrificing devotion to work or intellectual pursuits (Rodin & Izenberg, 1996). Either way, these self-sacrificing or grandiose behaviors are attempts to derive admiration and gratification from external sources, as these individuals lack the capacity to maintain their self-esteem.

We should note that as we discuss narcissism among our students here, we use the term *narcissism* to refer to a normal, subclinical personality trait, of which people possess varying levels, rather than the clinical personality disorder as identified and described by the American Psychiatric Association (Narcissistic Personality Disorder [NPD]). However, the difference between subclinical narcissism and NPD is essentially one of degree. Narcissism is commonly measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), which was designed to assess individual differences in narcissism as a subclinical personality trait yet was based directly on the DSM-III criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Numerous studies by personality and social psychologists using the NPI have demonstrated the validity of narcissism as a subclinical personality trait (e.g., Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005; Emmons, 1987; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984). Thus, like many others, we use the vast clinical literature on NPD (combined with the growing body of research in personality and social psychology) to inform our work, but when discussing our students, we are always referring to narcissism within the bounds of a subclinical personality trait.

Along these lines, one would not expect to see substantial qualitative differences in the behavior of an individual with clinical NPD versus an individual with high subclinical narcissism. Again, the differences are primarily a matter of degree. An individual with subclinical narcissism would exhibit behavioral tendencies quite similar to those of an individual with NPD. However, the frequency

or extent to which the individual exhibits these tendencies would be reduced so as to not be pervasively dysfunctional, as would be evident with an individual with clinical NPD.

### Origins of Narcissism

Overall, there is little agreement on the exact etiology of narcissism, which may simply indicate that there is more than one way to "grow" a narcissist. Many researchers suggest that parenting plays a large role in the development of narcissism, with some suggesting that a doting parenting style may lead to narcissism (e.g., Beck, Freeman, & Associates, 1990; Millon, 1996; Young, 1998) and others suggesting that narcissism may develop from unempathic, neglectful, or devaluing parents (e.g., Cooper, 1998; Kernberg, 1998; Kohut, 1968; Lieberman, 2004). Other researchers have cited societal or cultural conditions that they believe may lead to increased narcissism (e.g., Lasch, 1978; Mazlish, 1982; Nelson, 1977).

We suggest that the current phenomenon of increasing narcissism among our college students may be best explained by a combination of parenting style and societal conditions (indeed, the two are unlikely to be independent of one another). Twenge (2006) calls the current generation (those born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s) "Generation Me," and provides a substantial amount of evidence that this generation has been consistently taught by their parents and society to put themselves above others and to focus primarily on feeling good about themselves. Thus, a doting parenting style and societal influences are worth further examination.

Millon and colleagues (Millon, 1996; Millon & Davis, 2000) proposed a social learning theory that suggests that special treatment and overindulgence by parents result in the child valuing him- or herself regardless of real attainments, and the child builds expectations for automatic admiration and praise. Likewise, those taking a cognitive theory perspective (e.g., Beck et al., 1990; Young, 1998) believe narcissistic tendencies may emerge from an excessively idealizing parent who may cause the child to develop an overactive self-schema that includes inflated beliefs of personal uniqueness and self-importance. In such cases, parents may also systematically deny or distort negative external feedback to their child, and insulation from such feedback could contribute to the hypersensitivity to evaluation so common among narcissists (Beck et al., 1990). Indeed, there are reports in today's popular press of "helicopter parents"—members of the current generation of mothers and fa-

thers who hover over their children, protecting them, and even intruding on situations such as employment interviews and salary negotiations for children who are over 21 (see Alsop, 2006, February 14; Shellenbarger, 2006, March 16). Further, the National Survey of Student Engagement 2007 annual report has indicated the prevalence of helicopter parents in academe, as 39% of first-year students had a parent intervene on their behalf to solve a problem at college, and 13% indicated that such interventions were frequent (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). One of the coauthors of this essay has personally experienced a direct parental contact to contest their child's peer evaluation grade in the instructor's course. We imagine that, over the next several years, this may become a more frequent occurrence.

Other researchers have proposed that changes in Western society, which they believed was becoming overly self-centered and materialistic, may have contributed to increases in narcissism. For example, Lasch (1978) argued that the student unrest surrounding the Vietnam War during the 1960s was followed by a period of national disillusionment that led to the beginning of a culture of narcissism. Specifically, Lasch believed that the youth of our country:

- Had become unusually self-centered and demanding
- Wanted immediate gratification, and were incapable of tolerating delay
- Were excessively focused on materialistic consumption
- Had an inability to see their own lives or relationships in extended time
- Experienced quick boredom and short attention spans
- Lacked the capacity or desire for sustained intimacy.

Of interest is that these and similar statements are being made to describe the youth of today.

Twenge (2006) describes the current era (in which "Generation Me" grew up) as one when "focusing on yourself was not just tolerated but actively encouraged" (4). This generation had childhoods consisting of constant praise and self-esteem boosting. Numerous school districts across the country instituted programs designed specifically to raise children's self-esteem, and over 300,000 elementary schools in 2006 included in their mission statements that they aim to increase students' self-esteem (Twenge, 2006). However, self-esteem actively promoted for its own sake is not based on any objective reality, and may lead to the inflated and vulnerable self-esteem of narcissists.

As narcissism increases, we also see increases

in materialism (Roberts & Robins, 2000; Rose, 2007). Narcissists' inflated self-esteem and sense of entitlement leads them to believe that they deserve more and better than everyone else, and obtaining expensive, exclusive, or flashy new products helps to then validate this belief by increasing their apparent status (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007). In recent years, we have witnessed such a shift in materialistic behaviors and attitudes. For instance, 74% of college freshman in 2004 cited "being very well-off financially" as an important life goal, compared to 45% in 1967 (Astin, Oseguera, Sax, & Korn, 2004). In a Pew Research Center survey (2007), 81% of 18- to 25-year-olds said that getting rich was among their most important goals, with 64% citing it as the most important goal. By comparison, only 30% chose helping others, and only 10% named becoming more spiritual. Students also have arguably unrealistic expectations of success in that 51% of recent high school students predicted they would earn graduate or professional degrees, representing an increase from the 27% who predicted this outcome in 1976 (only 9% of 25- to 34-year-olds actually hold these degrees; Reynolds, Stewart, Sischo, & MacDonald, 2006).

Research has found that narcissistic tendencies such as materialistic values and money importance tend to be particularly evident in business students (e.g., Robak, Chiffriller, & Zappone, 2007; Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Simons, & Soenens, 2006). Unfortunately, these types of values and motives may undermine our students' happiness and well-being, as extrinsic value pursuits have been linked to reductions in psychological need-satisfying behaviors, such as prosocial engagement and affiliation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Srivastava, Locke, and Bartol (2001) examined the relationship between money and subjective well-being among a sample of entrepreneurs and business students, by examining individuals' evaluations of their lives (which included assessments of positive affect, anxiety, and depression). Their research found that as the value respondents placed on the acquisition of money as a vehicle to overcome self-doubt went up, subjective well-being went down. Similarly, the degree to which they valued money as a means of showing off and making social comparisons was also negatively correlated with subjective well-being. Robak et al. (2007) found that students majoring in business were more motivated to make money than students with a psychology major and were more subject to negative mood states, such as anger and depression. In a comparison of education and business university students, Vansteenkiste et al. (2006) found that extrinsic values negatively pre-

dicted well-being and optimal functioning, and 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. Further, in the Vansteenkiste et al. (2006) study, the differences in self-reported well-being and substance use between business and education students was 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).

### Behavior of Narcissists

Research in the psychology literature on subclinical narcissism shows that, because of their fragile self-esteem, individuals high in narcissism tend to react with rage, shame, or humiliation when their self-esteem is threatened (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Stucke & Sporer, 2002). They are also more likely to blame extrinsic or situational factors when they do not succeed (e.g., Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000), and this tendency to externalize blame may be what leads to reactions of anger (an externalizing emotion) versus sadness or anxiety (internalizing emotions) when they experience failure or rejection (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). The clinical literature suggests that narcissism may also be accompanied by hypochondriasis (Beck et al., 1990), which provides multiple benefits including a socially acceptable way to focus time and energy on the self, receiving attention and sympathy from others, and building a feasible explanation or excuse for failure. Narcissists can also develop paranoid trends in their thinking (Beck et al., 1990), possessing a "me against the world" attitude. Any information (i.e., feedback, criticism) that conflicts with the narcissist's grandiose sense of self may provoke intense rage, verbal or physical abuse of others, and major self-protective defense mechanisms.

Subclinical narcissism has been associated with a wide range of additional negative behaviors, including white collar crime (Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006); assault (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003); aggression (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998); distorted judgments of one's abilities (e.g., Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003); rapidly depleting common resources (Campbell et al., 2005); risky decision making (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004); alcohol abuse (Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005); pathological gambling (Lahey, Goodie, & Campbell, 2006); com-

pulsive shopping (Rose, 2007); and troubled romantic relationships (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006).

### Narcissism in the Management Classroom

The increase in narcissism among college students raises numerous potential issues for our management classrooms. First, narcissists tend to have a wide range of interpersonal deficits that are likely to cause a variety of problems for both educators and classmates. These include tendencies to be interpersonally exploitative, to show arrogant behaviors and haughty attitudes, and to be unable to empathize or take the perspective of others (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). As a result, students high in narcissism are likely to be very poor team players, as they tend to blame others for failure, take credit for success, and be overly competitive (Campbell et al., 2000). This presents real challenges for both faculty and classmates, as more business educators begin to use cooperative- or team-learning techniques in preparation for the increasing amount of team-based work in today's organizations. Cooperative-learning techniques are in-class, group-based instructional methods, and their success requires student interdependence, individual accountability, and skillful social interaction (Cottell & Millis, 1993; Rassuli & Manzer, 2005). Students high in narcissism, with their range of interpersonal deficits, are unlikely to work well in such settings and are quite likely to hinder the overall effectiveness of such instructional methods.

Narcissistic students are also likely to be hypersensitive to evaluation and potential negative feedback or criticism (Beck et al., 1990). Any feedback that might threaten their fragile self-concept may cause feelings of anger or shame and result in aggressive or antisocial behavior toward the source of the perceived threat (Stucke & Sporer, 2002). When faced with inadequate performance, narcissists are often unwilling or unable to take responsibility for their failures or inappropriate behaviors. They externalize failure, typically blaming outside sources (e.g., illness, friends, family, professors). This may have implications for faculty evaluation and grading, as a substandard grade may result in antisocial behavior in the narcissist, targeting the faculty member and course content and potentially disrupting positive work norms.

Narcissistic students are also likely to show a sense of entitlement (Beck et al., 1990). They may believe that they should be exempt from difficult or dull tasks, leading to disengagement with mate-

rial deemed uninteresting. They perceive themselves as above the ordinary rules that apply to others and may feel that others have no right to criticize them while they freely criticize others. They may display a surprising sense of entitlement when negotiating appointments and other arrangements with their professor, acting indignant when appointments or arrangements are not made to their preference or convenience. Their sense of entitlement may also lead to demands for the grades they believe they deserve.

What may be quite worrisome in an educational setting is the difficulty narcissists have engaging in the learning process (Beck et al., 1990). Narcissists must maintain their self-image of superiority, and, thus, cannot readily admit that others may know something that they do not. Narcissists, then, often experience negative emotional reactions to being in a state of ignorance and find it difficult to accept new information (Beck et al., 1990). These manifestations may seriously test faculty skills in managing productive classroom discussions, presentations, debates, and other learning-centered activities. Interpersonal deficits, a sense of entitlement, and hypersensitivity to feedback clearly present challenges to management faculty. As a result of having difficulty in engaging in learning, narcissists may tend toward what Jarvis (1995) refers to as nonreflective learning, whereby memorization is a primary tool employed to achieve successful outcomes.

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However, what may be especially enigmatic for management educators is that narcissism may have some benefits for transitory or temporary work environments similar to the higher education classroom. Narcissism has been associated with short-term (but not with long-term) likeability (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004; Paulhus, 1998); enhanced performance on public evaluation tasks (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002); short-term victories in competitive tasks (e.g., Campbell et al., 2005); and emergent (although not successful) leadership (Blair, Hoffman, & Helland, 2008; Brunell, Gentry, Campbell, & Kuhnert, 2006). As a result, it is possible that narcissists may be graded or assessed at a higher level than less narcissistic students in our management classrooms. Short-term likeability, emergent leader-

ship, and enhanced performance on public evaluation tasks may be rewarded in group work and classroom presentations. The classroom also represents a short-term competitive environment, which may motivate more narcissistic students toward achieving "victory" over their classmates. These issues raise a concern as to whether faculty assessments of these students' suitability for an organizational environment are accurate. Is it possible that some faculty and management programs may be inadvertently reinforcing narcissism in their classrooms?

And if the product of higher education in business includes increasing levels of narcissism in our graduates, in the longer term, this may be particularly problematic for the business community. As mentioned previously, narcissism has been associated with a range of significantly damaging behaviors for organizations. As Lubit (2002) argued in his article on destructively narcissistic managers, the behavior of the narcissistic manager works in direct opposition to building a healthy, productive workplace. The grandiosity, sense of entitlement, lack of empathy, and exploitativeness of narcissists, combined with the legitimate authority of a managerial position, results in managers who are more likely to destroy morale and motivation, force employees to divert their time and effort away from relevant tasks toward self-protection and politicking, and disparage the good ideas of others in order to keep the spotlight on themselves (Lubit, 2002). Narcissistic managers may drive away their best employees, as they consistently take credit for others' work and ideas, readily scapegoat in the face of failure, and hoard power rather than share it with talented, deserving subordinates.

Narcissistic leaders are also likely to experience severe shortfalls in decision making (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1997; Maccoby, 2000; Post, 1993). Maintaining a grandiose self-image is paramount to narcissists. Thus, they are unlikely to tolerate those who dissent, and will often surround themselves with sycophants. There tend to be few independent thinkers in the advisory circle of the narcissistic leader. In addition, because narcissists have difficulty learning new information (Beck et al., 1990), such a leader is unlikely to collect additional data, consult others, or listen to those who offer even the most constructive criticism. Decisions tend to be made quickly, with very little environmental scanning or analysis, and without the input of knowledgeable others. Furthermore, these decisions are often extraordinarily bold and risky, due to the narcissist's grandiosity, exhibitionism, and fantasies of unlimited power and success (Kets de Vries

& Miller, 1997). Recent research has shown that narcissistic CEOs take bold actions as a way to garner attention and applause, and that such actions often result in extreme performance (big wins or big losses) and fluctuating performance for their organizations (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007).

### Treatment of Narcissism

Clinical approaches to treating narcissism suggest some possible ways of dealing with it in the classroom. First, we note that narcissists rarely seek treatment, as they typically view themselves as nearly perfect, in no need of personal change (Carson et al., 1988). The narcissist usually experiences distress only when fate has been unkind (Lieberman, 2004), when recognition or praise is not available, or when the ability to feel powerful, valued, or attractive had been affected (Rodin & Izenberg, 1996). When narcissists do seek treatment, it is often for feelings of depression, substance-related disorders, and occupational and relational problems that are secondary to narcissism (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Once in treatment, the therapeutic relationship is often jeopardized by narcissists' belief that they can only be understood by persons of comparably high status or recognition (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Thus, the narcissist's therapist must be deemed worthy of the narcissist's time and attention, or the treatment may quickly unravel.

Although there are numerous clinical approaches to treating narcissism, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) seems especially relevant to the classroom and professor-student interactions. We provide a brief overview of CBT below, and in the following section examine the specific relevance of its methods in reducing narcissism in the management classroom.

CBT emphasizes increasing patients' awareness of the impact of their narcissistic behaviors and statements on interpersonal relationships (Beck et al., 1990). The CBT model is based on the premise that attributional bias is the main source of dysfunctional affect and conduct. Proponents of CBT argue that dysfunctional behaviors are largely due to the function of certain schemas or mental templates that produce consistently biased judgments and a tendency to make associated mental errors. Most CBT treatment strategies are based on the three major components of narcissism: grandiosity, hypersensitivity to evaluation, and lack of empathy. The aims of CBT include adjusting the patient's grandiose self-view, minimizing cognitive focus on evaluation by others, better managing affective reactions to evaluation, enhancing

awareness of others' feelings, activating more empathy, and eliminating exploitative behavior. Treatment interventions typically focus on increasing behavioral responsibility, decreasing cognitive distortions and dysfunctional feeling, and formulating new attitudes.

A variety of techniques can be used to address these three major components of narcissism. For instance, imaginal restructuring can be used to alter perceptions of grandiosity (Beck et al., 1990). A patient may fantasize, for example, about singing a hit song in front of thousands of people. The therapist can help the patient to instead fantasize about finding pleasure in singing in the church choir. Systematic desensitization can be used to decrease the patient's hypersensitivity to evaluation (Beck et al., 1990). The therapist gradually exposes the patient to increasing degrees of feedback, so that the patient can develop skills in tolerating, using, and benefiting from evaluation. The ultimate goal is for the patient to be able to maintain a positive self-view without that self-view being dependent upon reactions from others.

Regarding a narcissist's lack of empathy, three strategies appear useful (Beck et al., 1990). First, the lack of empathy needs to be brought to the patient's attention. A simple question about recognizing others' feelings may suffice. Sometimes, the patient's disregard and exploitation may need to be addressed more directly. Second, emotional schemas relating to the feelings and reactions of others need to be activated. This can usually be done by way of role reversals and role-plays in which the patient assumes the role of another, with emphasis on how the "other" is likely to feel, not simply how he or she would react. Third, alternative ways to treat and interact with others should be suggested and discussed. New beliefs should be introduced to help the patient articulate the affective recognition of others' reactions (e.g., "other people's feelings matter, too"), and specific ways can be offered to act out these new beliefs (e.g., "let someone get ahead of you in line," "give someone else a compliment").

### Suggestions for Management Educators

In our following suggestions for management educators, we are by no means asserting that management educators become psychoanalysts in their classrooms. The best approach to dealing with clinically narcissistic students is to get them to a university counseling center for individual therapy. This may not be easy to accomplish, as we have noted that narcissistic individuals do not feel a need for personal change and rely heavily on

external attributions for problems that they experience. As mentioned in the treatment discussion above, narcissists tend to enter into counseling or consider altering their behavior only after fate has been unkind. As faculty members, however, we create and manage the reward and reinforcement structures in our classrooms that allow us to control at least a small dimension of a student's "fate" and perhaps motivate appropriate behaviors.

Maybe we are idealists, but we think there is potential for faculty members to have a significant impact on a student's subclinical narcissistic tendencies. As discussed in the previous section, a key issue during therapy is that the narcissist views his or her therapist as worthy —i.e., of comparably high status or recognition (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Narcissists tend to respond positively to those viewed with respect and of perceived higher status, and it is possible that narcissistic students may perceive faculty in that way. Professors are often viewed as possessing higher status as a result of their educational achievements and expert power, and this perception may be enhanced for upper-division students taking courses from an instructor within the student's major and area of personal interest. Thus, we offer suggestions for dealing with more narcissistic students at three levels of analysis: the collegewide level, in the classroom, and one-on-one. Because subclinical narcissism differs from NPD only in degree, we believe that the suggested techniques should be helpful regardless of the level of narcissism. Of course, when narcissistic tendencies reach a truly dysfunctional level, faculty will likely be ill-equipped to do much for a student, except to encourage him or her to seek individual therapy.

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### ***Collegewide/Administrative Strategies***

There are steps concerned business school administrators can take to dampen the culture of narcissism that may be developing among their students. An obvious first one would be to develop an accurate understanding and recognition of the narcissism issue among management educators. Administrators could educate faculty and students about narcissism, its manifestations and consequences, and provide tools for student (and faculty)

self-measurement or information on counseling opportunities. Smaller class sizes may also be helpful in allowing faculty to better assess the degree to which narcissism is present in the classroom, and to have more intensive and developmental relationships with their students.

The issue of grade inflation may also be in play here, by fueling many students' inaccurate self-perceptions of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Cognitive-behavioral therapy suggests that we may be catering to narcissists by providing grades that exceed their performance and enhance feelings of grandiosity. Further, as many universities provide systemic reinforcements for faculty based on the attitudinal responses of students toward a course (in the form of teaching evaluations), we may be motivating some faculty to provide inflated grades in order to enhance the probability that they receive such rewards. We can explore alternative measures of classroom and teaching effectiveness that go beyond measuring students' feelings about a course or teacher, in an effort to achieve more accurate student evaluations. Those alternatives might include a teaching portfolio or peer assessments by other faculty. A more direct means of influencing faculty behavior might be to mandate forced grade distributions, or to include grade averages (over time) in the faculty performance-assessment process. Thus, we suggest that from a CBT perspective, enhanced accuracy in the grading of students to reduce grade inflation could reduce two (of three) primary dimensions of narcissism, grandiosity and hypersensitivity to evaluation, as new norms are created that more precisely reflect student performance.

Last, required internships as part of a management major's curriculum may help students see the need for further knowledge and skill development and assist in dampening both grandiosity and hypersensitivity to evaluation. It is also possible that providing enhanced opportunities and resources for students to study abroad, particularly in underprivileged countries in a volunteerism or service-learning context, may be helpful in reducing the third primary narcissistic tendency, the lack of empathy.

### ***Classroom Strategies***

Although we believe the above techniques will help to minimize students' narcissistic tendencies, much can also be done by individual faculty members within their own classrooms. For instance, faculty can increase the frequency of assessment, grading, and feedback on appropriate behaviors and collaborative performance, alleviating hyper-

sensitivity to evaluation through systematic desensitization (Beck et al., 1990). Further, explicitly focusing on the development of student skills in receiving constructive criticism may enhance their ability to respond appropriately to feedback and provide for more accurate (and less grandiose) self-assessments. To accomplish this, the authors have increased the frequency of assessment, using daily quizzes and short homework assignments with student results and updated course averages posted quickly (often on the same day). When students can track their progress throughout a course over a semester, we find that they are less likely to contest any individual grading outcome and are more accepting of the larger pattern of performance that emerges from many data points. We have also attempted to desensitize and improve students' ability to receive constructive criticism by creating formal "devil's advocacy" groups. The groups are assessed on their effectiveness in formally (and constructively) challenging any (student or team) class presentation. Because the devil's advocate role is legitimized in the syllabus, students seem more accepting of developmental criticism, although care must be taken to provide instruction for the students on the skills and techniques involved in providing effective constructive criticism. Another technique we use is to conclude any student presentation by having the nonpresenting students in the class provide anonymous feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation. This feedback is provided directly to the presenting student(s), without faculty reading the comments. The sum of the student comments gives detailed and substantial feedback to a presenting group, and the students seem more likely to be honest and direct if they know the faculty member is not going to review them and that they will have no effect on the presenter's grade outcome. In our experience, these approaches have been effective at reducing some narcissistic tendencies. However, we believe all faculty in the curriculum need to participate consistently; otherwise, it is possible that the narcissistic student may seek out faculty members who pander to or ignore counterproductive tendencies.

Imaginal restructuring and treatments for lack of empathy can be implemented at the classroom level by using the case method, emphasizing first-person emotional narratives combined with explicitly rewarding students who convincingly discuss several points of view (upper-management and line employees, for example). One of the authors has effectively used full Harvard Business School cases at the college freshman level in an introduction to business course, which helped to de-

velop student norms and expectations of the complexity of business decisions and the importance and validity of multiple points of view. Further, the strategic selection of a case narrative can be used to provide a perspective that the class may be lacking.

Faculty lectures may also include an enhanced use of the Socratic method or questions challenging students to consider broader implications of management theory and actions from multiple perspectives. If used with some skill, a narcissist's initial suggestions in class can be expanded and improved upon by classmates, illuminating the strengths and weaknesses of initial solutions while also broadening student appreciation for the strengths of their classmates' differing skill sets in contributing to a solution to a question.

Role playing in class may also assist in this effort, as it is likely to force students to take the perspective of others and to behave as they believe another might. For example, one of the authors uses a sexual harassment role-play in an attempt to sensitize male students to the plight of workers (mostly female) who are subjected to unwanted advances. In the role playing dyads, the female/victim role is always assigned to a male and, since there is a shortage of women in the class, the harasser's role is often given to another male. Creating a male-male sexual harassment dyad is very discomfiting to many of the students in the victim's role, who often say things like, "This is creeping me out." Inducing that kind of discomfort creates cognitive dissonance, which can be the first step in attitude change (Festinger, 1957). This role-play addresses an aspect of narcissism, the sense of entitlement, which can play itself out in the narcissist's behavior toward others that he or she views as objects of sexual attention (Baumeister, Cantanese, & Wallace, 2002; Bushman, Bonacci, van Kijk, & Baumeister, 2003).

Service learning or outreach also may help to sensitize students to those in need, activate more empathy, and formulate more externally oriented attitudes. A colleague of ours shared with us qualitative comments from students who were assigned to a variety of service-learning projects. The comments included the following:

As an ASU student, I only see the campus. I never have looked beyond to the surrounding community. This [project] has helped me realize that I am part of the community as a student and it is important to help.

While working with the Special Olympic athletes, I feel I am more open-minded and understand the everyday challenges they face.

I gained a lot of self-respect thanks to this class. It felt great to help out and I feel like I got a lot out of the whole experience (personal communications to R. Byerly, September 24, 2008).

To dampen grandiose narcissistic tendencies and develop positive in-class group behaviors, instructors might incorporate the use of peer evaluations linked to student grades and educate students on the types of collaborative behaviors, as a form of enhanced behavioral responsibility, that are expected within the group. Such structured, formal peer evaluations can provide a check on narcissistic behaviors within groups that are often difficult for faculty to observe. In our experience, it is critical for faculty members to build this evaluation into the syllabus so that narcissists are aware in advance of the criteria on which their peers will evaluate them. This also helps to increase the legitimacy of the practice by conceptually linking the process to the 360-degree performance assessment practices used in many organizations. We further believe that the implementation of self-assessments along with peer evaluations may assist in initiating changes in narcissistic tendencies, helping students become more aware not only of their own personalities and behavioral tendencies, but also in terms of how others may view them and their behaviors (building empathy). One of the authors routinely utilizes personality inventories and feedback in a course on leadership and management to assist students in increasing their self-awareness. After students are presented with their inventory results, they are asked to reflect on how others are likely to see their behavior and their leadership attempts. Throughout this segment of the course, students often make comments that suggest increases in perspective taking and self-awareness, such as, "It never occurred to me that I might come across like that," or "I think I always knew this about myself, but I just never wanted to admit it."

To minimize the unrealistic expectations that often accompany a sense of entitlement, faculty can utilize realistic course previews (akin to realistic job previews; Buckley, Fedor, Veres, Wiese, & Carraher, 1998; Buckley, Novicevic, Halbesleben, & Harvey, 2004). Explicit discussions on the first day of class regarding what is expected of students, how they will be evaluated, and how the course will be managed may help students form more

accurate expectations about the course. Other expectation-managing procedures can also be used, such as more general discussions about how students are not always expected to contribute to their own learning (Buckley et al., 2004). For example, one of the authors expects a great deal of class participation in a senior-level course, and spends a fair amount of time on the first day of class discussing the importance of participation in terms of taking more responsibility for one's own learning, as well as the great extent to which students can learn from one another.

Instructors might also consider inviting guest speakers to their classrooms to discuss their relevant experiences and personal beliefs about success. If faculty can identify alumni or local professionals who have achieved success in obvious "nonnarcissistic" ways, such speakers can relate to students their beliefs, and use real-world experiences to validate that typical narcissistic tendencies (e.g., grandiosity, entitlement, and self-importance) do not usually lead to achievement and success. One of the authors assigned a team of graduate students to observe and analyze the management style of a manager in the public sector who was very open about sharing data with the students for use in their project. They gathered information by way of interviews, direct observation, and a variety of personality inventories and measures of management style. At the end of the course, the students gave a presentation on the project with the manager in the audience. They were all impressed with how willingly he accepted negative feedback. He, in effect, modeled humility and a gracious acceptance of criticism.

### *One-on-One Interactions*

Of course, there are instances when faculty will interact with narcissistic students on an individual basis. One executive coach (Bentley, 2005) has suggested the use of a Gestalt approach with clients displaying narcissistic tendencies. Such an approach, successfully used in nonclinical settings, incorporates the primary goals of CBT (reduction of grandiosity and hypersensitivity to evaluation, and enhancement of empathy), and may be especially relevant to one-on-one professor-student interactions:

- *Building a working alliance.* It is important to initially build an alliance through consistent empathy and understanding. For example, a student comes to his professor raging about how his teammates on a class project are not doing their share of the work, or that a grade on

an assignment is unfair. The professor should empathize, stating that this situation must be very frustrating for the student, and demonstrate understanding of the student's commitment to his work. The professor should not indicate, at this point, that the student may be somehow at fault. That would be likely to put the student on the defensive, thus drastically reducing the possibility of beneficial future interactions.

- *Careful challenging.* When the professor's relationship with the student is strong enough (i.e., when the student feels that the professor is "on his or her side"), the professor should begin to gently challenge the student to think or behave differently. For example, the professor may suggest that the student's behavior toward his teammates may not get him what he wants, and that, perhaps, he could communicate with his teammates more clearly. The student is still likely to be defensive, and the professor should continue to empathize during these defensive responses. The hope is that, over time, the student will begin to see, through systematic desensitization, the difference between being challenged and being criticized.
- *Modeling.* The narcissistic student is likely to respond to challenges (what he or she sees as criticisms) by being critical of the professor. The professor should take these opportunities to model an alternative form of behavior by receiving criticism with grace. When the student sees that such criticism does not deflate the professor (as it does him or her), the student may stop being critical, and may begin to interpret challenges and constructive criticisms in a more positive manner.
- *Offering experiments.* Finally, the professor can begin to more directly suggest specific ways that the student might behave differently so that he or she can more effectively interact with others or succeed in class. For example, one of the authors had a student ask for advice on approaching another professor regarding what he perceived as an unfair grade. The student's first inclination was to react with anger, demand that the professor reconsider his grade, and threaten to talk to the dean. After empathizing with the student, stating how understandable it was that he was frustrated and upset, the author was able to slowly guide the student toward a more calm (and likely successful) approach to the situation. Offering the perspective of the other professor and explaining how demands and threats were unlikely to get the student what he truly wanted, helped the student to see the benefit of taking a different approach. The author was then able to offer an alternative way to approach the professor, presenting it as an experiment (e.g., "try being overly respectful and considerate, emphasize that you bring up the issue only because you deeply care about the course, and see how he responds"). The student reported that he tried this approach and the professor agreed to al-

low him to resubmit the assignment with revisions for additional points.

## CONCLUSION

F. Scott Fitzgerald's epigraph at the outset of this essay challenges us to reach outside of ourselves and focus on using our abilities to help others. A key tenet of management theory is imparting to students how to effectively and productively work with other individuals and groups to accomplish organizational goals. With the rising levels of narcissism in the United States, this may be an increasingly difficult skill for management educators to successfully develop in students. It is clearly important that narcissism is associated with substantially negative behaviors of particular importance to employing organizations, including white-collar crime, aggression and assault, substance abuse, risky decision making, rapidly depleting common resources, and distorted judgments of one's abilities. Further, as discussed earlier, narcissistic managers are likely to build toxic, unproductive work environments.

Altogether, the rising tide of narcissism presents significant problems for organizations, their productivity, and long-term viability. The question remains as to what role management education can play in alleviating this growing problem. We have suggested that university professors, whose position garners student esteem and represents expert power, may have an enhanced ability to influence narcissistic tendencies of students. A range of modest approaches that may be used in management education includes developing student skills on giving and receiving constructive feedback; providing objective, reliable, and frequent reinforcements in class in the form of oral feedback and grading; working on student teamwork skills and using peer feedback approaches; and using role playing, case studies, internships, and service learning to develop sensitivity and multiple perspectives on an issue. We also suggest that university and business school administrators might play a role in stemming the increasing culture of narcissism in business colleges and management education by educating faculty and students about narcissism, providing faculty with smaller class sizes to allow increased faculty interaction with students, reexamining the use of student satisfaction ratings in faculty evaluations, and providing enhanced resources for external outreach including study abroad opportunities and internships. Finally, the importance of this issue is likely to continue increasing, as cross-cultural studies are beginning to indicate a comparable prevalence of

narcissism in non-Western cultures (Ronningstam, 2005).

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***Altogether, the rising tide of narcissism presents significant problems for organizations, their productivity, and long-term viability.***

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