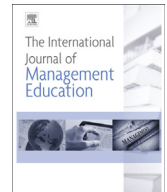




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Research notes

Faculty narcissism and student outcomes in business higher education: A student-faculty fit analysis



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ABSTRACT

We examined the relationship between personality congruence on faculty and student narcissism with student perceptions of professor status, the perceived difficulty of the class, and student performance in the classroom. Data were collected from business students and faculty at an AACSB-accredited business school at a comprehensive state university. Results indicated that narcissism congruence was significantly related to a student's final grade in the class such that less congruence was associated with lower course grades and that this negative association was partially mediated by perceived professor status and perceived class difficulty. Particularly concerning was the finding that more narcissistic faculty were associated with detrimental outcomes for less narcissistic students. Considering the well-documented and profoundly negative implications of narcissism for workplace environments, this finding suggests a need for future research on the impact of narcissistic faculty on business students and on successful intervention strategies.

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Recent evidence suggests that, over the last 25 years, U.S. college students have become increasingly narcissistic (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), and that business students may possess significantly higher levels of narcissism than students in other disciplines (Robak, Chiffriller, & Zappone, 2007; Westerman, Bergman, Bergman, & Daly, 2012). Not surprisingly, high levels of narcissism have been associated with counterproductive behaviors of particular interest to business and industry. These behaviors include white collar crime (Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006), aggression (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), distorted judgments of one's abilities (Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003), rapidly depleting common resources (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005), and risky decision-making (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). Moreover, narcissistic managers are likely to create toxic work cultures that lead to low productivity and high turnover (Lubit, 2002). Overall, rising levels of narcissism present significant challenges for the business community.

Enhanced levels of narcissism may also raise concerns for higher education. For example, a 2008 survey of college students found a significant positive relationship between narcissism and academic entitlement (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008). Of the students surveyed, 66 percent believed that their professor should give them special consideration if they explained that they were trying hard, and nearly 25 percent believed that their professor should lend them his/

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her course notes if they ask for them. Furthermore, narcissists tend to be hypersensitive to evaluation and criticism (Beck, Freeman, & Associates, 1990; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998), and are likely to be poor team players as they often take credit for success, but scapegoat in instances of failure (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000). And there is evidence that this increase in narcissism may be more pronounced among business students than among those in other disciplines (Robak et al., 2007; Westerman et al., 2012).

Perhaps most concerning for business educators is that narcissism may also be beneficial for individuals in temporary work environments similar to the business education classroom. Narcissists tend to have higher explicit and discrepant self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill, 2006), are more extraverted (e.g., Emmons, 1984), have greater short-term likeability (Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004; Paulhus, 1998), outperform others on tasks involving public evaluation (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002), and often emerge as leaders (Blair, Hoffman, & Helland, 2008; Brunell, Gentry, Campbell, & Kuhnert, 2006; Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009). Research also indicates that narcissists can thrive in short-term creative performance environments (Goncalo, Flynn, & Kim, 2010), which bear similarities to a business higher education classroom. Overall, narcissistic students may have an advantage in the business school classroom – an environment with a short-term focus (academic sessions of only a few months), in which qualities such as assertiveness, talkativeness, creativity, and overt confidence are encouraged and rewarded. More broadly, if the outcome of faculty-student fit on narcissism in business education includes higher grades for more narcissistic students and graduates, this may be especially worrisome for the business community due to the dysfunctional work environments narcissists tend to create (Blickle et al., 2006; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Campbell et al., 2005; Campbell et al., 2004; Lubit, 2002; Paulhus et al., 2003). Further, as younger generation employees enter the business faculty ranks, there is a risk that they will possess enhanced levels of narcissism in comparison with past generations of faculty. If so, the effects of narcissistic faculty on student learning and development represent a fertile area for examination.

Given that narcissism is associated with numerous counterproductive behaviors in the classroom and in the workplace, it is incumbent upon management researchers to better understand the role of faculty in the creation or suppression of narcissistic tendencies. Business schools could work to ensure that they graduate business men and women who will be positive organizational citizens and who are capable of and willing to introduce positive organizational change. Business school professors, because of their status, may find themselves well-positioned to influence their students' narcissistic tendencies, as narcissists typically respond well to those they view with respect and of perceived higher status (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Thus, the current study examines the relationship between the personality congruence of faculty and students on the dimension of narcissism, and student perceptions of a professor's status, the perceived difficulty of the class, and student outcomes (Fig. 1).

1. Narcissism, personality fit, and business education

As this study specifically examines student-faculty personality congruence with regard to the personality dimension of narcissism, a description of narcissism is in order. Narcissists possess an inflated, yet vulnerable, self-view, but are unable to regulate this fragile self-esteem, and must rely on others for affirmation (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Thus, despite a lack of empathy and difficulty forming close relationships, narcissists have a strong desire for social contact, as such contacts are their key source of attention and admiration. Narcissists, then, in order to maintain their inflated egos, engage in a variety of social behaviors designed to garner attention and praise, which manifest as displays of self-importance and self-focus. Common examples include expectations of special treatment with explicit beliefs of owing little or nothing in return (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Millon, 1996), exhibitionism and other types of attention-seeking behavior (Buss & Chiodo, 1991), hyper-competitiveness (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988), anger and

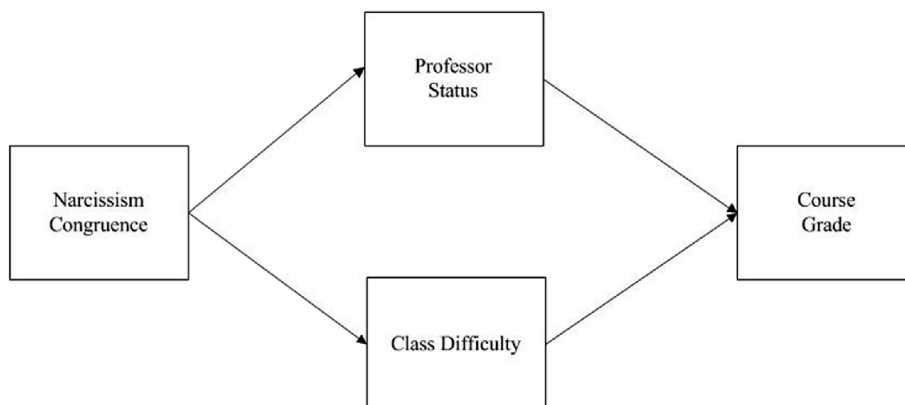


Fig. 1. Hypothesized mediation model.

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