

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Self-Perception and Performance.
Exploratory research into the narcissists' first 20
months within a corporate graduate recruitment
programme.**

**A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Human Development Studies

**Massey University, Palmerston North
New Zealand**

Jeff Simpson

2012

Dedicated to, Tracy, Sarah, Hannah, and Jamie.

Abstract

The intent of this exploratory study was to examine the nature and impact of narcissism in the early career stages of a graduate cohort, where there has previously been little applied narcissism research. Self-reports on self-perception and critical self-insight were obtained individually from 63 new recruits in a multi-national company as part of a graduate recruitment programme. Self-report data were collected on day one of the recruits' induction programme followed by repeated data collections at nine months and at twenty months into their employment. In addition, at months nine and twenty, two line managers of each recruit completed indicators on their perceptions of the recruits' actual work performance. Using a newly designed narcissistic traits indicator, line managers also indicated their views of each recruit's narcissistic tendencies. Results obtained indicated ten of the sixty three graduates had significant narcissistic tendencies. The self-ratings of recruits were subsequently compared to their actual performance as rated by their managers. The self-perceptions of those identified as having narcissistic tendencies were also compared to self-ratings and performance of peers displaying little or no narcissistic tendencies. In both the first and second years of employment, the results indicated that those viewed as having narcissistic tendencies significantly self-enhanced more than the non-narcissists and despite their comparative higher self-rating, narcissists underperformed in their role in comparison to non-narcissists. Narcissists' self-perception was less consistent over twenty months, indicating a less stable sense of self than the non-narcissists. A critical self-insight (CSI) self-perception gauge was developed for assessing degree and style of self-critique. Although analyses revealed five clusters of sub-scales, the narcissists' CSI was significantly different from non-narcissists on only one of these clusters; they reported as being less emotive-sensitive than did the non-narcissists. Narcissists were overall less self-critical than non-narcissists. In light of these findings, developmental and environmental influences of narcissism are discussed, along with the effect of such traits both for the

hiring organization and for the narcissistic individual within the first 20 months of career induction.

Acknowledgements

It has been with pleasure and pride to have worked on this thesis with my two supervisors Dr John Kirkland and Dr David Bimler. John, many years ago, when I first began my tertiary education, you inspired my interest in human nature when I took your outstanding undergraduate papers. The subsequent perspectives I gained from the study of human attachment and personality development still strongly influence my professional practice today. David, I can't thank you enough for your insightful guidance, support, assistance and good humour. You have been a critical factor in getting me through this process, particularly the last couple of years when it all seemed to be going wrong. Thanks for hanging in there with me.

Most of all, I want to thank my family, not only for their love and support through some of the bumpier patches but also for their good humour and never allowing me to lose perspective, despite narcissism being a regular topic of conversation for six years. I hope I have not put any of you off potentially studying psychology in the future. Tracy, this simply couldn't have been done without you and I appreciate your unfailing belief in me, this study and everything you have done to allow me to follow this dream. I love you very much.

To my parents, Dennis and Cathy, thank you for your unconditional love and for providing me with the secure base in which to explore.

Thank you to all the graduates who participated in this research, I wish you well in your future careers. I would also like to acknowledge the organisation that the graduate participant group came from. By mutual agreement, this organization has not been identified by name, but to those of you involved in this research, I would like to sincerely thank you for your trust, time, support and professionalism. It was a pleasure to work with you.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of contents.....	v
List of appendixes.....	ix
List of tables.....	x
List of figures.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction.....	1
The narcissist in workplace settings.....	4
Theoretical assumptions	5
Prompt for this research.....	6
CHAPTER TWO	
Perspectives of narcissism.....	8
Defining characteristics of narcissism.....	8
Psychometric perspectives.....	12
Theories about the origins of narcissism.....	14
Psychoanalytical.....	14
Freud.....	14
Kohut.....	15
Kernberg.....	16
Millon	17
Stone.....	17
Ego development.....	17

Attachment theory.....	20
CHAPTER THREE	
The Narcissistic Self-Concept.....	22
The ideal-self and actual-self.....	22
Maintaining the narcissistic self.....	24
Extreme Self-enhancement (ESE).....	25
Denial.....	29
Attributional egotism.....	31
Self-regulation models and the role of the ego.....	32
CHAPTER FOUR	
Broader environmental influences on narcissism and the narcissist at work.....	35
Narcissism within the corporate environment.....	38
The narcissistic personality at work.....	38
The performance of the narcissist.....	43
Narcissistic Supply – the workplace reservoir.....	46
CHAPTER FIVE	
The current study.....	50
The structure of the graduate’s career trajectory.....	51
Conceptualisation.....	53
Current research objectives.....	54
CHAPTER SIX	
Method & Procedure.....	56
Rationale for approach.....	56
Development of narcissism traits indicator.....	61
Participants.....	65
Design of data collection.....	66
Procedures and indicators.....	67
Self-enhancement.....	67

Critical self-insight (CSI).....	70
Narcissism.....	71
Performance.....	73
First impression – impact at initial interview.....	74
Cognitive ability testing – pre-employment.....	74
Statistical analysis.....	75

CHAPTER SEVEN

Results.....	77
Preliminary statistics.....	77
Rate of narcissism and agreement among managers.....	79
Self-enhancement across all recruits.....	80
Narcissism and self-perception.....	81
Self-enhancement, narcissists and non-narcissists.....	83
Changes in self-perception.....	84
Relationship between assessment points and each self-enhancement scale.....	86
Stress.....	87
Flexibility.....	88
Self-reliance.....	89
Integrity.....	90
Mature assertiveness.....	91
Problem solving.....	92
Self-confidence.....	93
Self-awareness	94
Openness to ideas.....	95
Interpersonal skills.....	96
Critical self-insight (CSI).....	97
CSI, narcissists and non-narcissists.....	98
Cluster 1: Dominance.....	100
Cluster 2: Unmotivated – disengaged.....	101
Cluster 3: Narrow – Rigid.....	102
Cluster 4: Avoidant.....	103
Cluster 5: Under Controlled (Emotive - Sensitive).....	104

Narcissism and Performance.....	105
Top performers' self-perception.....	106
Impression at interview.....	107
Comments on procedural validity and reliability.....	111
Summary.....	114
CHAPTER EIGHT	
Discussion.....	115
The task of early career and challenges for the narcissist.....	116
The narcissists' self-concept, actual-self and ideal-self.....	118
Critical self-insight.....	127
Issues of adaptability and blind spots.....	129
The environmental push.....	134
Implications for the narcissist; challenge for the organisation.....	134
Assisting the narcissist developmentally.....	138
Limitations and future research.....	139
Conclusion.....	141
References	143
Appendixes.....	161

List of Appendixes

Appendix A:	Introduction letter to graduates.....	162
Appendix B:	Self-Concept questionnaire.....	164
Appendix C:	Performance indicator administered at T2.....	175
Appendix D:	Performance indicator administered at T3.....	177
Appendix E:	Narcissism traits indicator.....	180
Appendix F:	CSI factor analysis.....	183

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of descriptions applied to self-enhancers (SE) by observers.....	28
Table 2: Sequence of data collection.....	67
Table 3: Narcissism items and their source.....	73
Table 4: Person's correlation coefficients between self-enhancement Scores	76
Table 5: Degree of agreement between each manager on individual narcissism items	79
Table 6: Mean and standard deviation scores across all time periods of self-enhancement items.....	80
Table 7: Summary of correlations between actual-self and ideal-self-rating and self-rating against peers on self-enhancement items over T1, T2 and T3.....	81
Table 8: Summary of narcissists' (N) and non-narcissists' (NN) self-rating on each self-enhancement (SE) item.....	84
Table 9: Summary table of narcissism main effects on the five CSI clusters.....	100

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Relationship between age and narcissism.....	37
Figure 2:	Mapped items used for creation of narcissism trilemmas measure. One trilemma shown as an equilateral triangle.....	63
Figure 3:	Example of self-enhancement self-rating item.....	69
Figure 4:	Example of critical self-insight items.....	70
Figure 5:	Screen shot example of trilemma format.....	72
Figure 6:	Critical self-insight and self-enhancement scores of narcissists and non-narcissists at T1.....	82
Figure 7:	Critical self-insight and self-enhancement scores of narcissists and non-narcissists at T2.....	82
Figure 8:	Critical self-insight and self-enhancement scores of narcissists and non-narcissists at T3.....	83
Figure 9:	Interaction between self-enhancement self-ratings and time. Narcissists and non-narcissists....	86
Figure 10:	Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissistic group on self-perception of <i>stress management</i>	87
Figure 11:	Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissistic group on self-perception of <i>flexibility</i>	88

Figure 12: Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissistic group on self-perception of <i>self-reliance</i>	89
Figure 13: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissistic groups on self-perception of <i>integrity</i>	90
Figure 14: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissistic groups on self- perception of <i>mature assertiveness</i>	91
Figure 15: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissistic groups on self- perception of <i>problem solving</i>	92
Figure 16: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissistic groups on self-perception of <i>self-confidence</i>	93
Figure 17: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissist groups on self-perception of <i>self-awareness</i>	94
Figure 18: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissist groups in self-perception of <i>openness to ideas</i>	95
Figure 19: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissist groups in self-perception of <i>interpersonal skills</i>	96
Figure 20: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissist mean scores across all CSI clusters.....	99
Figure 21: Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissists on CSI cluster 1.....	100
Figure 22: Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissists on CSI cluster 2.....	101

Figure 23: Comparison of narcissist and non-narcissists on CSI cluster 3.....	102
Figure 24: Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissists on CSI cluster 4.....	103
Figure 25: Comparison of narcissists and non-narcissists on CSI cluster 5.....	104
Figure 26: Self-enhancement rating – narcissists and top performers.....	107
Figure 27: Contrast on narcissism personality items. Narcissists and top performers.....	110
Figure 28: Contrast on pro-social personality items. Narcissists and top performers.....	111

