

## **I'm Too Good for This Job: Narcissism's Role in the Experience of Overqualification**

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Using relative deprivation theory, we examined the role of narcissism in moderating the relationships between objective overqualification and perceived overqualification, job satisfaction, and career-related work stress. Permanently employed participants ( $N = 292$ ) completed an online survey, which included measures of narcissism, overqualification, and job attitudes. The exploitiveness/entitlement subscale of narcissism was positively associated with perceived overqualification, though only modestly ( $r = .13$ ). Both exploitiveness/entitlement and perceived overqualification were associated with lower job satisfaction and higher career-related work stress. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that, unlike non-narcissistic employees, employees scoring high on exploitiveness/entitlement reported feeling overqualified even when they did not possess surplus education relative to job requirements. Surprisingly, while objective overqualification was positively associated with work stress for non-entitled employees, highly entitled employees did not experience greater work stress when objectively overqualified. We explore possible explanations for this finding, and outline future directions for research on narcissism and overqualification.

### INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, narcissism as a personality trait has emerged as a useful dispositional construct with which to explain organisational behavior, particularly leadership (e.g. Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009). However, several researchers (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011;

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Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; Wu & LeBreton, 2011) have noted that research on narcissism's role in organisational behaviors and attitudes, other than leadership, is still relatively sparse. Because narcissists have an inflated sense of self and a strong sense of entitlement, a narcissistic employee is likely to view and respond to his or her work, colleagues, and organisation differently from an employee who is less narcissistic. As such, investigations of employee narcissism have the potential to contribute to our understanding of employee perceptions and attitudes, such as job satisfaction, organisational justice, and perceived overqualification.

In the current study, we aim to contribute to this small but growing literature by examining the role of narcissism in *overqualification*, typically defined as surplus education, experience, and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) relative to the requirements of one's job (Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006). Overqualification is a common employee experience which is associated with a variety of important outcomes, including poorer job attitudes and withdrawal intentions and behaviors (see Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró, & Truxillo, 2011, for a recent review). Recent research on overqualification suggests that emotional states (e.g. burnout; Luksyte, Spitzmueller, & Maynard, 2011) and organisational practices (e.g. empowerment; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009) may affect the severity of these outcomes. Thus far, however, personality theory has been underutilised as a mechanism for understanding how employees might differ in their experience of overqualification (Feldman, 2011). The trait of narcissism has particular potential in this regard, given that the narcissist's propensity for self-aggrandisement (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) may foster a perception of overqualification even when he or she is in fact well matched to his or her job, and entitlement may strengthen negative reactions to holding a job that feels inadequate (Meier & Semmer, 2012).

## Narcissism and Entitlement

In the social and personality psychology literature, narcissism is conceived as a stable personality trait, with each individual falling somewhere on the continuum from low to high narcissism.<sup>1</sup> Narcissistic individuals have a grandiose, inflated view of themselves and their abilities and attributes (Judge et al., 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), feel entitled to positive outcomes and rewards that exceed reasonable expectations (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013; Fisk, 2010), and seek out roles which provide power, influence, and the opportunity to have an audience for their actions (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; Nevicka et al., 2011). In their process model of narcissism,

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<sup>1</sup> For readability purposes, in this paper, we use the terms "narcissist" and "narcissistic employee" as a shorthand to refer to individuals who fall on the upper end of the narcissism continuum.

Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) argue that narcissists have an inflated but vulnerable self-view which, in the face of potentially damaging feedback from the environment, must be maintained through constant intra- and interpersonal effort.

While there is consensus in the literature that non-clinical narcissism is probably multidimensional, there is less agreement about the number and nature of those dimensions. However, both theoretical work (e.g. Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009) and evaluations of the psychometric properties of narcissism scales (e.g. Ackerman, Witt, Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, & Kashy, 2011; Emmons, 1987) tend to conclude that entitlement, grandiosity, leadership/authority, and exhibitionism are likely facets of this construct.

In the current study, while we examine these four facets using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988), we focus in particular on the entitlement dimension of narcissism. An individual high on *narcissistic entitlement* believes that he or she possesses unrealistically positive personal characteristics and, as a result, deserves resources and outcomes which are out of proportion to what is actually due (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013) or in the absence of normally required performance levels to obtain those resources (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). We have chosen to highlight narcissistic entitlement in particular for several reasons. First, we expect that feelings of entitlement may be more strongly and consistently associated with maladaptive outcomes, relative to other dimensions of narcissism such as leadership and exhibitionism (Ackerman et al., 2011). Recent discussions of narcissism in organisations (Campbell et al., 2011; Fisk, 2010; Wu & Lebreton, 2011) have identified entitlement as the aspect of narcissism that is perhaps most important for understanding how employees form and react to organisational perceptions (e.g. organisational justice, psychological contract violation). Finally, as we will explain below, dispositional tendencies such as self-enhancement and entitlement are particularly relevant to the cognitive process of judging the match between one's abilities and the requirements of one's job and the emotional reactions that might accompany feelings of overqualification (Judge & Kristof-Brown, 2004). Therefore, in testing our hypotheses, we will focus primarily upon the results from the exploitiveness/entitlement dimension of the NPI, and then follow up by considering the other three dimensions (i.e. leadership/authority, self-absorption/self-admiration, and superiority/arrogance).

## Objective and Perceived Overqualification

Recent reviews of the overqualification construct (Erdogan et al., 2011; Feldman, 2011; Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2011; Maltarich, Reilly, & Nyberg, 2011) have highlighted the distinction between objective overqualification and perceived (or subjective) overqualification. *Objective overqualification*

occurs when an employee's actual qualifications, in the form of education level, amount or level of prior experience, and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) exceed the stated requirements of the job. *Perceived overqualification* is the subjective impression that an employee holds qualifications in excess of what is needed to do the job. Past research that has simultaneously measured objective and perceived overqualification has found a relatively modest association between the two (e.g. Khan & Morrow, 1991), suggesting that some employees may believe themselves to be overqualified despite other information "on paper" suggesting that they are actually well matched to their job (Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2011). Unfortunately, no research has yet explored the factors that might predict which individuals are likely to hold overqualification perceptions that deviate from more objective indicators.

There are reasons to believe that the self-enhancement and entitlement that accompany narcissism are likely to produce feelings of overqualification regardless of actual person–job fit. For example, Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) reviewed research suggesting that narcissists regularly engage in excessive self-promotion, such as attributing personal successes to ability (rather than external forces), holding an enhanced view of their cognitive abilities, and overestimating their contributions to group tasks. Such inflated self-views might contribute to differences between objective and perceived overqualification (Maltarich et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence does indeed demonstrate a mismatch between a narcissist's self-views on various constructs and independent evidence (e.g. the views of others, test results). For example, narcissism is associated with self-perceptions of intelligence, but not actual levels of intelligence (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994), and students' levels of narcissism are positively associated with final grade predictions, but unrelated to actual final grades (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). Narcissists also hold high views of their own talent (e.g. leadership) and behaviors (e.g. contextual performance), views that are inconsistent with the ratings provided by others (Judge et al., 2006). Further evidence of narcissists' tendency to hold inflated self-views about their abilities comes from the literature on overconfidence and over-claiming (e.g. Mesmer-Magnus, Viswesvaran, Deshpande, & Jacob, 2006). For example, narcissists tend to be overconfident about their general knowledge relative to actual performance on a knowledge task (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004), and are more likely than non-narcissists to claim familiarity with concepts, objects, and events, even if they do not actually exist (e.g. Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003).

In sum, narcissists are prone to self-perceptions in a variety of domains which are unrealistically positive, relative to external evidence or the perceptions of others (DuBrin, 2012). In line with the research findings mentioned above, we expect that narcissistic entitlement will be associated with perceived overqualification, but not objective overqualification.

*Hypothesis 1:* Narcissistic entitlement will be positively associated with perceived overqualification, but unrelated to objective overqualification.

In the general population, objective and perceived overqualification are positively related to one another (e.g. McKee-Ryan, Virick, Prussia, Harvey, & Lilly, 2009). However, as discussed above, for those exhibiting narcissistic entitlement and self-enhancement, there is a gap between how they view themselves on various attributes and more external or objective indices of the same attributes. Therefore, following from Hypothesis 1, we posit that there will be a greater disconnect between objective and perceived overqualification for employees high on narcissistic entitlement relative to employees low on narcissistic entitlement.

*Hypothesis 2:* Narcissistic entitlement will moderate the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and objective overqualification, such that the relationship will be weaker at higher levels of narcissistic entitlement.

## Responses to Overqualification

Researchers have hypothesised that outcomes of overqualification include an array of negative consequences for both the individual and the organisation. For example, overqualification has been shown to be negatively related to job attitudes and health outcomes, and positively related to turnover intentions (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Because narcissists have inflated self-views and unrealistic feelings of entitlement to organisational resources and rewards, they may react in particular ways to overqualification. In this section, we utilise relative deprivation theory to posit how narcissistic entitlement might moderate the relationships between objective overqualification and two employee outcomes: job satisfaction and career-related work stress.

*Job Satisfaction.* Of all the associations with overqualification that have been studied, the link with job satisfaction appears to be the strongest and most well established (Feldman, 2011; Fine & Nevo, 2008; Khan & Morrow, 1991; Jones Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Maynard et al., 2006; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013). Anderson and Winefield (2011) as well as Green and Zhu (2010) provide several explanations for this relationship, including the fact that overqualified employees tend to earn less than peers who are adequately qualified and that such jobs may not provide adequate opportunities for training and career development. In addition, theories such as person–job fit (Edwards, 1991; Verhaest & Omeij, 2006), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and relative deprivation (e.g. Feldman, Leana, & Bolino, 2002; Feldman & Turnley, 2004) converge on the prediction that overqualification should produce feelings of job dissatisfaction, albeit for slightly different

reasons (i.e. due to the perceived unmet employee needs, the perceived lack of reciprocity from the organisation, or the lack of resources or rewards the employee feels she or he deserves, respectively).

According to *relative deprivation theory* (e.g. Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Feldman et al., 2002; Feldman & Turnley, 2004), individuals compare their current work situation to the work situation they desire and feel they deserve. When an employee feels relative deprivation, they experience negative emotions and attitudes and may act accordingly. For example, Buunk and Janssen (1992) found strong positive correlations between relative deprivation and feelings of job dissatisfaction and resentment about work. We argue that the self-enhancement and entitlement that narcissists exhibit (Brown, 1997) lead them to feel they deserve more than they currently have, resulting in feelings of relative deprivation and dissatisfaction (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). Naumann, Minsky, and Sturman (2002) similarly proposed that entitlement should be negatively related to job satisfaction, and past investigations have found a fairly consistent, if modest, negative relationship between narcissism and job satisfaction (Bruk-Lee, Khoury, Nixon, Goh, & Spector, 2009; Kopelman & Mullins, 1992; Soyer, Rovenpor, Kopelman, Mullins, & Watson, 2001).

In addition to being directly associated with low job satisfaction, narcissistic entitlement may strengthen the overall overqualification–satisfaction relationship. Feldman (2011) has argued that narcissists may feel the sting of underemployment more keenly than most because it flies in the face of the very positive self-perceptions they hold. This is consistent with the assertion that narcissism, at its core, is about a grandiose but quite vulnerable self-view (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). In addition, the extreme entitlement narcissists feel may make overqualification feel especially unjust. Therefore, we hypothesise that, among overqualified employees, those who exhibit narcissistic entitlement will experience particularly strong dissatisfaction with their jobs.

*Hypothesis 3:* Narcissistic entitlement will moderate the negative relationship between objective overqualification and job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be stronger at higher levels of narcissistic entitlement.

*Work Stress.* Stress results when the demands of a situation are unbalanced with respect to the resources available to handle the situation (Meurs & Perrewé, 2011). According to Chen, Siu, Lu, Cooper, and Phillips (2009), work stress can be attributed to four factors: work overload, work relationships, work–life balance, and pay and benefits. As such, overqualified individuals experiencing lower pay and benefits than adequately employed peers are likely to experience stress. We would also argue that the boredom stemming from work *underload*, as might be expected in the case of objective

overqualification, is equally important; indeed, research has linked boredom at work to stress (e.g. Parasuraman & Purohit, 2000).

Direct evidence does suggest that overqualification is associated with various dimensions of psychological distress. For example, Jones Johnson and Johnson (1992) found a significant and positive relationship between levels of perceived underemployment and all five of the stress dimensions they assessed (i.e. psychosomatic symptoms, depression, frustration, hostility, and insecurity). Furthermore, Luksyte et al. (2011) showed that perceived overqualification was positively related to the cynicism dimension of burnout, and that cynicism mediated the relationship between overqualification and counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

George and Brief (2004) argue that personality traits can affect well-being and stress via their effects on how the individual appraises and reacts to work conditions. Entitled employees are likely to experience not only relative deprivation and job dissatisfaction, but also stress related to perceived gaps between their current career situation and the careers and jobs they believe they deserve. Recent research suggests that narcissism is associated with stress during difficult adjustment periods (Besser & Zeigler-Hill, 2011) and that work strain was greater for narcissistic than non-narcissistic employees in response to a perceived lack of reciprocity (Meier & Semmer, 2012).

Coping with perceived inequity may also be difficult for entitled employees. For example, cognitive reappraisal of one's work situation, perhaps by reassessing one's priorities or changing the standard of comparison used in evaluating one's job, could relieve some of the distress associated with overqualification (Anderson & Winefield, 2011), but some have argued that narcissists may be too rigid to engage in such reappraisal (Feldman, 2011). Therefore, we expect that while objective overqualification will be associated with career-related stress for employees generally, employees high on narcissistic entitlement will find such a situation especially intolerable and difficult to cope with.

*Hypothesis 4:* Narcissistic entitlement will moderate the positive relationship between objective overqualification and career-related work stress, such that the relationship will be stronger at higher levels of narcissistic entitlement.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were solicited from an online survey distributor and research center, StudyResponse ([www.studyresponse.net](http://www.studyresponse.net)), which compensates individuals in the form of gift cards in exchange for participation in online studies and surveys. Participation was restricted to individuals who currently held

permanent positions and were at least 21 years old. We received usable data from 292 participants. The survey itself was hosted on SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com), and took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

Participants were currently working in either the United States (90%) or Canada (10%). Nearly all (91%) were employed full-time. Participant age ranged from 22 to 75 years old, with a mean of 45.44 years old ( $SD = 11.11$ ). Slightly over half of participants were male (55%). The highest level of education attained ranged from some high school to a doctoral degree, with the most common responses being a bachelor's degree (42%), some college (19%), and a master's degree (18%). Participants held jobs in a variety of occupations, with the most common being management (24%), office and administrative support (16%), business and financial operations (9%), education, training, and library (8%), and computer and mathematical (7%).

## Measures

*Objective Overqualification.* To measure participants' objective overqualification, we focused on the match between their education and the level required for the job, an approach frequently taken in economics research (e.g. Brynin & Longhi, 2009; Verhaest & Omey, 2006). Each participant provided the level of education required for his or her position at the time of hire and, later in the survey, provided his or her actual level of education. Education level was quantified as years in school (e.g. high school degree = 12) and objective overqualification was operationalised as one's level of education minus the position's required level, such that a positive score represented overqualification. Because of the strongly skewed nature of the data (i.e. most individuals held exactly the minimum amount of education required for the position), respondents with valid data were recoded as "just qualified" ( $n = 200$ ) or "overqualified" ( $n = 74$ ), resulting in a dichotomous variable. Because of missing data, 18 respondents could not be coded.

*Perceived Overqualification.* Perceived overqualification was measured using Maynard et al.'s (2006) nine-item Scale of Perceived Overqualification (SPOQ), which utilises a 7-point Likert scale. Employees rated the extent to which they felt that they possessed surplus education, experience, or KSAs relative to requirements for their position (i.e. "My education level is above the education level required by my job").

*Narcissistic Entitlement.* The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988) is the most widely used measure of non-clinical narcissism. Based on factor analysis results, Emmons (1987)

proposed a shorter 37-item yes–no version with four subscales: leadership/authority (L/A; nine items), self-absorption/self-admiration (S/S; nine items), superiority/arrogance (S/A; 11 items), and exploitiveness/entitlement (E/E; eight items). As explained in the introduction, we used all four subscales but are focusing our hypotheses particularly upon the exploitiveness/entitlement subscale. This subscale includes items that tap self-enhancement (“I am more capable than other people”) and entitlement (“I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve”).

*Overall Job Satisfaction.* To measure participants’ job satisfaction, we used the 18-item Job in General (JIG) scale of the larger Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Balzer, Kihm, Smith, Irwin, Bachiochi, Robie, Sinar, & Parra, 1997), arguably the most well-established set of measures for job satisfaction. Respondents responded to words or brief phrases (e.g. “pleasant”, “worse than most”) and indicated whether each described their job by answering either *yes*, *no*, or ? (*not sure*). Following the recommended scoring procedure, 3 points were given for items endorsed which reflect satisfaction, 1 for not sure, and 0 for items endorsed which reflect dissatisfaction.

*Career-Related Work Stress.* Participant stress related to one’s career was measured using the five-item career development subscale of the Stress Diagnostic Survey (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). Respondents answered each item (e.g. “I am hurting my career progress by staying with this organisation”) using a 7-point Likert scale (*never a source of stress* to *always a source of stress*).

*Control Variables.* In addition to the measures described above, age and job tenure (in months) were also assessed to serve as control variables, given their relevance to overqualification and its correlates. For example, age is typically found to be positively associated with job attitudes (Ng & Feldman, 2010) and overqualification is a noted problem among younger adults (e.g. recent college graduates; Feldman & Turnley, 1995).

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, internal consistency coefficients, and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 1. There was a moderate, positive relationship between objective and perceived overqualification ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ). Consistent with past findings, perceived overqualification was also significantly associated with job satisfaction ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ) and career-related work stress ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ). Finally, narcissistic entitlement was directly related to both job dissatisfaction ( $r = -.12, p < .05$ ) and career-related work stress ( $r = .34,$

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations for Study Variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Job tenure (months)	127.45	104.64	—									
2. Age	44.44	11.11	.44**	—								
3. Objective overqualification <sup>1</sup>	0.27	0.45	.06	.05	—							
4. Perceived overqualification	4.09	1.43	-.19**	-.12*	.31**	(.91)						
5. Narcissism—L/A <sup>2</sup>	1.56	0.31	-.08	.04	-.10	-.07	(.85)					
6. Narcissism—S/S <sup>2</sup>	1.52	0.24	-.14*	-.13*	-.13*	-.04	.44**	(.69)				
7. Narcissism—S/A <sup>2</sup>	1.42	0.26	-.01	-.02	-.08	.05	.61**	.55**	(.79)			
8. Narcissism—E/E <sup>2</sup>	1.50	0.24	-.12*	-.16**	-.00	.13*	.46**	.47**	.58**	(.58)		
9. Job satisfaction	43.47	12.18	.07	.13*	-.08	-.40**	.01	.09	.08	-.12*	(.91)	
10. Career-related work stress	2.88	1.68	-.12*	-.21**	.05	.45**	.12*	.12*	.17**	.34**	-.58**	(.95)

Note: *N* = 292. Internal consistency reliability coefficients are provided in parentheses on the diagonal.

<sup>1</sup> 0 = Just qualified; 1 = Overqualified.

<sup>2</sup> L/A = leadership/authority; S/S = self-absorption/self-admiration; S/A = superiority/arrogance; E/E = exploitiveness/entitlement.

\* *p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .01.

TABLE 2  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Predicting Perceived Overqualification from Narcissism

Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	β	sr <sup>a</sup>
Step 1: Control variables	.038	.038**			
Age			-.00	-.05	-.04
Job tenure			-.01	-.17	-.15**
Step 2: Main effects	.089	.051**			
Leadership/authority			-.95	-.21	-.16**
Self-absorption/self-admiration			-.83	-.13	-.11
Superiority/arrogance			.81	.14	.10
Exploitativeness/entitlement			1.04	.17	.13*

Note: *N* = 289. <sup>a</sup> semi-partial correlation for the final model.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

$p < .01$ ). The other three dimensions of narcissism were also (though more weakly) associated with career-related work stress, but were not associated with job satisfaction.

In Hypothesis 1, we argued that narcissistic entitlement would be positively associated with perceived overqualification. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, narcissistic entitlement was unrelated to objective overqualification ( $r = .00$ ) but positively related to perceived overqualification ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ), although the relationship was relatively weak. None of the other three dimensions of narcissism were directly related to perceived overqualification. To further examine the link between narcissism and perceived overqualification, we ran a hierarchical regression analysis, regressing perceived overqualification upon job tenure and age in the first step as control variables and the four dimensions of narcissism in the second step. Results are shown in Table 2. Supporting Hypothesis 1, narcissistic entitlement remained a significant predictor of perceived overqualification after controlling for job tenure, age, and the other three dimensions of narcissism. Interestingly, the leadership/authority dimension of narcissism was negatively associated with perceived overqualification.

Each of the remaining three hypotheses was tested with a separate hierarchical moderated multiple regression analysis. In each, age and job tenure were entered in the first step as control variables, narcissistic entitlement (which was centered) and objective overqualification were added to the equation in the second step, and the interaction term was added in the third step. The outcome variables were perceived overqualification (Hypothesis 2), job satisfaction (Hypothesis 3), and career-related work stress (Hypothesis 4). Significant interactions were explored by simple slopes analysis conducted with Andrew Hayes's PROCESS custom dialog box for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) as well as comparisons on the outcome variable between the just qualified

TABLE 3  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Perceived Overqualification

Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	β	sr <sup>a</sup>
Step 1: Control variables	.033	.033**			
Age			-.01	-.07	-.06
Job tenure			-.00	-.14	-.13*
Step 2: Main effects	.145	.112**			
Objective overqualification			1.02	.32	.33**
Exploiteness/entitlement			.60	.10	.16
Step 3: Interaction	.169	.024**			
Objective overqualification × Exploiteness/entitlement			-2.20	-.18	-.15**

Note: *N* = 274. <sup>a</sup> semi-partial correlation for the final model.

\* *p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .01.

and the overqualified groups at low ( $-1$  *SD*), average (mean), and high ( $+1$  *SD*) levels of the predictor. Similar regression analyses were also run for the other three dimensions of narcissism (leadership/authority, self-absorption/self-admiration, and superiority/arrogance). However, no significant interactions emerged for these dimensions; therefore, we will focus on narcissistic entitlement for the remainder of this section.

Hypothesis 2 stated that objective overqualification and perceived overqualification would be more closely related to each other for individuals low on narcissistic entitlement than for those high on narcissistic entitlement. As shown in Table 3, while objective overqualification contributed uniquely to the prediction of perceived overqualification ( $\beta = .32, p < .001$ ), narcissistic entitlement did not. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the interaction between objective overqualification and narcissistic entitlement was significant ( $\beta = -.18, \Delta R^2 = .024, p < .01$ ). The moderation effect is displayed in Figure 1. Simple slopes analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between narcissistic entitlement and perceived overqualification for the just qualified group ( $b = 1.10, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.28, 1.92], p < .01$ ) and a non-significant negative relationship for the overqualified group ( $b = -1.10, 95\% \text{ CI } [-2.52, .31], p = .13$ ). As expected, there was no difference in perceived overqualification between entitled employees who were overqualified and those who were not ( $t(52) = 0.19, p > .05$ ), whereas non-entitled employees were much more likely to feel overqualified if they actually possessed surplus education than if they did not ( $t(49) = -3.07, p < .01$  and  $t(141) = -2.64, p < .01$  for respondents with low and moderate narcissistic entitlement scores, respectively).

For Hypothesis 3, neither objective overqualification nor narcissistic entitlement were significantly associated with job satisfaction after controlling

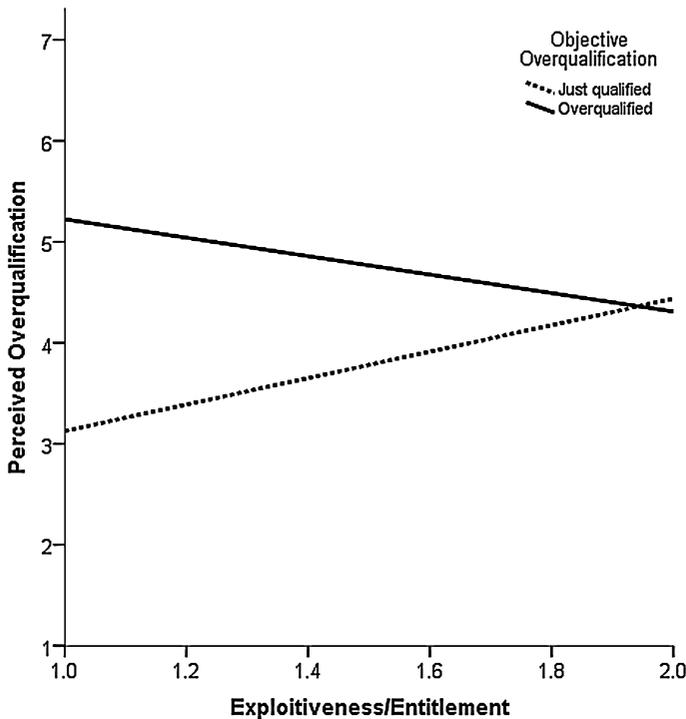


FIGURE 1. Mean differences in perceived overqualification as a function of objective overqualification and the exploitiveness/entitlement dimension of narcissism.

for age and job tenure (see Table 4). Further, the interaction between the two was not significant ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .001$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 suggested that the link between objective overqualification and career-related work stress would be stronger for workers high on narcissistic entitlement. In the second step, narcissistic entitlement accounted for a significant proportion of variance in career-related work stress, with higher levels of entitlement associated with more stress ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ , see Table 5). The interaction between objective overqualification and narcissistic entitlement was also significant ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .018$ ,  $p < .05$ ). As shown in Figure 2, however, the results were contrary to expectations. Simple slopes analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between narcissistic entitlement and work stress for the just qualified group ( $b = 2.79$ , 95% CI [1.89, 3.69],  $p < .001$ ) but no significant relationship for the overqualified group ( $b = 0.54$ , 95% CI [-1.61, 2.69],  $p = .62$ ). Workers low in narcissistic

TABLE 4  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Overall Job Satisfaction

Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	β	sr <sup>a</sup>
Step 1: Control variables	.020	.020			
Age			.14	.12	.10
Job tenure			.00	.03	.03
Step 2: Main effects	.037	.017			
Objective overqualification			-2.31	-.08	-.09
Exploiteness/entitlement			-5.24	-.10	-.10
Step 3: Interaction	.038	.001			
Objective overqualification × Exploiteness/entitlement			3.68	.03	.03

Note: *N* = 274. <sup>a</sup> semi-partial correlation for the final model.  
There were no significant results in this analysis.

TABLE 5  
Hierarchical Regression Results for Career-Related Work Stress

Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	β	sr <sup>a</sup>
Step 1: Control variables	.047	.047**			
Age			-.03	-.19	-.14*
Job tenure			-.01	-.04	-.02
Step 2: Main effects	.150	.103**			
Objective overqualification			.25	.07	.07
Exploiteness/entitlement			2.27	.32	.34**
Step 3: Interaction	.168	.018*			
Objective overqualification × Exploiteness/entitlement			-2.25	-.15	-.13*

Note: *N* = 274. <sup>a</sup> semi-partial correlation for the final model.  
\* *p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .01; \*\*\* *p* < .001.

entitlement reported greater work stress when they were objectively overqualified than when they were not ( $t(49) = -2.35, p < .05$ ). Highly entitled employees, in contrast, did not report significantly different levels of career-related work stress depending on whether they were just qualified or overqualified ( $t(52) = 1.69, p = .10$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between narcissistic entitlement and overqualification. We hypothesised that, compared to workers who exhibited little entitlement, employees scoring higher on

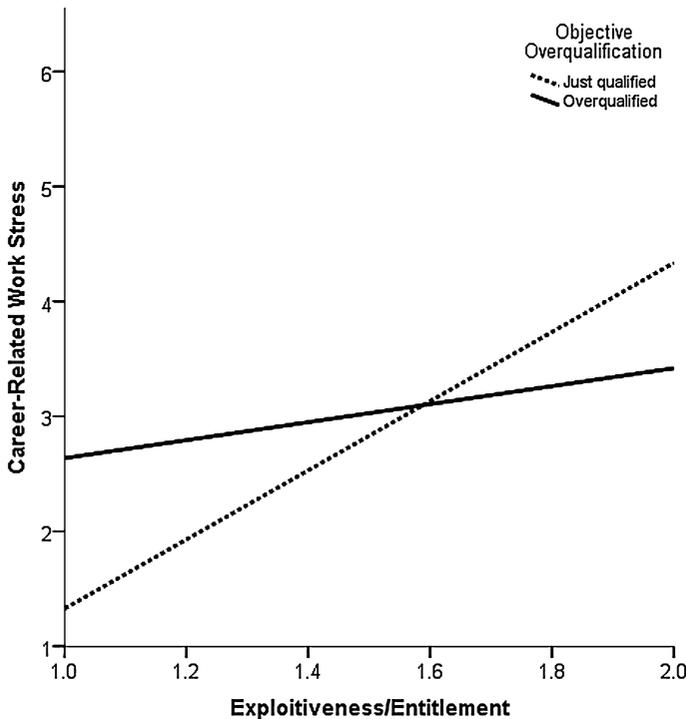


FIGURE 2. Mean differences in career-related work stress as a function of objective overqualification and the exploitiveness/entitlement dimension of narcissism.

narcissistic entitlement would report higher levels of perceived overqualification, be less accurate in their self-perceptions of overqualification based on the more objective standard of surplus education, and would experience more negative effects of actually being overqualified in the form of greater job dissatisfaction and career-related work stress.

As expected, there was a positive link between perceived overqualification and narcissistic entitlement. However, this direct relationship was surprisingly modest ( $r = .13$ ). Perhaps extreme self-enhancement and entitlement is relatively rare in many jobs, and for most workers, a moderately inflated (but less extreme) self-view may not be sufficient to overshadow other observable evidence about how well their qualifications match their job requirements. Given that narcissists appear to be drawn to certain occupations (Furnham, Hyde, & Trickey, 2014), future research which compares the impact of narcissism upon perceptions of overqualification in particular occupations that are likely to be either attractive to narcissists (e.g. sales, law) or unattractive (e.g. social work) would help clarify the nature of this relationship.

Consistent with our hypothesis, while most employees felt overqualified to a greater degree when they possessed surplus education, entitled employees did not seem to utilise this information and felt at least somewhat overqualified regardless of whether their education level actually exceeded job requirements. Due to their tendency to self-enhance and feel they deserve positive outcomes, narcissists may feel that they are at least qualified for almost any position, regardless of their educational standing. These findings support the notion that narcissists are “overtly egocentric in their perceptions of reality and covertly inattentive to objective events” (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995, p. 2). It would be fruitful to expand this idea by investigating how narcissists respond to other forms of information about the self in their work environment, such as negative performance feedback from supervisors (DuBrin, 2012).

The results of this research make an important contribution to the study of how narcissism affects worker perceptions, and it is the first study to show that individuals with high levels of narcissistic entitlement are more likely to perceive themselves as being overqualified for their current positions. Whereas much of the extant literature has focused on a possible increase in the prevalence of narcissism or its negative effects on interpersonal relationships (e.g. Jonason et al., 2012; Nevicka et al., 2011; Twenge & Campbell, 2003; Wu & Lebreton, 2011), the current findings illustrate how narcissistic employees’ perceptions of their work can differ from those of other workers. This research extends prior work that has examined other perceptual differences observed among narcissists (Judge et al., 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) and further points to an underlying factor that may explain some differences between self-reports and more objective measures of job and workplace characteristics.

In terms of career-related work stress, we found positive bivariate relationships between each dimension of narcissism and work stress, although the association with entitlement was notably stronger than the other three dimensions. The existing literature on anxiety and stress as it relates to narcissism is mixed and seems to depend upon the dimension of narcissism under study (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robbins, 2008). While some studies have found negative relationships between narcissism and anxiety (e.g. Spano, 2001), recent research suggests that individuals scoring high on measures of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism (as is captured by the NPI) experience greater perceived stress (Besser & Ziegler-Hill, 2011) and show elevated levels of stress hormones in response to negative daily events (Cheng, Tracy, & Miller, 2013). The specific perceptions and emotions associated with career-related stress, such as feelings of being stuck in a job with few opportunities to grow and advance, may be ones that are commonly experienced by narcissists at work.

Complicating the picture is the surprising finding that, while employees low on narcissistic entitlement experienced greater career-related work stress

when they were overqualified than when they were appropriately qualified, entitled employees on average found overqualification to be the *less* stressful situation (though this difference did not reach significance,  $p = .10$ ). The underlying mechanism for this phenomenon may lie in the fact that narcissists may feel particularly vulnerable to situations that threaten their self-image. For example, narcissists may feel most comfortable when their work is unchallenging because it allows them to feel superior, and they may feel uncomfortable or threatened when they must expend considerable effort to achieve satisfactory results at work. Several discussions of the narcissism construct have highlighted evidence that, behind the veneer of self-enhancement, narcissists are actually hypersensitive and fragile (Meier & Semmer, 2012; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). In fact, Ackerman and Donnellan (2013) have recently argued that the entitlement items from the NPI, which made up the subscale that we utilised, do tend to capture this vulnerability to a greater extent than other measures of narcissistic entitlement.

The current finding that narcissistic entitlement was associated with somewhat higher stress when the employee did not possess surplus education would also be consistent with self-verification theory, which suggests that individuals have a powerful desire for confirmation that they are known and understood by others (Swann, 1983). This theory has been used to explain why some individuals are predisposed to discount or be confused by treatment or feedback that clashes with how they view themselves (Stinson, Logel, Holmes, Wood, Forest, Gaucher, Fitzsimons, & Kath, 2010; Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007). We suggest that a similar phenomenon would be true for narcissists, and that they would be disconcerted by feedback that suggested that they were less accomplished than they preferred to believe. In contrast, they would experience less stress if they could easily perform their assigned tasks, because this would reinforce their self-image of superiority. Future research should investigate the intriguing possibility that there may be negative emotional consequences for narcissistic employees who actually get what they feel they deserve (e.g. higher-level, more challenging work).

Although our study was conducted with North American workers, it provides a useful baseline for further investigations in other contexts. While narcissistic preferences and behaviors have been found in non-western cultures (e.g. Ka, 2010; Tanchotsrinon, Maneesri, & Campbell, 2007), cross-cultural differences in organisational structures and interpersonal and group dynamics might influence the nature of the relationships studied in the current investigation. For example, the relatively other-focused, modest behaviors commonly found in collectivist cultures might make extreme self-enhancement and entitlement less common, either because individuals with such tendencies are rarer, or because the social situation prevents such behaviors from being freely expressed (Kurman, 2001).

The perception of overqualification may also be socially constructed and influenced by cultural and social expectations of “appropriate” work. For example, workers in a particular caste in South East Asia may feel overqualified for work that would not typically be performed by members of their caste, even if they have the suitable level of education and other qualifications. This issue may be particularly salient for immigrant populations who, upon employment in their new country, often end up working in jobs that do not utilise the education and experiences from their former home due to the discounting of foreign credentials (Maynard, Ferdman, & Holmes, 2010).

## Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

One potential limitation of the study concerns our measure of objective overqualification. Participants’ recollections regarding required education at the time of hire might not be accurate, and some employees may have accrued additional formal education between the time of hire and the point at which they completed our survey. This limitation, while common in the overqualification literature, is particularly relevant in our study given that individuals high on narcissism may have exaggerated their own level of education, which would compromise the validity of our measure. However, such exaggeration would likely produce positive relationships between objective overqualification and narcissism, while we actually found either slightly negative (for self-absorption/self-admiration) or non-significant relationships (for the other three dimensions). Regardless, we recommend that future researchers attempt to measure the required education level through some means other than self-report, such as through access to job analysis data. In addition, a more complete measure of objective overqualification would extend beyond surplus education to also include surplus work experiences and KSAs.

Measuring actual overqualification in this way would also provide a better standard of comparison for assessing the accuracy of employee perceptions of overqualification and allow researchers to examine additional factors which might affect such accuracy. For example, most individuals believe that they are more talented than they actually are (e.g. Larwood & Whittaker, 1977). This tendency, called the *above-average effect*, suggests that many employees may overestimate their overqualification levels. Furthermore, individuals at the lowest end of a skill continuum seem to be the least accurate in their self-assessment (Kruger & Dunning, 1999), but individuals are less likely to overestimate their skill on tasks which are challenging to master (Kruger, 1999). Together, such findings suggest that the least skilled workers in an organisation may be the most likely to feel overqualified, particularly if their work consists of relatively simple tasks. Future research which simultaneously examines both environmental (e.g. job characteristics)

and internal/dispositional (e.g. narcissism, skill level) predictors of self-assessment accuracy in the workplace would be particularly valuable.

A second limitation is that the present analyses were limited to permanent employees, whereas a growing segment of the workforce is engaged in contingent work, where workers do not expect ongoing employment with their current organisation (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Both the particular type of work situation (e.g. employment via direct-hire, temporary agency, or contract) and the employee's reasons for accepting a contingent work arrangement are likely to affect their perceptions of, and responses to, overqualification (Connelly, Wilkin, & Gallagher, 2011). Narcissistic individuals, for example, may dislike having to take work through a temporary employment agency, particularly if they use the permanent employees at their assigned organisation as their standard of comparison, given the prestige and benefits that accompany permanent positions. An investigation of narcissism among temporary workers, especially as it relates to perceptions of skill and skill utilisation, would be timely.

Finally, future research could investigate other possible negative outcomes of narcissism in the context of overqualification. Research that extends the current findings by incorporating behavioral outcomes would be particularly beneficial. For example, according to Crosby (1984), when a self-confident individual experiences relative deprivation at work (such as a job that does not utilise their perceived talents), some form of aggression may result. By this argument, a narcissistic employee who feels stuck in a job he or she is overqualified for might tend to respond with aggressive behavior towards the organisation or those within it. Given that narcissism has been linked with counterproductive work behavior (CWB; Judge et al., 2006; Penney & Spector, 2002; O'Boyle et al., 2012), and there is also initial evidence of a relationship between perceived overqualification and CWB (Luksyte et al., 2011), it would be valuable to examine the possible mediating role that perceptions of overqualification might play in the relationship between narcissism and disruptive employee behaviors.

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