

**Narcissus Goes to College:  
A Consideration of Dispositional Narcissism  
as a Variable for Student Learning in Higher Education**

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**Abstract**

For over a century, the enigmatic nature of narcissism has been the source of debate across psychological, sociological, and developmental domains. Although much has been written in recent years about narcissism as a generational phenomenon, referencing data collected from university undergraduates, there is little to no applied research and discussion into the implications for teaching and learning with respect to the reciprocal interactions between narcissistic students and traditional undergraduate education. Recognizing this paucity in the literature, the manuscripts within this dissertation draw theoretical and empirical connections between narcissism and learning, highlighting significant relationships between narcissism as a dispositional construct and achievement goal orientation. Through the development of a theoretical Triarchic Model of Dispositional Narcissism and the empirical exploration of its viability, this dissertation is written in accordance with sentiments that suggest educational psychologists seek to improve learning through a more comprehensive recognition of the variables that contribute to cognitive processes. The theoretical design, research, and interpretations within this dissertation seek to provide a heuristic through which educators may develop proactive, interventive instructional models and pedagogies that will encourage all students to improve their learning by engaging in strategies that lead to deeper cognitive and metacognitive processing.

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In the years since the inception of the ideas that underlie the creation of this dissertation, I have come to rely upon the patience of my colleagues, friends, and family as I have been challenged not only by the intellectual endeavors of my academic pursuits, but also by the balancing act that accompanies them: Mom, wife, daughter, sister, friend, professional, teacher, scholar. On the best days, these roles exist in harmony; however, on most days these roles fight for priority. Juggling these many roles is a feat not to be attempted by the faint-hearted, nor is it a feat to be attempted alone. Any success I enjoy from the completion of this dissertation and the subsequent doctoral degree is meant to be shared by those without whose support such success would never be possible.

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Perhaps my greatest motivation for the completion of this document and my degree has been my children, Liam and Carter. When they wake to find me at work each morning, they sleepily climb the stairs to my home office and ask excitedly, “Hey, Mom! Have you finished your dissertation yet?” Invariably the answer was always, “Not yet,” which was met with mollifying hugs and pats on the back and words of encouragement: “You can do this, Mom. We know you can.” These words of encouragement were most often followed by suggestions on how I might wrap it up more expeditiously. Among the more popular suggestions were to use a 72-point font and to “just copy it off of the internet.” While their suggestions fall short of practical and have led to a series of family discussions about academic integrity and plagiarism, the love and support that flows freely from them as they have to wait “just another five minutes so I can finish this paragraph” drives me to be someone that my children can respect and be proud of.

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## Introduction to the Dissertation

As I read through a new copy of Jean Twenge's *Generation Me* (2006), I slipped comfortably into her narrative, reflecting on my nearly 20 years of teaching and working with students. Anecdotal episodes came to mind in which students blamed me for their poor grades, demanded credit for their effort instead of their actual performance, and threatened that their parents would not sit quietly by while I robbed them of their rightful GPA. My voice mail and my email served as testament to the idea of the "helicopter parent." I couldn't get enough of the whole *students-as-narcissists* argument, and neither, it seems, could the general public. Twenge's second book, *The Narcissism Epidemic* (with W. Keith Campbell, 2009), was equally enthralling. She had data—longitudinal data—that validated my anecdotes and let me off the hook when it came to set-backs in my classroom. *It's not my fault they're not getting it, I would tell myself. They don't exert the effort. They're all a bunch of narcissists. How am I supposed to challenge them to learn new things when all they want is a trophy for showing up?*

And then I read something that became the catalyst for this dissertation: Twenge's indictment that virtually "no research in education has explored the effects of narcissism" (2007, p. 66). Her database search of journal articles in education and related fields revealed relatively few treatments of narcissism. I found this to be curious, particularly in light of the supposed "epidemic" that we were facing. I soon came to realize that I was approaching the whole situation wrong. I was swept up in the moment, carried away by the quick fix of a generational dysfunction. *Where were all the educational researchers? What if narcissists can't help it? Maybe they just learn differently.* It was then that I stopped thinking of students as narcissists and began thinking of narcissists as learners.

In my efforts to unravel the conundrum of the effects of narcissism on learning, I was led into a larger conversation that encompassed the domains of clinical, personality, and social psychology as well as that of education. My initial attempts at connecting narcissism to learning were confounded by the absence of an operational definition of narcissism itself. The first manuscript in this dissertation explores the development of a theoretical model that represents an interdisciplinary synthesis of the various perceptions and conceptions of narcissism, its relationship to the Big Five personality traits, and the relationships between the personality traits, narcissism as a construct of those traits, and achievement goal orientation. The resulting Triarchic Model of Dispositional Narcissism provides a theoretical basis upon which educational researchers might begin to consider dispositional narcissism as a variable that contributes to a learner's goal orientation and subsequent adoption of learning strategies.

Existing empirical literature facilitated the formulation of two of the three legs of the Triarchic Model of Dispositional Narcissism. Researchers have found a connection between narcissism and two of the Big Five personality traits: extraversion and agreeableness. Researchers have also found connections between the Big Five traits of extraversion and agreeableness and achievement goal orientation. The missing leg of the model—the previously unexplored relationship between narcissism and achievement goal orientation—comprises the basis for the second manuscript in this dissertation.

This dissertation serves not as a counterpoint to popular perceptions of narcissism; it is written, instead, for those with an interest and engagement in the critical interstices between teaching and learning. Contributing to the wider discourse that considers the role of personality in learning, the two manuscripts that comprise this document are intended

to introduce narcissism as a heuristic through which educators might consider how learning happens—and why it sometimes doesn't.

**A Triarchic Model of Dispositional Narcissism:  
Narcissism, the Big Five, and Goal Orientation**

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## **Abstract**

For over a century, the enigmatic nature of narcissism has been the source of debate across psychological, sociological, and developmental domains. Although much has been written in recent years about narcissism as a generational phenomenon, referencing data collected from university undergraduates, there is little to no applied research and discussion into the implications for teaching and learning with respect to the reciprocal interactions between narcissistic students and traditional undergraduate education. Recognizing this paucity in the literature, this paper seeks to draw theoretical connections between narcissism and learning, highlighting those motivational goal orientations that may predictably be expected of students who exhibit dispositional narcissism. To this end, a triarchic model of dispositional narcissism is proposed that illustrates the known relationship between narcissism and broader personality traits (e.g., the Big Five Trait Taxonomy), the known relationship between personality traits and goal orientation, and the theorized relationship between the construct of narcissism and goal orientation. In accordance with Eysenckian and Pintrichian sentiments that suggest educational psychologists seek to improve learning through a more comprehensive recognition of the variables that contribute to cognitive processes, this paper posits an operational definition of narcissism as a dispositional construct that may be used heuristically, as a tool for both better understanding and predicting student learning.

**Keywords:** narcissism, goal orientation, personality, disposition, learning, extraversion, agreeableness, Big Five

## Introduction

More than 80 years after its first appearance in Havelock Ellis' *Affirmations* (1898) as “Narcissus-like” behavior, a new personality disorder was written into the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)*, published by the American Psychiatric Association (1980). Ellis used the trope of the mythological Narcissus—who so loved his own image that he became rooted to a spot next to a pool of water, lost in the adoration of his own reflection, and was transformed into the narcissus flower—to describe self-absorbed sexual behavior. Since its inclusion among the ranks of clinically recognized and diagnostically significant pathologies and borderline personality disorders, the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) has stoked a resurgence in personality research (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Campbell, Brunell & Finkel, 2006; Emmons, 1984:1987; Foster & Campbell, 2007; John & Srivastava, 1999; Millon, 1981); however, despite its rich history and the attention it has received across clinical, theoretical, and secular domains, narcissism remains an “unimaginably diverse and amorphous construct” (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992, p. 821). Although narcissism remains something of an enigma, it is nonetheless featured prominently in popular culture (e.g., CBS News, 2010; Clark, 2010; Mail Foreign Service, 2010).

Much has been written in recent years about narcissism as a side-effect of American cultural priorities. Jean Twenge, Associate Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University, popularized narcissism through her books *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (2006) and *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (with W. Keith Campbell, 2009). The subsequent media attention she received, appearing or being quoted

on such programs as the *Today* show and NBC's *Dateline* and contributing to major popular print media including *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*, at once further secularized narcissism and taxonomically diagnosed an entire generation of young Americans, holding complicit a culture whose values and priorities serve to foster disorder. While Twenge's longitudinal data of narcissism scores among college students (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008; Twenge & Foster, 2008) and subsequent popular texts (Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) are compelling, particularly from the view of environmental (e.g., political and economic) influences on behavioral patterns, her principal narrative in many ways mirrors that of historian Christopher Lasch in his *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979), an indictment of self-centered and me-focused lifestyles and ideologies that he perceives as pervasively detrimental to American culture.

Although the birth cohort aspect of Twenge's research has come under scrutiny (e.g., Roberts, Edmonds & Grijalva, 2010; Trzensniewski & Donnellan, 2010; Trzensniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008), her celebrity has served to increase public awareness of what is commonly perceived as the "generational problem" of narcissism and contributes to the growing body of work that insinuates something is wrong or broken with the way generations of individuals—particularly young adults—think, live, and situate themselves (e.g., Bauerlein, 2008; Fukuyama, 1999; Harper, 2008; Huntley, 2006; Lipkin & Perrymore, 2009; Myers, 2000; Tulgan, 2009). While the contributions to and debates within the literature on narcissism as a generational phenomenon should give us pause and, perhaps, engage us in reflection, it should be noted that empirical data themselves do not carry value judgments. Issues of "wrong" or "broken" should not factor into any theoretical discussion



or interpretation of narcissistic traits and behaviors; a more judicious and productive approach instead considers narcissistic traits and behaviors as variables of individual difference and seeks to understand the impact that these variables make in the lives of those individuals who embody them.

### **Narcissism as Heuristic**

Longitudinal data compiled over the past 30 years indicate mean narcissism scores among college students are increasing each year (Tweng et al., 2008; Twenge & Foster, 2008). Regardless of the debates over the interpretation of this data (Trzensniewski & Donnellan, 2010; Trzensniewski et al., 2008), this information should be of special concern to educators who must consider how this prevalent personality construct will manifest itself in learning environments. According to Eysenck (1978), personality—more than IQ—is a significant variable in determining optimal learning environments and processes for students, and “it becomes neglect or discrimination” to be aware of the learning needs of certain personality types and to fail to consider such differences in designing instruction (p. 153). Further, Pintrich (1994) suggests that the goal of educational research is not only to better understand the constructs of learning, thinking, and motivation, but also “actually to improve learning” (p. 141). This sentiment echoes Eysenck’s call for “psychological technologists’ whose task it would be to translate the fundamental findings [of research psychologists]...and to work out practical ways of using this knowledge in educating pupils better” (1978, p. 135). A more substantial recognition of the role that student personality plays as a variable for learning will lead educators to better understand how individuals acquire and use various motivational goals. This improved understanding will facilitate the development of proactive instructional models and pedagogies that encourage the use of

adaptive learning strategies across a broad spectrum of personality proclivities and goal orientations.

Despite the fact that nearly all the empirical literature about narcissism samples university undergraduate populations for its empirical and anecdotal evidence of narcissistic manifestations, there is little to no applied research and discussion into the implications for teaching and learning with respect to the reciprocal interactions between narcissistic students and traditional undergraduate education (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). While Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, and Farruggia (2008) and Robins and Beer (2001) considered entitled attitudes and self-enhancing beliefs, respectively, with regard to undergraduate students in the academic domain, their research does not concern itself with issues touching acts of academic cognitive development. Recognizing this paucity in the literature, this paper seeks to draw theoretical connections between narcissism and learning, highlighting those motivational goal orientations that may predictably be expected of students who exhibit characteristically “narcissistic” traits and behaviors. To this end, a triarchic model is proposed that illustrates the known relationship between narcissism and broader personality traits (e.g., the Big Five Trait Taxonomy), the known relationship between personality traits and goal orientation, and the theorized relationship between the construct of narcissism and goal orientation (see Figure 1.1).

If properly organized and defined, narcissism may well function as a heuristic (Bradlee & Emmons, 1987), a tool for understanding and predicting student learning; however, narcissism remains an ill-structured and poorly defined phenomenon whose complexity is oversimplified in its use as a label for behaviors that have been lexically



*Figure 1.1.* A triarchic model of dispositional narcissism. This illustration depicts the relationships between narcissism, the Big Five personality traits, and goal orientation. Solid lines indicate empirical relationships, and the dotted line indicates the theorized relationship.

categorized as narcissistic. That said, an eclectic synthesis of its etiological and diagnostic components allows for an operational definition of narcissism as a personality construct that is comprised of varying degrees of personality traits and trait facets, which are distributed across the five hierarchical dimensions of normal personality. While no empirical evidence currently exists that cites a relationship between the construct of narcissism and goal orientation, separate studies have been conducted that positively correlate factors of the Big Five personality traits with narcissism and with goal orientation. In a transitive sense and in light of this evidence, this paper seeks to recognize the theoretical correlation between narcissism and goal orientation.

## Understanding Narcissism

In his *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, Freud (1914/1991) conceptualized narcissism not as a maladaptive construct, as insinuated by Ellis (1898/2010), but as a normal stage of ego and libidinal development. Freud's theory of psychosexual development was contested by other stage theorists, "neo-Freudians," who adopted similar developmental stage models focused, instead, on the psychosocial formation of individual personality. In both the psychosexual and psychosocial developmental realms, narcissism plays a role in interpersonal and intrapersonal development throughout childhood and into adolescence (e.g. Freud, Horney, Adler, Fromm, Klein, Erikson) by either existing as, enabling, or thwarting altogether the next stage of development. Waddell (2006), addressing of the role of narcissism in the "adolescent organization," notes:

When the adolescent process runs reasonably smoothly and a degree of maturity is achieved, there is usually a shift from the first outlook to the second, from selfishness and self-regard to generosity, responsibility, and the capacity to think for oneself and to be aware of the needs of others. ... The ability to make such a shift and the failure to do so are highly contingent on the kinds of internal and external factors the individual encounters. (p. 23)

It is precisely those "internal and external factors" that cause dissention among theorists and that make narcissism a "highly problematic empirical entity" (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992, p. 821).

Waddell's assertion is consistent with Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism in which ongoing interchanges and contingencies among an individual's cognition, environment, and behavior serve to create those patterns within which she lives (Bandura,

1977). Theorists Otto Kernberg and Hans Kohut offer significant contributions to the determination of psychoanalytic interruptions in human development, which they maintain contribute proportionally to the narcissistic tendencies in individuals. Agreeing that parental influence and childhood environment are involved as catalysts, Kernberg and Kohut fundamentally disagree as to the specific nature of the developmental narcissistic construct. Kernberg (1975) asserts that pathological narcissism is a result of having “chronically cold parental figures who exhibit either indifference or covert but spitefully aggressive attitudes toward their children” (Millon, 1981, p. 163). Kernberg’s theory includes the “Narcissistic Paradox” wherein, as a result of their unfulfilled relationship with their parents, narcissistic individuals are conflicted between “the desire to impress others and the need to devalue them” (Robins, Tracey, & Shaver, 2001, p. 234). Kernberg’s model of parental undervaluation as a catalyst for narcissism as a pathological entity is contrasted by Kohut’s (1977) perspective in which he suggests,

children are, by nature, self-focused and narcissistic according to adult standards of behavior. In the natural course of development, the narcissistic self is slowly dismantled and reintegrated into a healthy mature self that includes transformed components derived from the early narcissistic self. (Roberts et al., 2010, p. 100)

According to Kohut (1977), because parents fail to reflect the child’s appropriate grandiosity and, instead, overinflate even the most banal action or characteristic; and because parents are so overprotective that children rarely, if ever, experience failure, frustration, or disappointment, developmental impediments are introduced which function as external factors, deterring the fluid movement from one stage to the next. Kohut’s theory

maintains that narcissism is a normal construct until such time as development is arrested; in the arrested state, narcissism becomes pathological.

Drawing from both Kernbert and Kohut, Millon's (1981) social learning theory maintains that narcissism develops not as a response to parental or caregiver devaluation but rather as a consequence of parental overvaluation. The child's sense of self-worth and entitlement are overinflated; "the internalized self-image is enhanced beyond what external reality can validate" (Beck, Freeman, Davis, & Associates, 2004, p. 244) as the child is treated as an exceptionally special person, provided with an overabundance of attention, and led by parents and/or primary caregivers to believe he or she is perfect and above reproach. Such unrealistic overvaluation, according to Millon, "cannot be sustained in the outer world" (1981, p. 165). From a social learning perspective, narcissism arises as compensatory behavior for those feeling inferior in a social environment that promotes competition and privileges winners (Beck et al, 2004). Further, theoretically construed as a self-regulatory model by Morf and Rhodewalt (2001), narcissism may be seen as a process that links an individual's interpersonal "self-knowledge system" to their intrapersonal social relationships. The environmental catalysts that might "lead a person to view narcissistic strategies as the only rewarding ones available" vary widely and result in overwhelming feelings of exclusion, ridicule, and insecurity (Robins et al., 2001, p.234).

A highly complex phenomenon, narcissism has enjoyed oft-conflicting theoretical perspectives since its inception. This complexity and conflict can make a comprehensive definition difficult, requiring an interdisciplinary synthesis of the practical and theoretical domains. To best operationally define narcissism, it is important to note both the

categorical and the dimensional classifications of the term and to consider the ways that narcissism is measured in light of these classifications.

### **Categorical Narcissism**

The *categorical system of classification*, used primarily as a clinical diagnostic tool, focuses on the pathological symptomatology of a given personality disorder, identifying specific behavioral criteria, which “reflect manifestations of underlying maladaptive personality traits” (Saulsman & Page, 2004, p. 1057). These diagnostic criteria are typically presented in the form of a taxonomic menu, the majority of which must be exhibited by an individual in extremity in order to be diagnosed with a pathological disorder (Saulsman & Page, 2004; Costa & Widiger, 2002). Individuals who are categorically diagnosed with narcissism as a personality disorder (NPD) exhibit at least five behaviors from a set of nine distinct symptoms, which illustrate “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 661). Interestingly, and despite its origination as such (Ellis, 1898/2010), the “textbook” diagnosis of narcissism as a personality disorder makes no mention of aberrant sexual or autoerotic behavior. According to the *DSM-IV*, candidates for clinical diagnosis of narcissism are individuals who:

1. possess a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerate achievements and talents, expect to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements);
2. are preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love;
3. believe that they are “special” and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions);

4. require excessive admiration;
5. have a sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations);
6. are interpersonally exploitative, i.e., take advantage of others to achieve their own ends;
7. lack empathy: are unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others;
8. are often envious of others or believe that others are envious of them; and/or
9. show arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

(American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 661)

The categorical definition of narcissism is one with specific denotative value and is used primarily in clinical environments for diagnostic purposes among clinical populations. It should be noted that, according to the most recent text revision of the *DSM-IV* (2000), less than 1% of the general population is diagnosed with clinical narcissism. This figure is not surprising, given that individuals with high narcissism scores do not typically seek therapy because their heightened sense of grandiosity prevents them from recognizing flaws or shortcomings in their own behaviors and interactions with others (Campbell et al., 2006; see also Millon, 1981; Corbitt, 2002).

### **Dimensional Narcissism**

Espousing an alternative conception of personality disorders, the *dimensional system of classification* reflects a more connotative, dispositional definition of narcissism. The dimensional view suggests that personality be seen as “continua of functioning where distinct boundaries between normal and abnormal personalities are not clear” (Salusman



& Page, 2004, p. 1057), and it looks to underlying trait facets—instead of symptom sets—for behavioral explanations and disorder definitions. According to Emmons (1987), “only extreme manifestations of those behaviors [outlined in the *DSM-IV* and noted above] constitute pathological narcissism, and the assumption is that when exhibited in less extreme forms these behaviors are reflective of narcissism as a personality trait” (p. 12). Further, Foster and Campbell (2007) note that the “evidence suggests that clinical narcissism may be a categorical phenomenon, whereas sub-clinical, or ‘normal’ narcissism...is a dimensional trait” (p. 1330). Foundational to trait psychology is the premise that “individual differences in most characteristics are continuously distributed” (Costa & Widiger, 2002, p. 4), implying that “normal” and “abnormal,” in the dimensional sense, merely represent opposite ends of the same construct spectrum for each dimension. The term *narcissist* would be used, then, to describe an individual whose behavior and expectations position him or her in the upper end of the continuum (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005); at the lower end of the spectrum are those individuals who “display in their daily lives various patterns of innocuous narcissistic behaviors; however, the degree is not so pronounced as to limit or weaken social, personal, and professional interactions or to compromise relationships” (Ryan, Sweeder, & Bednar, 2002, p. 26). By this definition, all individuals possess narcissistic traits and trait facets; however, it is the “general trends or act frequencies in our conduct” that determine our actual dispositions (Buss & Chiodo, 1991, p. 181).

Based on patterns observed in a review of the empirical literature, individuals who exhibit dispositional narcissism—those among subclinical populations whose individual

differences tend more toward the upper end of the dimensional continuum—are more inclined to

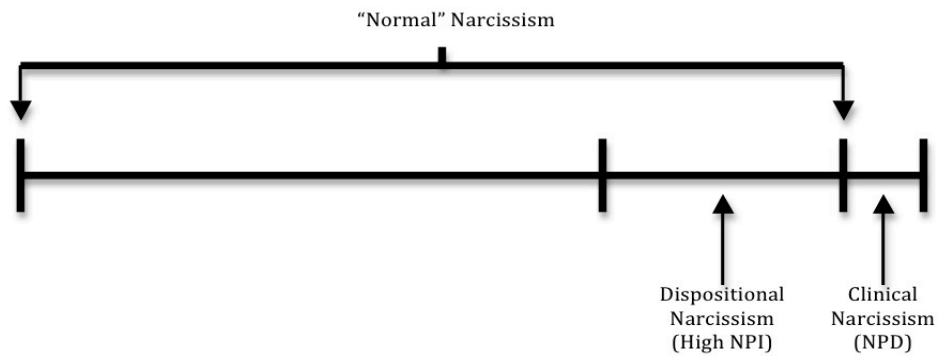
- Actively engage in self-enhancement, seeing themselves in an unrealistically positive light often at the detriment and devaluation of others (Emmons, 1987; John & Robins, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Paulhus, 1998; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Robins & Beer, 2001; see also Freud, 1914/1953; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977; and Millon, 1981);
- Possess “elevated levels of exhibitionism” and enact attention-seeking behaviors (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rudich, 1999);
- Exhibit impulsivity (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rose, 2007; Vazire & Funder, 2006);
- Maintain self-entitled beliefs (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004; Greenberger et al., 2008; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Trzesniewski et al., 2008); and
- Seek admiration but not acceptance in that they prefer to “get ahead” rather than “get along” (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus & John, 1998; Raskin et al., 1991; Robins & Beer, 2001).

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) is an instrument designed to facilitate the measurement of narcissism as a distinct personality construct, and acts as a synthesis of both the categorical and dimensional diagnostics of narcissism, taking data indiscriminately from both clinical and non-clinical populations with considerable internal and external validity.

## **NPI Narcissism**

As the *DSM-III* (1980), containing the newly defined Narcissistic Personality Disorder, was in its final stages of revision, Robert Raskin and Calvin Hall (1979) published their Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), a 44-question, forced-choice, self-reported questionnaire. Developed not for clinical diagnostic use but instead for use in “normal samples” (Campbell et al., 2006), the NPI has been used widely to measure individual differences in narcissism as a personality trait (Emmons, 1984: 1987; Raskin & Hall, 1979: 1981; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Thus, as a measure of dispositional narcissism, those individuals who score high on the NPI possess dimensional criteria (e.g., self-enhancement, impulsivity, self-entitlement, exhibitionism, and the desire to “get ahead” rather than “get along”) in greater proportion along the continua of normal personality traits (see Figure 1.2).

While other personality inventories designed for use with clinical populations contain subscales to measure the categorical components of narcissism [e.g., Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Personality Inventory—Revised (NEO-PIR); Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2); Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory—III (MCMI-III); Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire—4 (PDQ-4); Schedule for Nonadaptive and Adaptive Personality (SNAP)], the NPI—as a specific personality inventory measuring only the disposition of narcissism—has “opened the door for the empirical investigation of narcissism” (Emmons, 1987, p. 12). It is currently the most widespread measure used by non-clinical researchers among non-clinical populations (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006; Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008), boasting demonstrated internal consistency and construct



*Figure 1.2.* A continuum of “normal” narcissism. This illustration indicates the location of clinical narcissism (NPD) and dispositional narcissism (High NPI) along a continuum of “normal” narcissism (Foster & Campbell, 2007).

validity with coefficient alphas ranging from .80 to .86 (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). Rhodewalt and Morf (1995) note, “existing data suggests (sic) that one might expect some generalizability [from the NPI] to other measures of narcissism” (p. 20), and studies conducted by Miller, Gaughan, Pryor, Kamen, & Campbell (2009) establish further external validity of the NPI to the study of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). In their review of the literature, Miller, Gaughan, et al. (2009) reference empirical research that speaks to substantial correlations between the NPI and other clinical measures of NPD, including the MCMI and the PDQ-4.

Subjects completing the NPI must choose between dyadic statements, ultimately selecting the more or less narcissistic response (e.g., “I can live my life any way I want to” vs. “People can’t always live their lives in terms of what they want”; “I can usually talk my way out of anything” vs. “I try to accept the consequences of my behavior”). Each narcissistic choice is given a point, and the 40 items are summed together; higher scores indicate higher levels of narcissism. Average NPI scores for Americans between the ages of 20 and 24 range from 15.55 to 16.71 (Miller, Campbell, Young, Lakey, Reidy, Zeichner, &

Goodie, 2009; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Trzesniewski et al., 2008). The social personality literature indicates that “NPI narcissists” exhibit many of the same behaviors noted in the clinically diagnosed population of narcissists; however, the narcissistic inclinations measured by the NPI are not viewed as pathological personality traits. Instead, they are seen as more extreme instances along certain trait dimensions of normal personality. Miller and Campbell (2008) and Miller, Campbell, Pilkonis, and Morse (2008) empirically determined that both NPI narcissism and NPD diagnosed using *DSM-IV* measures create similar patterns of relationships with constructs of basic personality traits when correlated with the hierarchical personality traits using different personality inventories that measure the traits outlined within the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, a hierarchical framework used to conceptualize broad dimensions of normal personality (see also Miller, Gaughan, et al., 2009; Samuel & Widiger, 2008). These consistencies in measurement allow for the mitigation of the ambiguity surrounding the classification of narcissism in support of an operational definition that suggests that the construct of narcissism is comprised of varying degrees of traits and trait facets, which are distributed across the five hierarchical dimensions of normal personality. The ways in which narcissism is significantly distributed across the Big Five are outlined below.

### **Narcissism and the Big Five**

Citing a comprehensive list of empirical studies that suggest “personality disorders are related to normal personality trait dimensions in meaningful and predictable ways” (p. 1056), Saulsman and Page (2004) theorize “personality disorders can be conceptualized using the five-factor model of normal personality” (p. 1075). In addition, Clark, Vorhies, and McEwen (2002) present empirical data that suggest disordered personalities represent

extremities and/or extreme combinations of normal personality traits. Utilizing a hybrid conception of personality classification that employs “dimensions to describe categories” (Saulsman & Page, 2004, p. 1058), researchers are enabled to consider dispositional attributes of clinical personality disorders among sub-clinical or normal populations. A hybrid classification facilitates the measurement of various categorical personality traits along hierarchical, dimensional personality factors, and further supports Raskin and Hall’s (1979) delineation of a subclinical or dispositional construct of narcissism, while retaining significant facets from the clinical symptom set: grandiosity, entitlement, dominance, and superiority (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Owing to this trend of integrated classification, an operational definition may be developed wherein narcissism is defined as a personality construct (Campbell et al., 2006; John & Robins, 1994; Raskin & Terry, 1988)—opposed to a categorically maladaptive personality disorder—that is comprised of varying degrees of personality traits (or general characteristics) and trait facets (lower order characteristics that define traits), which are distributed across the five hierarchical dimensions of normal personality. These dimensions and their relationship to the construct of narcissism are addressed in the following section.

An embodiment of trait theory, which espouses the belief that human nature is manifest in “consistent and enduring individual differences” (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 199), the Five Factor Model (FFM) provides a framework for broad, higher-order dimensions of personality. Outlining five personality trait dimensions known as the Big Five, which are defined in turn by more specific personality trait facets, the FFM offers “the most adequate and comprehensive taxonomy for describing personality and for understanding problems associated with personalities or personality disorders” (Costa & Widiger, 2002, p. 6). With

a rich history of inception and implementation (see Digman, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1991), the taxonomic Big Five detail and define five personality traits—Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—that represent broad levels of abstraction of personality trait dimensions. Hierarchically constructed, the Big Five structure does not imply that personality differences can be reduced to only five traits; instead, the five traits serve to organize and summarize a multiplicity of more specific trait facets (John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five personality traits, commonly abbreviated by the first letter of each trait (O, C, E, A, N), are defined as follows:

### **Openness (O)**

Also referred to as “Openness to Experience” (Costa & McCrae, 1985), this trait “(versus closed-mindedness) describes the breadth, depth, originality, and complexity of an individual’s *mental and experiential life*” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 121). Digman’s (1990) analysis of various researchers’ organizations of the Big Five suggests that Openness is aligned with intellect, but not as a measure of intellectual ability; instead, it is better defined as “intellectance,” indicating imaginativeness and perceptiveness (McCrae & John, 1992). Individuals who are considered “Open” in the sense of the trait definition have a need for variety and experience; they are aesthetically sensitive and creative; and they possess unconventional values (McCrae & John, 1992). Individuals on the opposite end of the “Openness” continuum are considered to be “closed,” exhibiting such trait facets as predictability, rigidity in beliefs, and conventionalism (Costa & Widiger, 2002).

### **Conscientiousness (C)**

Conscientiousness is best defined as the personality trait dimension that “holds impulsive behavior in check” (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 197; see also John & Srivastava,

1999). Conscientious individuals—those at the high end of the continuum—possess trait facets that suggest thoroughness, neatness, organization, diligence, and an orientation toward achievement (McCrae & John, 1992). Credited with self-control and prudence (Digman, 1990), conscientious individuals think before they act, have no problem delaying gratification or following norms and rules, invest effort in planning and prioritizing tasks; and are highly goal-directed (John & Srivastava, 1999). Costa and Widiger (2002) outline the “Low C” individual as possessing trait facets such as aimlessness, irritability, and laziness.

### **Extraversion (E)**

Defined by John and Srivastava (1999) as “an *energetic approach* to the social and material world that includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness, and positive emotionality” (p. 121), the trait dimension of Extraversion has also been used synonymously with *surgency* (e.g. Digman, 1990; Eysenck, 1978), terminology that connotes dominance, competitiveness, and frankness. Referring to the “quantity and intensity of preferred interpersonal interactions” (Costa & Widiger, 2002, p. 3), Extraversion is an interpersonal trait dimension, which is frequently contrasted with Introversion (Eysenck, 1978), its spectral opposite. Along the interpersonal continuum, Extraverts seek social situations with “exuberant high spirits” and do not shy away from the spotlight (Costa & Widiger, 2002, p. 3), whereas Introverts, those who are “Low E,” tend to be more aloof, reserved, and independent (p. 7).

### **Agreeableness (A)**

Another interpersonal trait dimension, Agreeableness is measured along a continuum of preferred interaction and “contrasts a *prosocial and communal orientation*



toward others with antagonism” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 121). Individuals who are high in Agreeableness possess trait facets such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, empathy, and modesty (Costa & Widiger, 1994); the “High A” individual is also more likely to conform to social norms. Those low in Agreeableness are expected to be hostile, indifferent to others, self-centered, spiteful, and jealous (Digman, 1990).

### **Neuroticism (N)**

Taking into account emotional adjustment and stability, Neuroticism refers to an individual’s cognitive and behavioral coping responses and levels of psychological distress during times of crisis (McCrae & John, 1992). Individuals who are “High N” exhibit “*negative emotionality*, such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad, and tense” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 121); they are self-conscious to the point of irrationality, and they lack impulse control (McCrae & John, 1992). By contrast, “Low N” individuals are more emotionally stable and even-tempered (Digman, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999); they are described by McCrae and John (1992) as “calm, relaxed, and unflappable” (p. 195).

While categorically defined by trait facets, each of the Big Five personality traits is considered along individual dimensions of normal personality in terms of “low” and “high,” and each theoretically addresses “common dimensions of individual difference” (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 199; see Table 1). The Big Five traits, when considered as multiple variables within an individual, facilitate the definition of particular types, or categories, of people (John & Srivastava, 1999). Because of the FFM and the Big Five taxonomy, researchers are able to empirically study the ways in which “personality traits combine into coherent patterns within individuals” and identify “individuals that share the same basic personality profile” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 127). Further, Costa and McCrae (1995) argue that

domain interpretation, made possible by the Big Five taxonomy and the FFM in general, allows for the researcher to “combine information from several scales in meaningful ways...to make more powerful inferences about personality traits and correlates that are not directly measured” (p. 46). A body of empirical literature exists wherein researchers have sought to deconstruct various personality disorders (from the *DSM*) by seeking correlations with the personality traits across the Big Five framework (see Saulsman & Page, 2004). This deconstruction enables greater investigative granularity of an individual’s personality by glimpsing its composition as assemblages of traits, which are themselves assemblages of trait facets (Shroeder, Wormworth, & Livesley, 1992). These traits and trait facets may then be measured by their varying degree along dimensional continua.

### **Personality and Narcissism: Disagreeable Extraverts**

Paulhus (2001) parsimoniously asserted that a composite of two of the Big Five personality traits, Extraversion and Agreeableness, provides “an emergent personality type equivalent to the construct of the narcissistic personality” (p. 228). Among the support for such an assertion are the results from an empirical investigation of narcissistic manifestations in “everyday life” behaviors in non-clinical populations conducted by Buss and Chiodo (1991), whose findings indicate that narcissism “can be coherently located as a particular pattern within the factor space of the major existing taxonomies of personality” (p. 210). Their data reflect significant relationships between narcissism and two interpersonal dimensions of the Big Five personality traits: Extraversion (E) and Agreeableness (A). A significant positive correlation between narcissism and Extraversion/Surgency suggests that individuals who are high in narcissism are also “High

E” and are prone to demonstrate “exhibitionism, self-aggrandizement, and grandiosity” in their everyday behaviors (p. 210). A significant negative correlation between narcissism and Agreeableness indicates that those who are high in narcissism are “Low A,” signaling the presence of “self-centeredness, entitlement, exploitativeness and lack of empathy” in an individual’s daily behavior (p. 210). The Buss and Chiodo (1991) findings are further supported by Paulhus and Williams (2002) whose data also negatively correlated narcissism with Agreeableness and positively correlated narcissism with Extraversion. In addition, in their meta-analysis of studies that seek to explore relationships between the *DSM-IV* personality disorders and the Five Factor Model personality dimensions, Saulsman and Page (2004) found significant correlations between narcissism and the personality dimensions of Extraversion and Agreeableness across clinical and non-clinical populations (p. 1067).

Throughout the literature, scores on the NPI consistently “correlate positively with extraversion and negatively with agreeableness” (Paulhus, 2001, p. 229; see also Miller et al, 2008; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), which suggests that, in the realm of the Big Five, the NPI narcissist is a “disagreeable extravert” (Paulhus, 2001, p. 228). In light of the trait facets attributed to the hierarchical personality traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness, individuals who are dubbed “disagreeable extraverts” may predictably be seen as active, talkative, self-aggrandizing, exhibitionistic, sociable, dominant, competitive, and frank (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Costa & Widiger, 1994: 2002; John & Srivastava, 1991), owing to their “High E” proclivity; and antagonistic, rude, manipulative, suspicious, hostile, indifferent to others, self-centered, spiteful, and jealous (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Costa & Widiger, 1994: 2002; Digman, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1991), thanks to their “Low A”



tendencies. This deconstruction of the narcissistic personality composite across the hierarchical dimensions of normal personality affords a more precise, multi-trait image of those individuals categorically described as narcissists. This precision allows for succinct alignment with the Big Five (see Figure 3) and facilitates a more comprehensive exploration of the relationship between an individual's personality and his or her motivational goal orientations (De Raad & Schouwenburg, 1996); the exploration of such a relationship will, in turn, enable a theoretical supposition regarding narcissism and its impact on student learning.

### **Personality, Narcissism, and Goal Orientation**

It has been determined theoretically and empirically that personality plays a role in the development of an individual's goal orientation (Blickle, 1996; Boekaerts, 1996; De Raad & Schouwenberg, 1996; Eysenck, 1978; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Klein & Lee, 2006; Messick, 1994; Mumsford & Gustafson, 1988; Wang & Erdheim, 2007; Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996; Zweig & Webster, 2004), that is, the perspective an individual takes when addressing a task in an achievement situation is determined by his or her personality traits. While there is to date no empirical evidence that correlates narcissism with goal orientation, empirical studies have been conducted that correlate the Big Five personality traits with goal orientation (e.g., Wang & Erdheim, 2007; Zweig & Webster, 2004). Conclusions based on these findings indicate that the Big Five traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness, those traits that define the relationship between narcissism and the Big Five, significantly determine whether an individual is more oriented toward mastery learning or performance. These findings and their implications are addressed in the sections that follow and are illustrated in Figure 4.



*Figure 1. 3.* The relationship between narcissism and the Big Five personality traits.

This illustration depicts the relationship between narcissism and the Big Five, which is defined empirically through the trait composite of “disagreeable extravert.”

### **Goal Orientations**

Dweck (1999) defines goal orientation as an individual’s personal disposition to pursue either a *mastery orientation* or a *performance orientation* in achievement situations. The two basic orientations are suggestive of different priorities: Individuals with a mastery goal orientation are focused on their efforts to seek out and succeed in challenging tasks; individuals with a performance goal orientation, however, are focused more on their abilities and the ways in which those abilities are perceived by and relate to others. Each orientation carries with it specific cognitive implications: mastery goal orientations are more inclusive of cognitive strategies that enable long-term retention of information, whereas performance goal orientation favors surface processing, which is beneficial only for short-term retention and performance.



deeper levels of cognitive processing” (1996, p. 213). These adaptive strategies result in positive achievement outcomes in learning situations.

**Performance goal orientation (PGO).** In contrast to the adaptive patterns of mastery goal orientation, performance goal orientation (also referred to as ability goal orientation) is “characterized by challenge avoidance and low persistence in the face of difficulty” (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040; see also Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Individuals with PGO are focused on their performance relative to others, and they are concerned about the outward demonstration of their ability, as their ability (as opposed to the effort of the MGO) is centered on their self-worth (Ames, 1992; Wolters, et al, 1996, p. 213). Further classification of PGO into sub-groupings provides a clear overview of goal orientation and the strategies employed by those possessing those orientations.

The *performance-approach orientation*, also referred to as the proving goal orientation, suggests that the individual demonstrates competence to get favorable feedback. Wolters, et al. (1996) liken the performance-approach orientation to extrinsic goal orientation, which focuses on “seeking external rewards such as grades and praise from teachers and parents [and peers] as well as avoiding external sanctions such as punishment” (p. 214). The *performance-avoidance* or avoiding goal orientation demonstrates competence to avoid negative judgment. Also referred to as “relative ability orientation,” individuals inclined toward this goal orientation are “more concerned with social comparison, competing with others to be the best, and not wanting to appear less able than others” (Wolters et al., 1996, p. 214; see also Dweck, 1986).

“Characterized by a desire to avoid unfavorable judgments” (Zweig & Webster, p. 1697), individuals with PGO are more likely to employ defensive cognitive strategies that



lead to negative performance outcomes (Dweck, 1986; Pintrich, & Schunk, 1996). For example, benefectance, a term coined by Greenwald (1980), denotes the tendency to accept responsibility for successful outcomes and to reject responsibility for failed outcomes. Similar to Emmons' (1987) "attributional egotism," the defensive cognitive strategy or cognitive bias of benefectance suggests that individuals who employ it are "more likely to attribute positive outcomes to the self and negative outcomes to situational factors" (p. 5). Individuals who believe that they are able to perform a task and who are responsible for their own performance on that task illustrate the basic characteristics of self-regulated learning (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990); benefectant individuals lack the ability to self-regulate in this way, as they do not engage in conscious deliberation before, during, and after task performance. Because "memory supports an association of self with success more than with failure" (Greenwald, 1980, p. 605), individuals with benefectant bias, whose focus is only on real or imagined positive outcomes, lack the reflective ability to acknowledge and learn from their mistakes.

### **Personality and Goal Orientation**

Studies conducted by Elliot and Thrash (2002), Wang and Erdheim (2007), and Zweig and Webster (2004), indicate that the Big Five traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness, the two personality traits that factor preeminently in the construct of narcissism as addressed previously, are correlated with goal orientations in significant ways.

**Extraversion.** Empirical findings indicate that Extraversion is positively correlated with both mastery goals and performance-approach orientations (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Wang & Erdheim, 2007; Zweig & Webster, 2004), which suggests that the Extravert, while

exhibiting a willingness to take on intellectual challenges and risks, may be extrinsically motivated to do so. McCrae and Costa (1987) indicate that “sociability—the enjoyment of others’ company—seems to be the core” of the trait of Extraversion (p. 87). Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, and Shao (2000) contend that validation by social others functions as a reward for the Extravert’s competence, and they alternatively suggest that “reward sensitivity” serves as the core facet of Extraversion. In this way, Extraverts may demonstrate a mastery goal orientation by putting forth effort to master a task; however, their motives for mastering the task are not intrinsic. Instead, task mastery becomes an exhibitionistic opportunity to satisfy their “sensitivity to the rewards inherent in most social situations” (Lucas et al., 2000, p. 465). Their motives are extrinsic, as the means (mastering a task) justify the ends (validation through rewards of good grades and/or public recognition). Opposed to the true spirit of the mastery goal orientation, which focuses on the efforts involved in the mastery of skills for the enjoyment of increased competency (Dweck, 1986), Lucas et al. (2002) contend that Extraverts are more inclined toward a performance goal orientation as they are intrinsically motivated by and seek their enjoyment through external rewards.

**Agreeableness.** Agreeableness has been positively correlated with mastery goal orientation and negatively correlated with performance-avoidance orientation (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Wang & Erdheim, 2007; Zweig & Webster, 2004). Inasmuch as Agreeableness has been empirically related to mastery orientation, individuals who score low in Agreeableness, who exhibit such trait facets as “competitiveness and a desire to prove their abilities,” are inclined toward a performance-avoidance orientation (Wang & Erdheim, 2007, p. 1699; see also Zweig & Webster, 2004). The “skepticism and cynicism

toward others” that is characteristic of those low in A theoretically supports the empirical findings that suggest a performance-avoidance orientation among “Low A” individuals (Zweig & Webster, 2004, p. 1699).

Viewed holistically in light of the empirical findings, those individuals who are High E and Low A are prone toward performance orientation, as their ultimate motivation in achievement situations is not the intrinsic enjoyment that comes from task mastery but the external rewards of social acclaim that result from displayed ability. These findings carry significant implications for individuals whose personality traits predispose them to approach learning situations from the perspective of performance.

### **Goal Orientation and Narcissism**

In discussing the results of their empirical study of the Big Five personality traits and goal orientations, Zweig and Webster (2004) indicate that “more focused *combinations of personality traits* [emphasis added] might be better than more global traits at predicting outcomes” (p. 1705) when considering relationships between personality traits and goal orientation. While the relationship between narcissism and goal orientation is currently not known, it is theoretically appropriate, based on the empirical connections between narcissism and the Big Five Personality Traits and between goal orientation and the Big Five Personality Traits, to consider the composite of the “disagreeable extravert” when determining a predictable goal orientation for the personality construct of narcissism. In so doing, questions arise that suggest the need for further study.

**Do dispositional narcissists tend toward performance-approach or performance-avoidance orientation?** As a “disagreeable extravert,” the dispositional narcissist is attributed with a performance goal orientation, possessing the both the

approach tendencies of a High E and avoidance tendencies of a Low A. Consistent with this theoretical assertion, Elliot and Thrash (2001) assert, “the behavior of the narcissist often represents an active avoidance of failure or rejection [as well as] a performance-approach goal pursuit in the service of an underlying fear of failure and fear of rejection (in addition to an underlying need for achievement)” (p. 217). Empirical studies designed to measure dispositional narcissism and its relationship to goal orientation among college students are necessary to first validate the theoretical assertion that dispositional narcissists are performance oriented; beyond this initial study, further research may be designed to measure both approach and avoidance orientations.

**Does the dispositional narcissist employ defensive cognitive strategies to achieve his performance goals in achievement situations?** In the realm of performance, is the dispositional narcissist likely to cognitively default to beneffectance as a means to preserve his aggrandized self-image and/or to deflect negative impressions about his competency? Employing a defensive cognitive strategy that allows for only the acceptance of responsibility for successful achievement outcomes and the rejection of responsibility for unsuccessful achievement outcomes is a hallmark mechanism of the narcissistic construct (Bartels & Magun-Jackson, 2009; Emmons, 1987; Greenwald, 1980; Raskin, et al., 1991; Vazire & Funder, 2006), and it precludes the reflective self-assessment that is necessary for self-regulation and cognitive advancement (Zimmerman, 1989). This lack of thoughtfulness about one’s own thought processes and behavior rests with impulsivity at the “conceptual core of narcissistic personality dynamics” (Carlson & Gjerde, 2009, p. 571; see also Samuel & Widiger, 2008). Empirical studies designed to measure the cognitive biases and strategies of dispositionally narcissistic college students will provide critical

contributions to the learning sciences literature, and such data will certainly yield implications for teaching and learning in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

This paper provides a theoretical argument for the development of a triarchic model of dispositional narcissism as a means to better understand the personality construct of narcissism and its relationship to learning. In this model, the known relationship between narcissism and the Big Five Personality Traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness, and the known relationship between the Big Five Personality Traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness and performance goal orientation, lead to a theorized relationship between narcissism and performance goal orientation. Because “individual motivation orientations and beliefs about learning are relevant to cognitive engagement and classroom performance” (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990, p. 33; see also De Raad & Schouwenberg, 1996), it is important for the educator to be cognizant of the role that personality plays in the development of these beliefs and orientations (Wang & Erdheim, 2007). Such an awareness, according to Eysenck (1978), places the educator “in a position to capitalize on the particular personality factors and aspects which enable [learners] to succeed in given tasks” (p. 144).

Further explorations and discussions that empirically ascribe motivational goal orientations to narcissism as a unified construct are necessary. Establishing predictable and profound relationships between narcissism and goal orientation would identify narcissism as a variable of interest when considering those factors that influence student learning and that ultimately contribute to the complex array of considerations involved in the development of effective pedagogy and practice.

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**Educating the Disagreeable Extravert: An Examination of the Relationships Between  
Narcissism, the Big Five Personality Traits, and Achievement Goal Orientation**

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## Abstract

Despite the fact that longitudinal data have been compiled over the past 30 years among undergraduate students in higher education settings regarding narcissism, the literature is devoid of empirical investigations that explore the relationships between narcissism and learning. Because the data suggest that narcissism scores are increasing each year among this population (Twenge & Foster, 2008), an exploration of the relationship between narcissism and learning is timely and warranted. Sampling from university undergraduate students, this study uses the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979), the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), and the Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ; Elliot & McGregor, 2001) to explore the known relationships between narcissism and the Big Five personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness; to explore the known relationships between the Big Five personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness and goal orientation; and to establish a previously undocumented empirical relationship between narcissism and performance goal orientation. Establishing a relationship between narcissism and performance goal orientation provides a heuristic through which educators may develop proactive, interventive instructional models and pedagogies that will encourage all students to improve their learning by engaging in strategies that lead to deeper cognitive and metacognitive processing.

**Keywords:** narcissism, goal orientation, extraversion, agreeableness, disagreeableness, Big Five, performance, cognition, learning

## **Introduction**

When considering those variables that impact student learning, it is often easy to overlook or otherwise discount the significance of individual personality and its role in the learning process. While, as educators, we may deftly identify certain archetypes that contribute to our collective consciousness of “student,” we may fail to recognize that the individual personalities of our students factor significantly into their cognition. Of late there has been considerable interest in and a growing discussion of the personality construct of narcissism among undergraduate populations. Social psychologists, particularly those interested in generational phenomena, draw from convenience samples of university undergraduates in an exploration of the dynamic interactions between narcissistic personality and social contexts (i.e., Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Twenge & Foster, 2008; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). Despite the fact that longitudinal data have been compiled over the past 30 years among undergraduate students in higher education settings regarding narcissism, the literature is devoid of empirical investigations that explore the relationships between narcissism and learning. Because the longitudinal data suggest that narcissism scores are increasing each year among this population (Twenge et al., 2008; Twenge & Foster, 2008), empirical attention must be given to the impact that this reportedly pervasive personality construct has on student learning.

### **Narcissism**

An “unimaginably diverse and amorphous construct” (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992, p. 821), narcissism enjoys a rich and varied etiology that contributes to the ambiguity of its definition and its empirical illusiveness. Beginning with Ellis’ (1898/2010) description of

“Narcissus-like” behavior to define aberrant, self-absorbed sexual behaviors, and later gaining acceptance as a normal part of ego and libidinal development in Freud’s (1914/1991) theory of psychosexual development, the early impressions of narcissism dealt explicitly with sexual behaviors and motivations. The “neo-Freudians” (i.e., Horney, Adler, Fromm, Klein, Erikson), without fully discounting the structure of Freud’s psychosexual theory, supported a *psychosocial* theory of development and contended that narcissism either exists as, enables, or thwarts successive stages of development throughout childhood and into adolescence. Theorists such as Kernberg (1975) and Kohut (1977) suggested that certain interruptions or disconnections in human development contributed proportionally to the narcissistic tendencies in individuals, particularly parental overvaluation or undervaluation. Social learning theorists such as Millon (1981), drew from the works of Kernberg and Kohut to sketch a picture of the narcissist as someone whose enhanced self image “cannot be sustained in the outer world” (p. 165) and, thus, struggles to create an environment and make associations that provide continual validation.

Narcissism first appeared as a personality disorder in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in 1980. Listed among the ranks of borderline personality disorders, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is diagnosed clinically by use of a taxonomic menu. Individuals exhibiting at least five of the following nine categorical symptoms in extremity are considered candidates for clinical diagnosis of NPD:

1. A grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerate achievements and talents, expect to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements);

2. A preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love;
3. The belief that they are “special” and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions);
4. The demand for excessive admiration;
5. The belief in a sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations);
6. Interpersonally exploitative thoughts and behaviors (i.e., take advantage of others to achieve their own ends);
7. A lack of empathy (i.e., are unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others);
8. Envy toward others and/or the belief that others are envious of them; and
9. Arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

(American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p. 661)

According to the most recent publication of the *DSM*, edition IV (2000), less than 1% of the general population is clinically diagnosed with narcissism, likely owing to the fact that narcissists, with a heightened sense of grandiosity, would not recognize their own flaws and shortcomings that might lead them to therapy (Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006; see also Corbitt, 2002; Millon, 1981).

While a categorical system of classification is useful as a clinical diagnostic tool, “only extreme manifestations of those [categorical] behaviors constitute pathological narcissism, and the assumption is that when exhibited in less extreme forms, these behaviors are reflective of narcissism as a personality trait” (Emmons, 1987, p. 12). Trait

psychology maintains that “individual differences in most characteristics are continuously distributed,” that is, in a dimensional sense, “normal” and “abnormal” are opposite ends of the same continuum of an individual’s personality (Costa & Widiger, 2002, p. 4). While all individuals may have the propensity toward occasional and innocuous narcissistic behaviors, *dispositional narcissists* exhibit the following behaviors and expectations to such a degree as to “limit or weaken social, personal, and professional interactions or to compromise relationships” (Ryan, Sweeder, & Bednar, 2002, p. 26; see also Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005):

- Actively engage in self-enhancement, seeing themselves in an unrealistically positive light often at the detriment and devaluation of others (Emmons, 1987; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Robins & Beer, 2001);
- Possess “elevated levels of exhibitionism” and enact attention-seeking behaviors (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Raskin & Terry, 1988);
- Exhibit impulsivity (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rose, 2007; Vazire & Funder, 2006);
- Maintain self-entitled beliefs (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004; Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farrugia, 2008; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008); and
- Seek admiration but not acceptance in that they prefer to “get ahead” rather than “get along” (Paulhus & John, 1998; Raskin et al., 1991; Robins & Beer, 2001).

Developed in 1979 by Robert Raskin and Calvin Hall, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) measures narcissistic traits as dimensions of normal personality. Those individuals who score high on the NPI reportedly possess the dispositional criteria of self-

enhancement, impulsivity, entitlement, exhibitionism, and social climbing in greater proportion along the continuum of normal personality. While dispositional narcissists may be considered “interpersonal irritants” (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), they are not pathologically disordered in the categorical, clinical sense. This study is concerned with narcissism as a personality construct as measured by the NPI, reflective of dimensional personality traits and individual dispositions.

### **The Big Five Personality Traits**

Considering a dimensional measure of personality suggests that all individuals possess varying degrees and combinations of facets (lower order trait characteristics) that, when culled, constitute a set of traits, which in turn combine to define an individual’s personality. Narcissism can be seen as a distinct personality, the product of a combination of traits from the Big Five. Broadly representing personality trait dimensions, the taxonomic *Big Five* details and defines five comprehensive personality traits: Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N). “Common dimensions of individual difference” are theoretically addressed in terms of “high” and “low” increments of each of the five traits (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 199); the Big Five traits, when viewed as multiple variables that comprise a personality construct, facilitate the definition of particular types or categories of personality (John & Srivastava, 1999). For example, Paulhus and Williams (2002) empirically determined construct differences among the “Dark Triad of personality,” constituted by Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Their findings indicate that individuals classified as “Machiavellian” score low in C and low in A; psychopaths score low in C, low in A, and low



in N; narcissists score low in A and high in E. While each of these constructs shares a low A, it is the varying degrees and combinations of the traits that set each of the constructs apart.

Significant to the present study is the empirical and meta-analytic evidence that suggests a relationship between narcissism and the Big Five personality traits of agreeableness and extraversion (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Saulsman & Page, 2004). Agreeableness is defined as an interpersonal trait dimension that “contrasts a prosocial and communal orientation toward others with antagonism” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 121). Those who score high in A are more likely to be altruistic, tender-hearted, trusting, empathetic, and modest (Costa & Widiger, 2002). Those who score low in A and who are subsequently termed as disagreeable are more likely to be hostile, indifferent, self-centered, spiteful, and jealous (Digman, 1990). Those who score high on the interpersonal trait dimension of extraversion (E) exhibit sociability, activity, and assertiveness (John & Srivastava, 1999) as well as dominance, competitiveness and frankness (see Digman, 1990; Eysenck, 1978). Those who score low in E are typically classified as Introverts and tend to be more aloof, reserved, and independent (Costa & Widiger, 2002).

Empirical data indicate significant relationships between the Big Five traits of agreeableness and extraversion and the personality construct of narcissism. In studies conducted by Paulhus and Williams (2002) and Buss and Chiodo (1991), narcissism—as measured by the NPI—correlates positively with extraversion and correlates negatively with agreeableness. Further, in their meta-analysis of studies that address the relationships between the *DSM-IV* personality disorders and the dimensions of personality represented by the Big Five, Saulsman and Page (2004) found similar significant correlations across both clinical and non-clinical populations. Parsimoniously stated, within the space of the

Big Five, the NPI narcissist is a “disagreeable extravert” (Paulhus, 2001, p. 228).

Contributing to this body of empirical evidence, the present study explores the relationships between narcissism, as measured by the NPI, and extraversion (E) and agreeableness (A).

### **Achievement Goal Orientation**

According to Eysenck (1978), an individual’s personality, more than his or her IQ, is a significant variable in the learning process. Personality traits can “facilitate or inhibit the effective use of [learning] strategies” by exercising control over those “motivational impulses or the motivational blocks to use or not to use learning strategies and thus improve or turn down performance” (Blickle, 1996, p. 338). Not inconsistent with Eysenck, Dweck (1999, 2008a, 2008b) maintains that individual beliefs or “self-theories” about learning are critical pieces of an individual’s personality and intellectual constitution; such beliefs comprise mindsets that influence achievement patterns and trajectories. An individual who possesses a “fixed” mindset believes that her intelligence and other basic qualities are fixed traits; that is, effort and practice will not influence them, as the limits are predetermined. Those of a fixed mindset deem their abilities to be inherently manifested. By contrast, an individual who possesses a “malleable” mindset believes that her intelligence and other basic qualities can be grown and expanded upon through effort and education. She is less concerned with short-term evaluations of her abilities and more focused on their cultivation in the long-term (Dweck, 2004).

The perspective an individual takes when addressing a task in an achievement situation—her *achievement goal orientation*—is determined by her beliefs and self-theories, which constitute her mindset, which is determined by her personality (de Raad &

Schouwenburg, 1996; Dweck, 1999, 2008a; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Klein & Lee, 2006; Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996). Based on their personalities and subsequent mindsets, individuals are disposed to pursue either a *mastery* goal orientation (MGO) or a *performance* goal orientation (PGO), each of which is suggestive of different prerogatives when approaching a task (Dweck, 1999). Those with a MGO (used synonymously throughout the literature with *learning goal orientation*) are focused on the process of mastering or learning material in achievement situations. Individuals with a malleable mindset are most likely to possess a MGO; they harbor an intrinsic motivation to engage in challenging tasks and are willing to “risk displays of ignorance in order to acquire skills and knowledge” (Dewck, 1986, p. 1042). They recognize that their efforts lead to success, and as a result, they find enjoyment in investing effort strictly for the outcome of an increased understanding (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Wolters, et al., 1996). According to Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich (1996 ), “a goal orientation that prioritizes effort and mastery of skill is more likely to include cognitive strategies such as elaboration and organizational strategies, which reflect deeper levels of cognitive processing” (p. 213). The MGO individual utilizes adaptive achievement patterns, “characterized by challenge seeking and high, effective persistence in the face of obstacles” (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040) either to improve her skills and competence (*mastery-approach*) or to avoid losing her skills and becoming incompetent (*mastery-avoidance*; Finney, et al., 2004); the MGO individual is unlikely to quit when challenged by new or difficult information.

While MGO embodies adaptive patterns of motivation, which lead to positive cognitive strategies that enable long-term retention of information, PGO is suggestive of more maladaptive patterns (Wolters, 2004), which tend toward cognitive biases,

helplessness, or other obstructions that impede processing and support only short-term retention. “Characterized by challenge avoidance and low persistence in the face of difficulty” (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040), individuals with PGO are more concerned with outward demonstrations of their ability and with appearing better than others than with having a truly deep understanding of the material or mastery of a skill (Dweck, 1986; Wolters, et al., 1996). Possessing a fixed mindset, they are motivated by a desire to appear knowledgeable (*performance-approach*) or to avoid looking unknowledgeable (*performance-avoidance*); and it is their prerogative to seek extrinsic validation through performance, such as grades and favorable feedback delivered publicly, for their perceived fixed abilities (Dweck, 2004; Wolters, et al., 1996). Those with a fixed mindset become “excessively concerned with how smart they are, seeking tasks that will prove their intelligence and avoiding ones that might not” (Dweck, 2008, p. 34). In their attempts to avoid unfavorable judgments, individuals with PGO are more likely to utilize defensive cognitive strategies that lead to negative performance outcomes. Among these strategies are Greenwald’s (1980) “beneffectance,” the inclination to attribute positive outcomes to the self and negative outcomes to situational factors, and Millon’s (1981) “Illusion of Competence” wherein individuals

assume that the presumption of superiority will suffice as its proof. Conditioned to think of themselves as able and admirable, they see little reason to waste the effort needed to acquire these virtues. [...] Rather than face genuine challenges, they may temporize and boast, but they never venture to test their adequacy. ...they can maintain their illusion of superiority without fear of disproof. (177-178)

Empirical studies have demonstrated correlations between achievement goal orientation and the Big Five personality traits (e.g., Wang & Erdheim, 2007; Zweig &

Webster, 2004), noting specific correlations between the personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness and both mastery and performance goal orientations. Zweig and Webster (2004) present findings that demonstrate positive correlations between extraversion and both mastery goal orientation and performance-approach orientation. These data suggest that those individuals high in E may be willing to “put themselves out there” and engage in intellectual risks and challenges but that they are extrinsically motivated to do so, desirous of the attention, perceived admiration, and validation they will receive for the attempt alone. Research conducted by Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, and Shao (2000) support the finding that extraverts are sensitive to the rewards inherent in most social situations and indicate that while their efforts may suggest a mastery goal orientation, the motivation behind the efforts of those with high E are performance-oriented.

Additional data from Zweig and Webster (2004) indicate that agreeableness (A) is positively correlated with mastery goal orientation and negatively correlated with performance-avoidance orientation. Those individuals who are low A correlate positively with a performance-avoidance orientation, which is consistent with the theoretical picture of the low A individual as competitive, skeptical, and cynical (Wang & Erdheim, 2007; Zweig & Webster, 2004). In sum, these empirical findings suggest that those individuals who are high E and low A, Paulhus’ “disagreeable extraverts,” are inclined toward performance orientation. The present study contributes to these data by exploring relationships between E, A, and goal orientation.

While the literature suggests a theoretical relationship between dispositional narcissists (as “disagreeable extraverts”) and performance goal orientation based on the

transitive empirical relationships among narcissism and the Big Five traits of extraversion and agreeableness and among the Big Five traits of extraversion and agreeableness and goal orientation, there are no empirical data to date that confirm this supposition. The current research explores possible relationships between narcissism and goal orientation among college students to address this theoretical relationship and to provide a foundation for further study into student beliefs, self-theories, and personality, which hold significant implications for an individual's cognitive processing and subsequent learning. To this end, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between narcissism and the Big Five personality traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness?
2. Is there a relationship between the Big Five personality traits of Extraversion and Agreeableness and achievement goal orientation?
3. Is there a relationship between narcissism and achievement goal orientation?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were 308 undergraduates taken from a convenience sample of 321 students enrolled in three sections of a one-credit college-level professional seminar course in a large university in the eastern United States. The participants were from a variety of majors from the Liberal Arts and Human Sciences domains. The academic level of the participants reflected students at their Sophomore (7%), Junior (50%), and Senior (43%) years; the average age of the participants was 21.7 years. Female students comprised 85% of the study respondents.

As part of their coursework, students were asked to complete an online, Likert-type survey that comprised three distinct measures: the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), the Big Five Inventory (BFI), and the Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ). Students were promised a report of their scores on the BFI component of the survey to assist them in researching career paths that are consistent with their assessed personality strengths (see Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). The participants' personal interest in the resulting data coupled with its perceived usefulness and the course credit they received for the completion of the survey assignment in its entirety contributed to the response rate of 96%.

## **Measures**

The survey instrument is a 96-question (exclusive of demographic questions) electronic survey, comprised of three distinct sections or "inventories," each of which represents different known measures (see Appendix A for the online survey in its entirety). Each of the three measures—the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, the Big Five Inventory, and the Achievement Goal Questionnaire—is described below.

**Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI).** Regarded as the preeminent self-report instrument for measuring non-clinical populations for dispositional narcissistic traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), the NPI demonstrates considerable internal consistency with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .80 to .86 (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). For the present study, the NPI had an internal reliability of .82 (n=308).

The NPI, constructed by Raskin and Hall (1979), contains 40 forced-choice questions, which ask respondents to choose between two statements by selecting the

statement with which they most closely identify. Pairs of statements, such as “I am no better or worse than most people” vs. “I think I am a special person” and “I am more capable than other people” vs. “There is a lot that I can learn from other people” are scored according to a key, which awards the more narcissistic answer with a point. Scores on the NPI may range from 0 (respondent selected no narcissistic statements) to 40 (respondent selected all narcissistic statements); mean scores reported across the empirical literature range from 15.6 to 16.7 (Miller, Campbell, Young, Lakey, Reidy, Zeichner, & Goodie, 2009; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Trzesniewski et al., 2008). While the potential exists to do so, the overall scores on the NPI in these findings will be evaluated without factor analysis, as this study aims to establish a fundamental relationship between all measurable aspects of narcissism and the Big Five personality traits and goal orientation.

**Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI).** The BFI, constructed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991), is a 44-item inventory that asks respondents to indicate their level of agreement with self-descriptive statements along a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 = “Disagree Strongly” and 5 = “Agree Strongly.” With mean coefficient alphas above .80 (John & Srivastava, 1999), the BFI determines respondent strengths in the Big Five personality traits of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Internal consistency coefficients for each of the personality scales within the BFI are as follows (Cronbach’s alpha): Openness = .81; Conscientiousness = .82; Extraversion = .88; Agreeableness = .79; Neuroticism = .84 (John & Srivastava, 1999). Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities for each scale in the present study are indicated as follows: Openness, .81; Conscientiousness, .79; Extraversion, .87; Agreeableness, .74; and Neuroticism, .80. All alphas were determined at  $n = 308$ .



Sample statements for which the respondents must rate their agreement include, “I see myself as someone who is original, comes up with new ideas” (Openness); “I see myself as someone who does a thorough job” (Conscientiousness); “I see myself as someone who generates a lot of enthusiasm” (Extraversion); “I see myself as someone who is helpful and unselfish with others” (Agreeableness); and “I see myself as someone who worries a lot” (Neuroticism). After the reverse-scored items are standardized, scores for each personality scale are determined by calculating the mean of the numerical responses to each categorical question. Scores for each scale may range from an average of 1 (indicating low levels of the personality trait) to an average of 5 (indicating high levels of the personality trait).

**Achievement Goal Questionnaire (AGQ).** Designed by Elliot and McGregor (2001), the original AGQ measures performance (approach and avoidance) and mastery (approach and avoidance) orientation in a course specific context. Generalizing the AGQ to a more domain-specific context (i.e. general academic achievement as opposed to course-specific achievement), Finney, Pieper, and Barron (2004) calculated reliabilities for three of the four goal orientation variables of over .70: Performance-Approach Orientation = .88; Mastery-Approach = .74; Mastery-Avoidance = .76. The fourth goal orientation, Performance-Avoidance, had a Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of .68, which was consistent with that of the Elliot and McGregor instrument, .64. For the present study, the internal reliability of the synthesis of the factored scales into more general categories of “Overall Performance Orientation” and “Overall Mastery Orientation” revealed Cronbach’s alphas of .85 (n=308) and .73 (n=308), respectively. These “Overall” scales will be used without

factor analysis, as this study aims to establish a fundamental relationship between personality variables and goal orientation in general.

The version of the AGQ employed in this study requires that respondents rate the validity of each of 12 statements as they apply to the respondents' attitudes toward mastery and performance in their college classes during the semester along a 7-point Likert scale in which 1 = "not at all true of me" and 7 = "very true of me." Scores are calculated by taking the mean among the statement clusters for each of the four goal orientations. Mean scores can range from 1 (indicating no association with the goal orientation) to 7 (indicating a strong association with the goal orientation) for each goal orientation category. Sample statements for which respondents must provide a level of personal validity include: "My goal this semester is to get better grades than most of the other students" and "I just want to avoid doing poorly compared to other students this semester" (from the performance domain); and "Completely mastering the material in my classes is important to me this semester" and "I am definitely concerned that I may not learn all I can this semester" (from the mastery domain).

## **Procedures**

Students were introduced to the personality assessment activity first in the course syllabus at the beginning of the semester and again in class, when they were made aware of the availability of the online survey and provided instruction on how to access it. The online survey was available for students to access via the course website. The students were given 10 days to complete the survey. During this 10-day period, students received two reminders via email, which included the web link to the online survey, and one reminder in class, with the web link to the online survey projected on a large screen in the

lecture hall. At the end of the data collection period, the survey was taken offline and was no longer accessible to participants. Data were downloaded from the survey instrument and imported into an Excel file. Individual reports were prepared for the students by calculating their average scores on each of the Big Five personality traits, as per the agreement in the course assignment. This information was returned to the students on an individual basis, and a whole-class lecture was provided that explained the data and how students might use it when choosing their careers. Once the data were sorted and the results were returned to the students, all identifying information (i.e., student names) was removed from the existing dataset. Use of the “clean” dataset was approved by the Institutional Review Board for this study (see Appendix B for IRB approval). Statistical software was used to calculate the resulting descriptive data and correlation coefficients.

## **Results**

Using the “clean” dataset, data gathered from the three instruments were calculated according to the protocol for each. An NPI score, mean scores for the BFI scales, mean scores for the AGQ scales (Performance-Approach, Performance-Avoidance, Mastery-Approach, and Mastery-Avoidance), and mean scores for the non-factorial, general Overall Performance Orientation and Overall Mastery Orientation scales were determined for each respondent. For the purpose of this study, the BFI scales for Openness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism will not be discussed, as the data are superfluous to the relationships sought herein. Descriptive statistical data relevant to the current study are summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

*Summary of Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for NPI, BFI, and AGQ Scales*

Scale	M	SD
Narcissism (NPI)	16.14	6.29
Extraversion (BFI)	3.52	.81
Agreeableness (BFI)	3.99	.54
Overall Mastery Orientation (AGQ)	4.56	1.03
Overall Performance Orientation (AGQ)	4.58	1.31

*Note.* The range of scores for the NPI is 0-40; the range of scores for the BFI is 1-5; the range of scores for the AGQ is 1-7.

### **Research Question One: Narcissism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness**

The first research question seeks to determine whether a relationship exists between NPI scores for narcissism and BFI scores for the Big Five personality traits of extraversion (E) and agreeableness (A). Previous research has determined a positive relationship between narcissism and extraversion and a negative relationship between narcissism and agreeableness (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). To determine the existence of a relationship in this study, a bivariate analysis using Pearson's  $r$  was performed on the NPI scores and the mean scores for the BFI subscales for E and A. The findings indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between narcissism and extraversion ( $r=.473, p<.01$ ) and a statistically significant inverse relationship between narcissism and agreeableness ( $r=-.187, p<.01$ ).

### **Research Question Two: Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Goal Orientation**

The second research question seeks to determine whether a relationship exists between the BFI scores for extraversion (E) and agreeableness (A) and the AGQ scores for Performance and Mastery goal orientations. Previous findings from Zweig and Webster (2004) indicate that extraversion was positively correlated with both Mastery and Performance goal orientations; further, their study revealed a positive correlation between agreeableness and Mastery goal. For the present study, a bivariate analysis using Pearson's  $r$  was performed on the mean scores for the BFI subscales for E and A and on the mean scores for Overall Mastery orientation and Overall Performance orientation. The findings indicate that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between Overall Mastery orientation and agreeableness ( $r=.200, p<.01$ ). The data revealed no statistically significant relationships between extraversion and Overall Mastery orientation or between extraversion, agreeableness, and Overall Performance orientation.

### **Research Question Three: Narcissism and Goal Orientation**

The third research question seeks to determine whether a relationship exists between NPI scores and the AGQ scores for Overall Performance orientation and Overall Mastery goal orientation. No previous data exist regarding this relationship. In the present study, a bivariate analysis using Pearson's  $r$  was performed on the NPI scores and the mean Overall Performance and Overall Mastery scores on the AGQ. The data indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between narcissism scores and Overall Performance goal orientation ( $r=.143, p<.05$ ).

## Discussion

The goal of the present study was to determine the relationships between narcissism, the Big Five personality traits of extraversion (E) and agreeableness (A), and achievement goal orientations; and to determine the existence of a previously unexplored relationship between narcissism and achievement goal orientation.

The first research question in the present study explored the previously determined relationship between narcissism and the Big Five traits of E and A. The results revealed a statistically moderately positive relationship between narcissism and the Big Five trait of extraversion ( $r=.473, p<.01$ ) as well as a statistically low inverse relationship between narcissism and the Big Five trait of agreeableness ( $r=-.187, p<.01$ ). These results are consistent with those found in studies conducted by Buss and Chiodo (1991) and Paulhus and Williams (2002), wherein they confirm the construct of narcissism is comprised in part by a Low A trait and a High E trait. In their 1991 study, Buss and Chiodo determined a positive correlation between extraversion and narcissism ( $r=.38, p<.001$ ). Further, in their 2002 study, Paulhus and Williams determined a positive correlation between extraversion and narcissism ( $r=.42, p<.05$ ) as well as a negative correlation between agreeableness and narcissism ( $r=-.36, p<.05$ ).

While the data in the present study do confirm the construct of the “disagreeable extravert,” the statistics do not provide enough support to suggest that Low A and High E are the only traits included in the composition of the dispositionally narcissistic personality; other traits from the Big Five most assuredly factor into the construction of narcissism with varying degrees of intensity. Further research should explore the relationships between the remaining personality traits within the Big Five (Openness,

Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism) and narcissism as measured on the NPI in order to ascertain a more robust view of narcissism as a disposition.

The second research question in this study confirmed earlier empirical findings from Zweig and Webster (2004), which indicated “significant relationships between most personality factors and goal orientation” (p. 1702). Seeking to determine whether a relationship exists between achievement goal orientation and the Big Five traits of agreeableness (A) and extraversion (E), the present data indicate the existence of a statistically low relationship between A and mastery goal orientation ( $r=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ), findings which are not inconsistent with the 2004 Zweig and Webster study ( $r=.29$ ,  $p<.001$ ). That is, those whose personalities tend toward empathy, cooperation, trust, and modesty (Costa & Widiger, 1994) are found to be intrinsically motivated and find enjoyment through efforts they exert in the completion of tasks or in problem-solving. In their 2004 study, Zweig and Webster also reported statistically significant relationships between E and mastery goal orientation (MGO;  $r=.21$ ,  $p<.001$ ), E and performance-avoidance goal orientation ( $r=-.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and A and performance-avoidance goal orientation ( $r=-.15$ ,  $p<.001$ ); further, in their 2007 study, Wang and Erdheim reported a statistically significant relationship between E and MGO ( $r=.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Surprisingly, and inconsistent with the previous research, the present findings reveal no significant relationship between E and MGO, no significant relationship between E and performance goal orientation (PGO), and no significant relationship between A and PGO. Additional investigations are needed to determine achievement goal orientations among composites of the Big Five as they correspond to narcissism to determine the ways in which

“personality factors combine to create people’s different orientations toward learning and goals” (Zweig & Webster, 2004, p. 1705).

The theoretical assumption that the “disagreeable extravert” may be predisposed toward a performance goal orientation (PGO) is indeed supported by the data in the present study, which indicates a statistically low relationship between narcissism and PGO. Individuals with a PGO, according to Dweck (2008b), come from a fixed mindset wherein they “care first and foremost about how they’ll be judged: smart or not smart” (p. 35). This priority, combined with the narcissistic tendency toward self-enhancement and proclivity toward exhibitionism, suggests that there are a great many potential impediments for dispositional narcissists with PGO in learning environments; the need for recognition and public validation drives their efforts in the classroom, and they are less inclined to take risks and make errors for fear of appearing less than stellar in the eyes of their peers. Additional research is needed to explore the nuances of the relationship between narcissism and PGO, which was initially brought to light in this study.

### **Limitations**

Like all research that uses self-report measures, the results of this study may have been affected by common methods bias including social desirability bias and consistency motif. Social desirability bias occurs when the respondents tend “to present themselves in a favorable light, regardless of their true feelings about an issue or topic” (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003, p. 881). A social desirability bias coupled with a consistency motif, in which respondents “try to maintain consistency in their responses to similar questions or to organize information in consistent ways” (Podsakoff, et al., 2003, p.



881), may offer some explanation as to why some of the findings in this study are inconsistent with those in previous research.

Because their identities were initially provided and linked to the results of the BFI measure for the classroom assignment, respondents may have been more susceptible to a social desirability bias. Wanting to appear more socially acceptable and attractive, respondents may have opted for the more favorable responses and maintained a consistent set of responses for similar questions throughout the survey. These biases together have the potential to act as “suppressor variables” that hide the actual relationships between variables or “moderator variables” that influence the relationships between variables (Podsakoff, et al., 2003, p. 881), which may have impacted the strength of statistical significance among the variables in this study.

Future iterations of this study will take additional steps to account for common methods bias including the temporal separation of the various instruments, asking respondents to complete the NPI, the BFI, and the AGQ questionnaires as discrete entities at different times. Psychological separation of the instruments is also a potential remedy for consistency motif biases, wherein each questionnaire has its own “cover story” to make it appear unique and unrelated to the other instruments (Podsakoff, et al., 2003). In addition to these methodological considerations to account for common methods bias, treatments of the relationship between narcissism and goal orientation should include a qualitative component that would allow researchers to augment the quantitative findings with explanatory narratives. Such a component might include observations, interviews with the participants, and interviews with those who know the participants and their personality traits and behavioral tendencies.

## Conclusion

If the statistical trends identified by Jean Twenge and her colleagues (2008) indeed suggest an increase in NPI scores among university undergraduates across the U.S., then an increasing trend in performance goal orientation may also be anticipated. In light of Pintrich's (1994) suggestion that the goal of research in educational psychology is not only to better understand the constructs of learning, thinking, and motivation, but also "actually to improve learning" (p. 141), this study contributes to these efforts by identifying a connection between a student's personality construct and his or her goal orientation. In order to help students become better learners, educators must recognize those myriad variables that constitute their cognitive behaviors and develop teaching strategies that enhance learning strategies (Wolters, 2004).

Further, heeding Pashler's (2009) admonition that "research needs to be the foundation for upgrading teaching and learning" and that "its primary focus should be on the experiences, activities, and challenges that enhance everybody's learning" (p. 117), an empirical establishment of the relationships between personality constructs and goal orientation promises to contribute to the growing body of "best practice" discourse. Demonstrating the empirical relationship between narcissism and performance goal orientation encourages further study into the strengths, conditions, causes, and predictability of these relationships in educational settings. The recognition of this relationship also allows for the development of a heuristic through which educators may develop proactive, interventive instructional models and pedagogies that will encourage all students to improve their learning by engaging in strategies that lead to deeper cognitive

and metacognitive processing (de Raad & Schouwenburg, 1996; Somuncuoglu & Yildirim, 1999).

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## Conclusion to the Dissertation

*I cannot but think that to apperceive your pupil as a little sensitive, impulsive, associative, and reactive organism, partly fated and partly free, will lead to a better intelligence of all his ways. Understand him, then, as such a subtle little piece of machinery. And if, in addition, you can also see him sub specie boni, and love him as well, you will be in the best possible position for becoming perfect teachers.*

William James, 1899/1958, p. 131

Mirroring William James' sentiment that knowing a student well will lead to a "better intelligence of all his ways" is Pintrich's (1994) pronouncement that educational psychologists should concern ourselves with those variables that "improve learning." This dissertation is an attempt to better come to know those variables that constitute the individual differences and influence the behaviors of the "subtle little pieces of machinery" in our college classrooms. The idea for this dissertation, in its infancy, began as a visceral reaction to movements in popular culture that both celebrate and vilify the contemporary university undergraduate as a narcissist. The pervasive rhetoric of the growing "narcissism epidemic" among such an important population coupled with an absence of educational research that speaks to the academic implications of such an epidemic led me to consider whether individuals with more narcissistic dispositions learn differently. This questioning contributes to the larger discourse that considers the role that personality plays in our intellectual capacity.

The operational definition of narcissism developed in Manuscript #1 of this dissertation identifies narcissism as "a personality construct that is comprised of varying degrees of personality traits and trait facets, which are distributed across the five hierarchical dimensions of normal personality." Along a continuum, we all have narcissistic tendencies—whether high or low—which contribute to our overall personality. The

Triarchic Model of Dispositional Narcissism seeks to detail the relationships between these “normal” narcissistic aspects of our personalities to our learning strategies by making a connection between narcissism and goal orientation.

Manuscript #1 drew from the known relationships between narcissism and the Big Five personality traits of extraversion (E) and agreeableness (A) and the known relationships between E and A and achievement goal orientation to theorize a relationship between narcissism and goal orientation. Manuscript #2 empirically challenged these relationships, finding correlations between narcissism and the Big Five traits of E and A; a correlation between the Big Five trait of A and mastery goal orientation; and a correlation between narcissism and performance goal orientation. It is my hope that the findings in this empirical study—the first in the body of literature to consider the relationship between narcissism and goal orientation—serve to open doors and additional opportunities to connect specific personality traits and trait constructs with significant aspects of learning, to recognize personality as a variable in learning.

Despite James’ appreciation for their complexity, he “never confused acquaintance with the needs of students with acquiescence to their whims” (Pajares, 2003, p. 55) and nor should we as contemporary researchers and practitioners. Recognizing the potentiality of narcissism as a variable that influences a student’s goal orientation should serve only to raise an additional opportunity for acquaintance with our students. If we know that students are coming to us with particular learning strategies, then we stand a better chance of instituting pedagogies that support the development of beneficial, adaptive practices; we stand a better chance of creating learner-centered instructional environments, which will

account for the individual needs and differences of all students and that will lead them to “better intelligence” and “improved learning.”

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*entitlement.* New York, NY: Free Press.

## Appendix A

### Personality and Goal Orientation Survey

Please enter the requested information below. Your responses to these questions will remain absolutely confidential. The information gathered from this survey will be used in class to link your personality tendencies with your goal orientation inclinations. This information, when viewed together, may be a reasonable predictor for career trajectory and workplace performance, as well as for academic and athletic performance.

You will be given 25 points for the completion of this survey. Please note: ALL QUESTIONS MUST BE ANSWERED if you are to be given credit for the survey. Data from the survey will be analyzed, and you will receive a report of your answers, their correlations, and their practical implications.

The first part of this survey asks for basic demographic information that will be of use when sorting the data and providing you with a report that you might use to determine appropriate career options.

This survey is comprised of three separate inventories: Inventory #1 and Inventory #2 are concerned with different aspects of your self-reported personality. Inventory #1 consists of 40 questions; Inventory #2 consists of 44 questions. Inventory #3, which consists of 12 questions, deals with your personal goal orientations. All of the inventory questions are multiple-choice.

Please answer all of the questions completely and honestly.

While this data may be used beyond this course in other research pursuits, your personal information will remain absolutely anonymous.

---

#### Demographic Information

1. Name

2. Sex:

- Male
- Female

3. In what year were you born?

4. What is your year in school?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior



5. What is your major? (If double major, please list both.)
  6. What is your expected semester and year of graduation?
  7. What are your plans for after graduation?
    - Attend graduate school.
    - Attend a professional/trade school.
    - Enter the workforce.
    - Enter the military.
    - Pursue a career in an athletic profession.
    - Other:
  8. Indicate in the space provided below your anticipated career trajectory. That is, what career do you hope to have after completing the necessary education?
- 

### **Inventory #1 of 3**

This inventory consists of 40 pairs of statements with which you may or may not identify. Consider this example:

- A. I like having authority over people
- B. I don't mind following orders

Which of these two statements is closer to your own feelings about yourself? If you identify more with "liking to have authority over people" than with "not minding following orders," then you would choose option A.

You may identify with both A and B. In this case you should choose the statement that seems closer to yourself. Or, if you do not identify with either statement, select the one that is least objectionable or remote. In other words, read each pair of statements and then choose the one that is closer to your own feelings. Indicate your answer by selecting the letter (A or B) that corresponds with the statement that you wish to choose. Please do not skip any items.

Take your time and answer as honestly as you possibly can.

1.     A. I have a natural talent for influencing people.  
       B. I am not good at influencing people.
2.     A. Modesty doesn't become me.  
       B. I am essentially a modest person.
3.     A. I would do almost anything on a dare.  
       B. I tend to be a fairly cautious person.

4. A. When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed.  
B. I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.
5. A. The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.  
B. If I ruled the world it would be a better place.
6. A. I can usually talk my way out of anything.  
B. I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.
7. A. I prefer to blend in with the crowd.  
B. I like to be the center of attention.
8. A. I will be a success.  
B. I am not too concerned about success.
9. A. I am no better or worse than most people.  
B. I think I am a special person.
10. A. I am not sure if I would make a good leader.  
B. I see myself as a good leader.
11. A. I am assertive.  
B. I wish I were more assertive.
12. A. I like to have authority over other people.  
B. I don't mind following orders.
13. A. I find it easy to manipulate people.  
B. I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.
14. A. I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.  
B. I usually get the respect that I deserve.
15. A. I don't particularly like to show off my body.  
B. I like to show off my body.
16. A. I can read people like a book.  
B. People are sometimes hard to understand.
17. A. If I feel competent I am willing to take responsibility for making decisions.  
B. I like to take responsibility for making decisions.
18. A. I just want to be reasonably happy.  
B. I want to amount to something in the eyes of the world.

19. A. My body is nothing special.  
B. I like to look at my body.
20. A. I try not to be a show off.  
B. I will usually show off if I get the chance.
21. A. I always know what I am doing.  
B. Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing.
22. A. I sometimes depend on people to get things done.  
B. I rarely depend on anyone else to get things done.
23. A. Sometimes I tell good stories.  
B. Everybody likes to hear my stories.
24. A. I expect a great deal from other people.  
B. I like to do things for other people.
25. A. I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.  
B. I take my satisfactions as they come.
26. A. Compliments embarrass me.  
B. I like to be complimented.
27. A. I have a strong will to power.  
B. Power for its own sake doesn't interest me.
28. A. I don't care about new fads and fashions.  
B. I like to start new fads and fashions.
29. A. I like to look at myself in the mirror.  
B. I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror.
30. A. I really like to be the center of attention.  
B. It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention.
31. A. I can live my life in any way I want to.  
B. People can't always live their lives in terms of what they want.
32. A. Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me.  
B. People always seem to recognize my authority.
33. A. I would prefer to be a leader.  
B. It makes little difference to me whether I am a leader or not.
34. A. I am going to be a great person.

- B. I hope I am going to be successful.
35. A. People sometimes believe what I tell them.  
B. I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.
36. A. I am a born leader.  
B. Leadership is a quality that takes a long time to develop.
37. A. I wish somebody would someday write my biography.  
B. I don't like people to pry into my life for any reason.
38. A. I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.  
B. I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go out in public.
39. A. I am more capable than other people.  
B. There is a lot that I can learn from other people.
40. A. I am much like everybody else.  
B. I am an extraordinary person.

### Inventory #2 of 3

The following list of 44 statements suggests characteristics that may or may not apply to you.

For example, do you agree that you are someone who likes to spend time with others?

Please select a number for each statement that indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement as it applies to you using the following Likert scale:

Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5

**I see myself as someone who...**

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| __1. Is talkative                    | __23. Tends to be lazy                        |
| __2. Tends to find fault with others | __24. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset |
| __3. Does a thorough job             | __25. Is inventive                            |
| __4. Is depressed, blue              | __26. Has an assertive personality            |

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ___5. Is original, comes up with new ideas    | ___27. Can be cold and aloof                      |
| ___6. Is reserved                             | ___28. Perseveres until the task is finished      |
| ___7. Is helpful and unselfish with others    | ___29. Can be moody                               |
| ___8. Can be somewhat careless                | ___30. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences     |
| ___9. Is relaxed, handles stress well         | ___31. Is sometimes shy, inhibited                |
| ___10. Is curious about many different things | ___32. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone |
| ___11. Is full of energy                      | ___33. Does things efficiently                    |
| ___12. Starts quarrels with others            | ___34. Remains calm in tense situations           |
| ___13. Is a reliable worker                   | ___35. Prefers work that is routine               |
| ___14. Can be tense                           | ___36. Is outgoing, sociable                      |
| ___15. Is ingenious, a deep thinker           | ___37. Is sometimes rude to others                |
| ___16. Generates a lot of enthusiasm          | ___38. Makes plans and follows through with them  |
| ___17. Has a forgiving nature                 | ___39. Gets nervous easily                        |
| ___18. Tends to be disorganized               | ___40. Likes to reflect, play with ideas          |
| ___19. Worries a lot                          | ___41. Has few artistic interests                 |
| ___20. Has an active imagination              | ___42. Likes to cooperate with others             |
| ___21. Tends to be quiet                      | ___43. Is easily distracted                       |
| ___22. Is generally trusting                  | ___44. Is sophisticated in art, music, or         |

literature

---

### Inventory #3 of 3

The following 12 statements concern your attitudes toward learning and performance in your college classes **this semester**.

Please select a number for each statement that indicates the extent to which each of the following statements is true as it applies to you personally using the following Likert scale:

Not At All True of Me							Very True of Me
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Please consider each statement carefully and answer honestly.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. My goal this semester is to get better grades than most of the other students.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I am definitely concerned that I may not learn all I can this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The fear of performing poorly is what motivates me.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. I want to learn as much as possible this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. I want to do better than other students this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. I am afraid that I may not understand the content of my courses as thoroughly as I'd like.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. The most important thing for me this semester is to understand the content in my courses as thoroughly as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. I just want to avoid doing poorly compared to other students this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Completely mastering the material in my courses is important to me this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. It is important for me to do well compared to other students this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. I worry that I may not learn all that I possibly could this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. My goal this semester is to avoid performing poorly compared to other students.

---

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Please click SUBMIT when you have finished.

Once the data have been collected, you will be given a report outlining the details of your aggregate scores and their implications for career choices according to the research.

## Appendix B

### IRB Approval Letter



VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
e-mail [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
Website: [www.irb.vt.edu](http://www.irb.vt.edu)

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** November 9, 2010

**TO:** Joan Watson

**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires June 13, 2011)

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Exploring the Relationship Between Personality and Goal Orientation

**IRB NUMBER:** 10-975

Effective November 9, 2010, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm> (please review before the commencement of your research).

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved as: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5**

Protocol Approval Date: **11/9/2010**

Protocol Expiration Date: **11/8/2011**

Continuing Review Due Date\*: **10/25/2011**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

#### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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