

Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

<http://psp.sagepub.com/>

Wealth and the Inflated Self: Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism

Paul K. Piff

Pers Soc Psychol Bull published online 20 August 2013

DOI: 10.1177/0146167213501699

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://psp.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/19/0146167213501699>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Society for Personality and Social Psychology](http://www.spsociety.org)

Additional services and information for *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://psp.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://psp.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Aug 20, 2013

[What is This?](#)

Wealth and the Inflated Self: Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism

Paul K. Piff¹

Personality and Social
Psychology Bulletin
XX(X) 1–10
© 2013 by the Society for Personality
and Social Psychology, Inc
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0146167213501699
pspb.sagepub.com


Abstract

Americans may be more narcissistic now than ever, but narcissism is not evenly distributed across social strata. Five studies demonstrated that higher social class is associated with increased entitlement and narcissism. Upper-class individuals reported greater psychological entitlement (Studies 1a, 1b, and 2) and narcissistic personality tendencies (Study 2), and they were more likely to behave in a narcissistic fashion by opting to look at themselves in a mirror (Study 3). Finally, inducing egalitarian values in upper-class participants decreased their narcissism to a level on par with their lower-class peers (Study 4). These findings offer novel evidence regarding the influence of social class on the self and highlight the importance of social stratification to understanding basic psychological processes.

Keywords

social class, socioeconomic status, entitlement, narcissism, personality

Received April 22, 2013; revision accepted July 24, 2013

We've changed the way we think of ourselves as citizens. We don't think of ourselves as citizens in the old sense of being small parts of something larger and infinitely more important to which we have serious responsibilities. . . . We think of ourselves now as eaters of the [American] pie . . .

—Wallace, 2012, p. 138

In his analysis of the American ethos, the author David Foster Wallace describes a shift from communal values toward self-interest. His observation is corroborated by mounting empirical evidence: Americans today are experiencing unprecedented levels of narcissism (Twenge, 2006). College students are more self-centered than ever before (Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), teenagers deem fame a fundamental life goal (Halpern, 2007), and cultural products such as popular music reflect increasing self-focus—for instance, the song, “I Am a God” by the musician Kanye West (DeWall, Pond, Campbell, & Twenge, 2011).

However ubiquitous, growing societal narcissism may be qualified by an important caveat: Narcissism may not be evenly distributed across all strata of society. I propose that narcissism varies by people's social class (or socioeconomic status [SES])—their position vis-à-vis others in society in terms of their actual objective resources (e.g., wealth, education) and corresponding subjective perceptions of

social class rank (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012).

Social class uniquely shapes people's patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions (e.g., Fiske & Markus, 2012; Kraus et al., 2012; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). Relatively abundant resources and elevated rank afford upper-class individuals increased control over their lives, reduced exposure to external influences, and more personal choice, all of which promote greater independence and self-focus (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). In contrast, lower-class individuals, who have reduced resources, subordinate rank, and reduced personal control, are more interdependent and other-focused (e.g., Piff et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2007). Guided by these findings, I hypothesize that relative to their lower-class counterparts, upper-class individuals will exhibit increased narcissism and will do so, in part, because of their increased sense of entitlement. By testing this hypothesis, I extend research on social class to examine its influences on personality and the self-concept.

¹University of California, Berkeley, USA

Corresponding Author:

Paul K. Piff, Department of Psychology, University of California, 3210 Tolman Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-1650, USA.
Email: paulpiff@gmail.com

Narcissistic Personalities

Narcissism is a multifaceted construct characterized by an inflated view of the self, a self-aggrandizing and dominant orientation toward others, increased grandiosity, and heightened feelings of uniqueness and individualism (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Twenge et al., 2008). One of the primary determinants of narcissism is psychological entitlement (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009)—a sense that one deserves more and is more important than others (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). Entitlement is a global and pervasive dimension of the self-concept that orients the individual toward maintaining an enhanced status vis-à-vis others and, as such, is a primary motivator of narcissistic tendencies (Brown et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2004; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004).

Narcissism varies by culture. For example, individuals from Western countries (e.g., the United States) tend to be more narcissistic than those from Eastern countries (e.g., China; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). These findings imply an association between cultural values of individualism and narcissism. Specifically, factors that emphasize individual achievement and “standing out from the crowd” may promote narcissism (e.g., Cai, Kwan, & Sedikides, 2012). Cultural processes related to economic prosperity, including increased urban living, formal schooling, and commerce may also shift values away from collectivism toward individualism and, in turn, narcissism (Greenfield, 2009; Keller, 2012). This research suggests not only that eras with more economic prosperity may tend toward narcissism but also that individuals with relatively greater economic advantage may be more narcissistic. I submit that the socio-cultural environments of different social-class groups—which vary in their levels of affluence and differentially emphasize individual versus communal tendencies—shape different levels of entitlement and narcissism.

Social Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism

Studies of class differences in the way people perceive themselves and act toward others indicate that higher class may be associated with increased entitlement and narcissism (e.g., Kraus et al., 2012; Piff et al., 2010; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). Lower-class individuals are more likely to spend time taking care of others (Argyle, 1994), and they are more embedded in social networks that depend on mutual aid (Lamont, 2000; Piff, Stancato, Martinez, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012). By contrast, upper-class individuals prioritize independence from others: They are less motivated than lower-class individuals to build social relationships (Kraus & Keltner, 2009) and instead seek to differentiate themselves from others (Stephens et al., 2007).

Upper-class individuals also behave in a more self-interested fashion. In one study, upper-class individuals proved more selfish in an economic game (Piff et al., 2010). In other research, upper-class individuals showed reduced sensitivity to others' suffering (Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012) and exhibited increased tendencies toward self-serving unethical behavior (Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). To the extent that upper-class individuals are more independent, self-focused, and self-interested, they may also display increased entitlement and narcissism.

Cross-cultural research on narcissism further supports my hypothesis. Foster and colleagues (2003) found a small but positive association between income and self-reported narcissism worldwide. In another study, self-identified relatively rich Chinese individuals expressed more narcissism than their less affluent counterparts (Cai et al., 2012). Although the specific factors underlying these associations remain untested, this initial evidence indicates that upper-class individuals may feel more entitled and narcissistic than lower-class individuals.

An Alternative Hypothesis

Certain conceptual analyses and empirical findings suggest a competing hypothesis to my own and merit elaboration. The hypothesis that lower-class individuals may feel *less*, not *more*, entitled could seem inherently paradoxical. Lower-class individuals are—objectively and in terms of subjective construal—more disadvantaged, and it would stand to reason that they might feel more deserving than upper-class individuals. Research on conspicuous consumption further underscores an alternative hypothesis. Conspicuous consumption refers to the acquisition of luxury goods and services to signal one's wealth or status to others (Sundie et al., 2011), and it is associated with self-indulgence and narcissism (Rose, 2007). Select studies have found that lower-status individuals (e.g., ethnic minorities)—partly in an effort to compensate for lacking status—are more desiring of luxury material goods (Mazzocco, Rucker, Galinsky, & Anderson, 2012) and devote larger shares of their expenditures to visible luxury (Charles, Hurst, & Roussanov, 2009). By implication, one might expect lower-class individuals to engage in more conspicuous consumption, which may underlie increased narcissism.

However, social status and social class are conceptually distinct constructs, and findings for one construct do not necessarily generalize to the other (Kraus et al., 2012). In addition, whereas narcissistic personality may be linked to conspicuous consumption, it is not reducible to it (Rose, 2007). Thus, although select indirect evidence reasonably points to an alternative hypothesis, the research concerning social class, interdependence, and prosociality, as well as the cross-cultural findings that directly link income to narcissism, strongly favor my prediction: Upper-class individuals are more prone to feelings of entitlement and narcissistic tendencies.

The Present Research

I conducted five studies using nationwide and university samples to test the associations between social class, entitlement, and narcissism. Studies 1a and 1b tested the link between class and self-reported entitlement. Study 2 examined whether upper-class individuals scored higher on a scale of narcissistic personality in part because of increased entitlement. Study 3 investigated the association between class and a narcissistic behavior—looking at oneself in the mirror. Finally, Study 4 explored whether inducing egalitarian values—that is, the antithesis of entitlement—would eliminate class differences in narcissism. Across studies, I sought to generalize my results across operationalizations of social class and therefore used assessments that represent the construct's two core facets: objective resources (e.g., educational attainment, income) and subjective social-class rank (Adler et al., 2000).

Study 1a: Social Class and Psychological Entitlement

Study 1a examined the association between scores on measures of social class and psychological entitlement in a nationwide sample of adults. In testing my hypothesis, I also controlled for ethnicity and gender, factors that co-vary with social class and narcissism and could influence my results (e.g., Foster et al., 2003).

Participants and Procedure

I recruited 195 adults (129 female, 6 unreported; age 18–72, $M = 33.82$, $SD = 13.26$) from several online community forums to complete a survey for a chance to win a \$50 gift certificate. One hundred forty-one participants selected European American as comprising their ethnic background, 17 selected Asian American, and 63 selected African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (two unreported; the sum of these categories exceeds 195 because participants could select multiple categories).

After giving consent and completing filler items, participants completed the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; Campbell et al., 2004), a nine-item measure of the extent to which individuals feel they deserve more than others. Sample items include “I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others” and “I do not necessarily deserve special treatment” (reverse-scored). All items are answered on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. The PES has demonstrated good reliability, validity, internal consistency, and stability across time (Campbell et al., 2004; Pryor, Miller, & Gaughan, 2008). Scores on the scale were reliable ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.18$).

Participants also completed the MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES to index social class (Adler et al., 2000). On an image of a ladder containing 10 rungs representing people

with different levels of income, education, and occupational prestige, participants selected a rung to represent where they feel they stand relative to others.¹ Scores on this measure ranged from 1 to 10 ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.91$), indicating that the sample represented the full spectrum of social-class backgrounds.

Results

I computed partial correlations between social class and entitlement while accounting for participants’ ethnicity (1 = European American, 0 = non-European American) and gender (1 = male, 0 = female). As predicted, higher social class was associated with increased scores on the PES, $r(178) = .17$, $p = .021$. The zero-order correlation between these variables were virtually identical (in subsequent studies, too, results were unchanged without controlling for ethnicity and gender).

Study 1b: Replicating and Extending the Association Between Social Class and Psychological Entitlement

In Study 1b, I examined the relationship between social class and entitlement in a sample of university students. I tested my prediction using an assessment of subjective social class—paralleling Study 1a—and an objective indicator of social class (parental education; e.g., Stephens et al., 2007), which allowed me to ascertain the generalizability of my results across distinct operationalizations of social class.

Participants and Procedure

One hundred five undergraduates (62 female; age 18–36, $M = 20.33$, $SD = 2.52$) received partial course credit in exchange for completing the study. Thirty-seven participants selected European American as comprising their ethnic background, 50 selected Asian American, and 33 selected African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported; the sum of these categories exceeds 105 because participants could select multiple categories).

Participants were seated at computers in individual sound-attenuated cubicles. After giving consent and completing several unrelated measures, participants completed the PES to index entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004; $\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.19$). To assess social class, participants first completed the MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES by indicating their position on a 10-rung ladder relative to others in society (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.72$). I also asked participants to report the educational attainment of both their parents: (1) did not finish high school, (2) high school graduate or some college, (3) college graduate, or (4) postgraduate degree. I standardized, summed, and averaged mothers’ and fathers’ educational attainment to create an overall measure

of each participant's parental educational attainment ($M = 0$, $SD = .92$). Parental educational attainment is considered a fundamental objective indicator of social class and has been used as such in prior research (e.g., Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). In the current study, scores on the MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES and parental educational attainment were highly correlated, $r(102) = .52$, $p < .001$. These findings parallel prior work arguing that subjective and objective measures of social class, though distinct, are strongly conceptually and empirically related (e.g., Adler et al., 2000; Kraus et al., 2012).

Results and Discussion

I tested the partial correlations between the two measures of social class and the measure of entitlement while accounting for participants' ethnicity (1 = European American, 0 = non-European American) and gender (1 = male, 0 = female). Central to my hypothesis, parental educational attainment—an objective indicator of social class—was positively associated with scores on the PES, $r(93) = .22$, $p = .036$. Furthermore, paralleling my earlier findings, higher scores on the MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES were also marginally associated with increased entitlement, $r(96) = .19$, $p = .059$.

Taken together, the results of Studies 1a and 1b provide initial evidence for the central hypothesis guiding this investigation. Across subjective and objective indicators of social class, higher social-class standing was positively associated with increased feelings of entitlement in an adult and university student sample. In the following studies, I shift my attention to the relationship between social class and the broader construct of narcissism.

Study 2: Social Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism

In Study 2, I advanced my initial findings in several key ways. First, I assessed the relationship between social class and narcissism with a widely used measure of narcissistic personality tendencies (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Second, I sought to replicate the association between class and entitlement in a different sample with a different measure of entitlement and a resource-based index of class: income (e.g., Côté, Piff, & Willer, 2013). Third, I tested my theoretical framework in which the relationship between social class and narcissism is explained, in part, by psychological entitlement.

Participants and Procedure

One hundred eighty-two undergraduates (90 female, 7 unreported) received partial course credit in exchange for participation. Nine participants were excluded because of substantial missing data, leaving 173 participants in the final sample (age 18–45, $M = 20.67$, $SD = 2.81$). Thirty-four participants were European American, 100 were Asian

American, and the remaining 38 were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported).

Participants were seated at computers in private cubicles. After giving consent, participants completed the Me Versus Other Scale—a visual, nonverbal measure of entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004). This measure contains seven sets of four circles, with each set containing three circles labeled “other” and one circle labeled “me.” The size of the “me” circle steadily increases across the seven sets, from being significantly smaller than the others to significantly larger. The size of the circles representing the others does not vary. Participants select the set of circles to represent how they see themselves relative to others ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.33$). Prior research has validated this scale as a visual measure of entitlement—for instance, it is positively and specifically associated with the PES (Campbell et al., 2004).

To measure narcissism, participants completed the forced-choice version of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), a well-validated, reliable, and widely used instrument for assessing subclinical narcissism. The NPI presents participants with 40 two-statement pairs and asks them to select the statement from each pair that best describes themselves. Example items are “I like to look at myself in the mirror” (narcissistic) or “I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror” (nonnarcissistic), and “I am more capable than other people” (narcissistic) or “There is a lot I can learn from other people” (nonnarcissistic). The NPI contains several different factors (e.g., authority, exhibitionism, and exploitativeness), but for the purposes of the current study, I totaled responses to all 40 items to compute a global measure of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2004; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Scores ranged from 1 to 34 and demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 14.79$, $SD = 6.42$).

To index social class, participants reported their parents' current annual salary and total household income using eight categories: (a) <\$15,000, (b) \$15,001–\$25,000, (c) \$25,001–\$35,000, (d) \$35,001–\$50,000, (e) \$50,001–\$75,000, (f) \$75,001–\$100,000, (g) \$100,001–\$150,000, or (h) >\$150,000. Annual salary and household income were highly correlated, $r(165) = .90$, $p < .001$, and were standardized and averaged to compute an overall measure of social class ($M = .007$, $SD = .970$).

Results and Discussion

I tested the associations between social class, the Me Versus Other Scale, and the NPI, while also accounting for participants' ethnicity (1 = European American, 0 = non-European American) and gender (1 = male, 0 = female). As predicted, social class was positively associated with the Me Versus Other Scale, $r(159) = .16$, $p = .044$. Social class was also positively associated with scores on the NPI, $r(143) = .16$, $p = .055$. Moreover, the Me Versus Other Scale was positively associated with the NPI, $r(151) = .43$, $p < .001$.

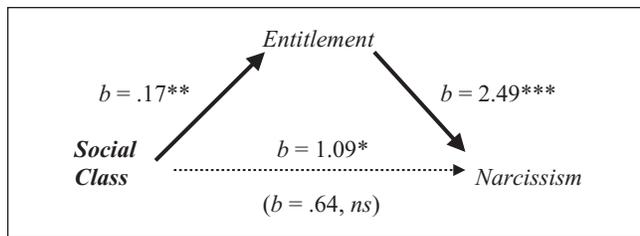


Figure 1. The relationship between social class and narcissism, mediated by entitlement (Study 2).

* $p < .055$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Prior work indicates that entitlement is a primary motivator of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2009). I tested whether entitlement—as indexed by the Me Versus Other Scale—mediated the relationship between class and narcissism. The results of this analysis are displayed in Figure 1. As reported above, higher social class predicted higher scores on the Me Versus Other Scale, $t(162) = 2.03$, $p = .044$, and the NPI, $t(146) = 1.93$, $p = .055$. When the Me Versus Other Scale was entered alongside social class into a linear regression model to predict the NPI, social class ceased to be a significant predictor, $t(146) = 1.23$, $p = .22$, whereas the Me Versus Other Scale remained significant, $t(146) = 5.26$, $p < .001$. Moreover, the Preacher & Hayes (2008) bootstrapping technique (with 10,000 iterations) produced a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect that did not include zero (range = .058 to 1.035). These findings suggest that upper-class individuals are prone to increased narcissism, and this association is due in part to their greater sense of entitlement.²

Study 3: Social Class and Looking at Oneself in a Mirror

Study 3 used a novel laboratory paradigm to assess a behavioral signal of narcissism. Specifically, I tested whether upper-class individuals would be more likely to behave in a narcissistic fashion by choosing to look at their reflections in a mirror.

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred forty-four undergraduates (147 female, 1 unreported) received partial course credit for their participation in the study. Fifteen participants were excluded due to experimenter error during data collection and two participants were excluded for identifying the purpose of the study, leaving a total of 227 participants in the final sample (age 18–32, $M = 20.57$, $SD = 2.58$). Fifty-five participants were European American, 110 were Asian American, and 59 were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (three unreported).

Participants were seated at computers and provided consent before completing demographics, including a measure of

social class in which they indicated their agreement with five statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; Griskevicius, Tybur, Delton, & Robertson, 2011): “I have enough money to buy things I want,” “I don’t need to worry too much about paying my bills,” “My family usually had enough money for things when I was growing up,” “I grew up in a relatively wealthy neighborhood,” and “I felt relatively wealthy compared to the other kids in my school.” Responses were summed and averaged to index social class ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.30$).³ Participants also indicated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with two statements assessing their self-consciousness about their appearances: “I’m self-conscious about the way I look” and “I’m concerned about the way I present myself” (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975; $\alpha = .65$, $M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.31$).

The computer then prompted participants to exit the lab and enter the hall. The experimenter greeted the participants and asked them whether she or he could take their photos for an upcoming study on facial perception. Participants were told that the photo was optional and confidential. One participant elected not to have his picture taken. After participants agreed to the photo, the experimenter pointed to a mirror approximately 11 feet down the hall and informed the participants that they could use it, if they wanted, to “fix yourself up for the photo.” The experimenter then left participants (ostensibly) alone in the hall to retrieve the camera from the lab. Unbeknownst to participants, 20 feet down the hall, a second experimenter—posing as a student studying at a desk—discreetly observed and recorded whether participants walked to the mirror to look at their reflections (0 = no, 1 = yes). One hundred forty-two participants (approximately 63%) in the current study elected to look at themselves in the mirror.

This measure assessed narcissistic tendencies in that, by looking at themselves in the mirror, participants were signaling increased interest in their physical appearances, and this was based on several guiding principles. First, attention to one’s appearance is a defining feature of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008); second, several items in the NPI specifically reference interest in one’s appearance (e.g., “I like to look at myself in the mirror”); third, similar measures have been used in past research on narcissism (see Exner, 1995).

Results and Discussion

Using a binary logistic framework, I regressed whether participants looked at themselves in the mirror onto social class, ethnicity (1 = European American, 0 = non-European American), and gender (1 = male, 0 = female). Ethnicity was unrelated to mirror looking, but men were less likely than women to look in the mirror, $b = -.67$, $SE b = .29$, $p = .02$. As expected, upper-class individuals were more likely to look at themselves in the mirror relative to lower-class individuals, $b = .22$, $SE b = .11$, and $p = .047$. The association between

class and mirror looking remained unchanged when controlling for self-consciousness ($b = .22, p = .047$). These findings indicate that upper-class individuals were more prone to behave narcissistically by looking at themselves in the mirror and that this tendency was not reducible to self-consciousness about appearance.

Study 4: Social Class, Egalitarian Values, and Narcissism

Study 4 further tested why upper-class individuals are more narcissistic. In Study 2, I found that feelings of entitlement—as indexed by the Me Versus Other Scale—mediated the association between class and narcissism. In the current study, I used a moderation-of-process design to further test this mechanism (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). I examined whether a manipulation that increases egalitarian values—and thus reduces entitlement—would decrease the narcissism of upper-class individuals to match their lower-class counterparts.

Participants and Procedure

One hundred thirty-nine participants (82 female) completed an online study via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Two participants were excluded due to substantial missing data, leaving 137 participants in the final sample (age 20-73, $M = 37.80, SD = 13.72$). One hundred two participants were European American, 12 were Asian American, and the remaining 22 were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported).

After providing consent, participants reported their demographics and social class using the same five items as Study 3. Responses were summed, averaged, and standardized ($\alpha = .76, M = 0, SD = 1.00$). Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two priming conditions. In the egalitarian-prime condition, participants were instructed to list three benefits of regarding others as equals. In the neutral-prime condition, participants listed three activities they did during an average day. To verify that I successfully induced egalitarian values (and decreased entitlement), participants completed the PES (Campbell et al., 2004; $\alpha = .90, M = 3.32, SD = 1.19$). Finally, participants completed the NPI to index their narcissistic tendencies (Raskin & Terry, 1988; $\alpha = .90, M = 11.89, SD = 7.72$).

Results and Discussion

Participants in the egalitarian-prime condition reported significantly lower entitlement ($M = 2.99$) than those in the control condition ($M = 3.61$), $t(135) = 3.15, p = .002, d = .54$, indicating that I successfully induced egalitarian values.

My central prediction was that priming egalitarianism would moderate the association between social class and

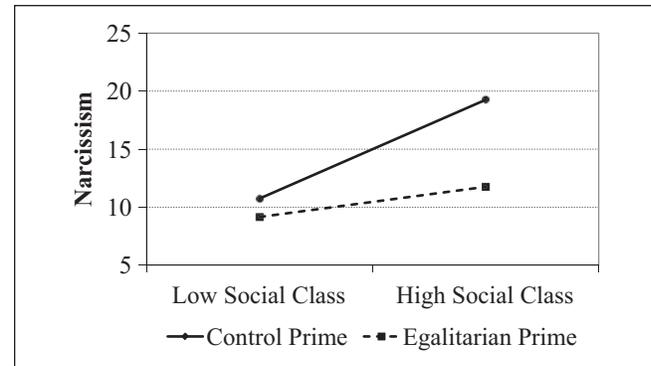


Figure 2. The relationship between social class and narcissism, moderated by the egalitarian prime (from Study 4).

narcissism. I regressed NPI scores on social class, priming condition (1 = egalitarian, 0 = control), their interaction, ethnicity (1 = European American, 0 = non-European American), and gender (1 = male, 0 = female). The effect for ethnicity was nonsignificant ($p = .52$), but men were more narcissistic than women, $b = 2.71, SE b = 1.23, t(126) = 2.20, p = .029$. Further, upper-class participants reported greater narcissism than lower-class participants, $b = 4.00, SE b = .86, t(126) = 4.64, p < .001$, and egalitarian-prime participants reported less narcissism than neutral-prime participants, $b = -4.56, SE b = 1.22, t(126) = -3.73, p < .001$. These effects were qualified by the predicted significant interaction between social class and priming condition, $b = -2.89, SE b = 1.20, t(126) = -2.42, p = .017$. As shown in Figure 2, in the neutral prime condition, upper-class participants expressed more narcissism than lower-class participants, $t(126) = 4.64, p < .001$. When primed with egalitarianism, however, upper-class participants exhibited low levels of narcissism comparable to their lower-class counterparts, $t(126) = 1.34, p = .183$.

Following Aiken and West (1991), I further probed the interaction between social class and priming condition by calculating the mean difference in narcissism between participants in the egalitarian prime versus control condition for individuals ± 1 standard deviations (SDs) from the mean of social class (i.e., testing for effects of prime within “high” versus “low” levels of social class). Among lower-class individuals (1 SD below the mean), who are presumably relatively high in baseline levels of egalitarianism, priming egalitarianism did not lead to significant decreases in narcissism, $t(126) = -.97, p = .336$. On the other hand, among upper-class individuals (1 SD above the mean), who may otherwise tend toward reduced egalitarianism, priming egalitarian values led to significant decreases in narcissism, $t(126) = -4.42, p < .001$.

Complementing the mediational results of Study 2, these findings further indicate that class differences in narcissism arise, in part, out of class differences in feelings of entitlement. Importantly, these results also suggest that class

differences in narcissism are not fixed but rather sensitive to changes in social values.

General Discussion

Narcissism is an increasingly prevalent feature of social life, visible in the values people teach their children to the music they listen to and in the clothes they wear (DeWall et al., 2011; Twenge & Foster, 2010; Vazire et al., 2008). There is significant cultural variation in narcissism as a function of individualistic versus communal values (e.g., Cai et al., 2012). Guided by research finding that upper-class individuals are more self-focused and individualistic than lower-class individuals (Kraus et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2007), I tested whether higher social class is associated with greater entitlement and narcissism.

Five studies using university and nationwide samples and assessments of subjective and objective social class (e.g., parental educational attainment, income) yielded evidence consistent with this prediction. Upper-class individuals reported increased entitlement and narcissistic tendencies, and they were more likely to behave in a narcissistic fashion. In addition, mediator and moderator data indicated that upper-class individuals' increased narcissism is attributable, in part, to their increased entitlement. These findings converge with research arguing that entitlement is a primary determinant of narcissistic tendencies (e.g., Brown et al., 2009).

My results also dovetail with work finding that social inequality—and relevant social comparison processes—causes individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to see themselves as deserving of lesser outcomes. By contrast, individuals from more privileged backgrounds tend to feel entitled to relative advantage (Major, 1994). Extending this work, I posit that the disadvantage associated with lower social class also promotes other-focus and interdependence, which enhance egalitarianism and diminish entitlement (Foster et al., 2003; Twenge et al., 2008).

The current investigation is among the first to document how personality varies by social class. Recent epidemiological data link social class to the “Big 5” personality factors. For instance, lower-class standing is associated with increased agreeableness—a factor comprising traits reflecting compassion, cooperation, and trust (Chapman, Fiscella, Kawachi, & Duberstein, 2010). My findings link class to other dimensions of personality—entitlement and narcissism. This work highlights the significance of social stratification to understanding the self-concept and how people construe themselves vis-à-vis others.

Limitations and Future Directions

My findings should be interpreted with certain limitations and future research directions in mind. In my studies, I assessed the core components of the class complex: objective resources (education and income) and subjective class

rank (Kraus et al., 2012). Future investigations could assess other dimensions of class, including occupational prestige (Adler et al., 2000), to ascertain whether they influence entitlement and narcissism in ways that parallel my findings. This is particularly important given recent evidence suggesting that different facets of class may at times exert different influences on psychology and behavior (e.g., Trautmann, Kuilen, & Zeckhauser, in press).

Future research should also explore other narcissism-related constructs. For instance, self-esteem and feelings of grandiosity (e.g., omnipotence) are associated with narcissism (Brown et al., 2009) and might co-vary with class. It will also be important to explore the consequences of entitlement and narcissism among the upper class. For example, entitlement may shape attitudes toward income inequality—an issue of increasing concern in society (e.g., Kuziemko & Stantcheva, 2013)—as well as support for social policies aimed at wealth redistribution. Moreover, although I assessed individual differences in subclinical narcissism, it will be interesting to test the impact of affluence on diagnoses of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—4th ed., text rev. [DSM-IV-TR]*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Studying the effects of class at the extremes of the narcissism spectrum represents an important extension of my research and points to possible boundary conditions of my effects.

Additional work is needed to elucidate the origins of class differences in entitlement and narcissism. In the present research, I argued that individualistic values may contribute to increased entitlement and narcissism among upper-class individuals. However, the class differences I have documented are likely to be multiply determined via a confluence of developmental, cultural, and psychological factors (e.g., Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge et al., 2008). For instance, upper-class individuals are more likely to cultivate their children's individual accomplishments and talents (Lareau, 2002), and they may also be less sensitive to others' evaluations and perceptions (Fiske, 1993)—factors that may enhance narcissism. In this vein, longitudinal investigations of the life course will be particularly informative in illuminating the specific features of social class that contribute to the development of psychological entitlement and narcissistic personalities.

Given the mounting levels of economic inequality in society (Cagetti & De Nardi, 2008), it will be important for future research to more critically examine the role of inequality in shaping the class differences I document. For instance, beyond levels of absolute wealth, individuals who feel particularly wealthy relative to others may exhibit the greatest levels of entitlement and narcissism. Such research will highlight the role of perceptions of *relative* advantage versus disadvantage in driving my results. Along these same lines, studies should explore how levels of inequality within a particular society (e.g., Gini coefficient; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) shape my pattern of findings. The associations between

social class, entitlement, and narcissism may be curtailed in societies with more egalitarian distributions of wealth relative to the United States (e.g., Sweden).

Conclusion

Research documents increasing narcissism in society (DeWall et al., 2011; Twenge & Foster, 2010; Twenge et al., 2008). Yet, my results point to a potential moderator of this pattern: social class. Social class is a structural variable that, as recent psychological theory and findings suggest, becomes inscribed in the mind and exerts a profound influence on thought, emotion, and action. Bringing emerging social class theory to bear on the issue of historical trends in narcissistic personality, my research reveals that recent rises in narcissism may be most pronounced among upper-class individuals and less accelerated, if increasing at all, among lower-class individuals.

Acknowledgments

I thank Pia Dietze, Sunni Dutra, Millie Huckabee, Dillon Jackson, Maia Menschik, Sally Ng, Matt Nguyen, Daniel Petrie, Ahnna Princen, Judah Ruiz, Daniel Stancato, Koji Takahashi, and Staphanie Yu for their tremendous assistance with data collection. I am also grateful to E. J. Horberg for her invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript and to Andres Martinez for his keen insights into data analysis.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported in part by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship awarded to Paul Piff.

Notes

1. In research using national and university samples, this measure of subjective social class consistently correlates with objective, resource-based measures of social class (e.g., education, income) at moderate to high levels (see Kraus et al., 2012). These findings indicate that people's subjective perceptions of their social class—as indexed by the MacArthur Scale—are closely associated with their actual, or objective, social class.
2. Given that the 40-item NPI contains six items that purport to assess entitlement, I also tested my mediational model with these items excluded. Higher social class predicted higher scores on this modified NPI (excluding the Entitlement subscale), $b = .94$, $SE b = .47$, $t(148) = 1.99$, $p = .048$. The mediational results paralleled those for the total NPI scale. When the Me Versus Other Scale and social class were entered into a linear regression model to predict the modified NPI, social class was not a significant predictor, $b = .54$, $SE b = .52$, $t(148) = 1.23$, and $p = .22$, whereas the Me Versus Other

Scale remained significant, $b = 2.17$, $SE b = .40$, $t(148) = 5.41$, $p < .001$. The 95% CI for the indirect effect did not include zero (range = .066 to .903), thereby suggesting that entitlement—indexed via the Me Versus Other Scale—mediated the link between class and the Non-Entitlement subscales of the NPI. Although the total NPI scale has been validated extensively, research undermines the validity of the NPI Entitlement subscale as a measure of entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004). Thus, I maintain my focus on the total NPI scale.

3. In a separate sample of students ($N = 114$), I verified that this five-statement measure of social class was associated with objective, resource-based measures of social class. As expected, this measure was strongly correlated with parental educational attainment ($r = .44$, $p < .001$) and household income ($r = .51$, $p < .001$).

References

- Adler, N. E., Epel, E. S., Castellazzo, G., & Ickovics, J. R. (2000). Relationship of subjective and objective social status with psychological and physiological functioning: Preliminary data in healthy white women. *Health Psychology, 19*, 586-592.
- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression, Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Argyle, M. (1994). *The psychology of social class*. London, England: Routledge.
- Brown, R. P., Budzek, K., & Tamborski, M. (2009). On the meaning and measure of narcissism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35*, 951-964.
- Cagetti, M., & De Nardi, M. (2008). Wealth inequality: Data and models. *Macroeconomic Dynamics, 12*, 285-313.
- Cai, H., Kwan, V. S. Y., & Sedikides, C. (2012). A socio-cultural approach to narcissism: The case of modern China. *European Journal of Personality, 26*, 529-535.
- Campbell, W. K., Bonacci, A. M., Shelton, J., Exline, J. J., & Bushman, B. J. (2004). Psychological entitlement: Interpersonal consequences and validation of a self-report measure. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 83*, 29-45.
- Chapman, B. P., Fiscella, K., Kawachi, I., & Duberstein, P. R. (2010). Personality, socioeconomic status, and all-cause mortality in the United States. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 171*, 83-92.
- Charles, K. K., Hurst, E., & Roussanov, N. (2009). Conspicuous consumption and race. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 124*, 425-467.
- Côté, S., Piff, P. K., & Willer, R. (2013). For whom do the ends justify the means? Social class and utilitarian moral judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104*, 490-503.
- DeWall, C. N., Pond, R. S., Jr., Campbell, W. K., & Twenge, J. M. (2011). Tuning in to psychological change: Linguistic markers of psychological traits and emotions over time in popular U.S. song lyrics. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 5*, 200-207.
- Emmons, R. A. (1984). Factor analysis and construct validity of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 48*, 291-300.

- Exline, J. J., Baumeister, R. F., Bushman, B. J., Campbell, W. K., & Finkel, E. J. (2004). Too proud to let go: Narcissistic entitlement as a barrier to forgiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*, 894-912.
- Exner, J. E. (1995). Comment on Narcissism in the comprehensive system for the Rorschach. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 2*, 200-206.
- Fenigstein, A., Scheier, M. F., & Buss, A. H. (1975). Public and private self-consciousness: Assessment and theory. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 43*, 522-527.
- Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist, 48*, 621-628.
- Fiske, S. T., & Markus, H. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Facing social class: How societal rank influences interaction*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K., & Twenge, J. M. (2003). Individual differences in narcissism: Inflated self-views across the lifespan and around the world. *Journal of Research in Personality, 37*, 469-486.
- Greenfield, P. M. (2009). Linking social change and developmental change: Shifting pathways of human development. *Developmental Psychology, 45*, 401-418.
- Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., Delton, A. W., & Robertson, T. E. (2011). The influence of mortality and socioeconomic status on risk and delayed rewards: A life history theory approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 100*, 1015-1026.
- Halpern, J. (2007). *Fame junkies*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Keller, H. (2012). Autonomy and relatedness revisited: Cultural manifestations of universal human needs. *Child Development Perspectives, 6*, 12-18.
- Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2009). Signs of socioeconomic status: A thin-slicing approach. *Psychological Science, 20*, 99-106.
- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., & Keltner, D. (2009). Social class, the sense of control, and social explanation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*, 992-1004.
- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., Mendoza-Denton, R., Rheinschmidt, M. L., & Keltner, D. (2012). Social class, solipsism, and contextualism: How the rich are different from the poor. *Psychological Review, 119*, 546-572.
- Kuziemko, I., & Stantcheva, S. (2013, April 21). Our feelings about inequality: It's complicated. *The New York Times*. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/our-feelings-about-inequality-its-complicated/>
- Lamont, M. (2000). *The dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in Black families and White Families. *American Sociological Review, 67*, 747-776.
- Major, B. (1994). From social inequality to personal entitlement: The role of social comparisons, legitimacy appraisals, and group membership. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 26*, 293-355.
- Mazzocco, P. J., Rucker, D. D., Galinsky, A. D., & Anderson, E. T. (2012). Direct and vicarious conspicuous consumption: Identification with low-status groups increases the desire for high-status goods. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22*, 520-528.
- Piff, P. K., Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., Cheng, B. H., & Keltner, D. (2010). Having less, giving more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99*, 771-784.
- Piff, P. K., Stancato, D. M., Côté, S., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Keltner, D. (2012). Higher social class predicts increased unethical behavior. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 109*, 4086-4091.
- Piff, P. K., Stancato, D. M., Martinez, A. G., Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2012). Class, chaos, and the construction of community. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 103*, 949-962.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods, 40*, 879-891.
- Pryor, L. R., Miller, J. D., & Gaughan, E. T. (2008). A comparison of the Psychological Entitlement Scale and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory's Entitlement scale: Relations with general personality traits and personality disorders. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 90*, 517-520.
- Raskin, R., & Terry, H. (1988). A principal-components analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and further evidence of its construct validity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*, 890-902.
- Rose, P. (2007). Mediators of the association between narcissism and compulsive buying: The roles of materialism and impulse control. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 21*, 576-581.
- Snibbe, A. C., & Markus, H. R. (2005). You can't always get what you want: Educational attainment, agency, and choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 703-720.
- Spencer, S. J., Zanna, M. P., & Fong, G. T. (2005). Establishing a causal chain: Why experiments are often more effective than mediational analyses in examining psychological processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 89*, 845-851.
- Stellar, J. E., Manzo, V. M., Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2012). Class and compassion: Socioeconomic factors predict responses to suffering. *Emotion, 12*, 449-459.
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2012). Social class disparities in health and education: Reducing inequality by applying a sociocultural self model of behavior. *Psychological Review, 119*, 723-744.
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Townsend, S. M. (2007). Choice as an act of meaning: The case of social class. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 93*, 814-830.
- Sundie, J. M., Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., Vohs, K. D., & Beal, J. D. (2011). Peacocks, Porsches, and Thorstein Veblen: Conspicuous consumption as a sexual signaling system. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 100*, 664-680.
- Trautmann, S. T., van de Kuilen, G., & Zeckhauser, R. J. (in press). Social class and (un)ethical behavior: A framework, with evidence from a large population sample. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.
- Twenge, J. M. (2006). *Generation me: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled—and more miserable than ever before*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Twenge, J. M., & Foster, J. D. (2010). Birth cohort increases in narcissistic personality traits among American college students, 1982-2009. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 1*, 99-106.

- Twenge, J. M., Konrath, S., Foster, J. D., Campbell, W. K., & Bushman, B. J. (2008). Egos inflating over time: A cross temporal meta-analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality, 76*, 875-902.
- Vazire, S., Naumann, L. P., Rentfrow, P. J., & Gosling, S. D. (2008). Portrait of a narcissist: Manifestations of narcissism in physical appearance. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*, 1439-1447.
- Wallace, D. F. (2012). *The Pale King*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. E. (2010). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press.