

RESPONDING TO THE WORKPLACE NARCISSIST

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DEDICATION

The following people made this work possible. The journey of life has taken me in directions that I never anticipated, and without these people I would not be alive...much less writing.

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ABSTRACT

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The presence of narcissism in the workplace is well established. Some have even gone so far as to extol the virtues of the narcissistic personality and the effect that it has on the leadership roles in organizations. Still, research suggests that there are more narcissists than there are leadership positions that might be filled. It is well established that the presence of those with strong narcissistic tendencies at the lower levels of organizations are disruptive to the productivity and the morale of the organization as a whole. This paper found that five coping method categories existed: non-responding, quitting one's job, befriending the narcissist, confronting the narcissist, and going to management. Contrary to existing literature, only quitting one's job or going to management were perceived by respondents as effective methods.

Ronald Sandwina, Ph.D., Chair

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The person with narcissistic tendencies is one of the most difficult types of people to work for because their attitudes and behaviors often lead to disruption in the workplace (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000). Various studies have reported that there are individuals with narcissistic tendencies in the workplace (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004). The majority of these studies have looked at narcissistic tendencies in the leaders of organizations, but only a few have noted these tendencies in the lower levels of organizations (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004; Maccoby, 2004). When these individuals with narcissistic tendencies find their way to the highest levels of the organizational hierarchy, they are often heralded as visionaries who lead their companies to previously unimagined prosperity (Boyett, 2006; Sandowsky, 1995). Yet, when these individuals are found in the lower levels of the corporate structure, their presence is often recognized as caustic by those around them (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004). The research surrounding coping mechanisms for dealing with individuals with narcissistic tendencies is limited, and it is difficult to determine whether the defined coping methods have proven either prevalent or effective. It is also difficult to determine from the current literature if any of the suggested coping methods are preferred over others.

Narcissism has been identified as a component of many other types of disruptive management personalities including, grandiose managers, control freaks, paranoid managers, sociopaths, ruthless managers, bullies, and even rigid managers (Lubit, 2004). Lubit goes on to state that in each of the aforementioned personalities the effect on coworkers is the same: they become distracted by the presence of the person and

productivity suffers. Considering the effect that narcissism has at the lower levels of the corporate structure, identifying which coping methods are prevalent and perceived to be effective is necessary to maintain productivity.

Statement of Problem

As mentioned earlier, work already exists concerning individuals with narcissistic tendencies at the highest levels of corporate America (Boyett, 2006; Sandowsky, 1995). Another author, Maccoby (2004) noted that even the leaders of corporations have recognized the presence of individuals with narcissistic tendencies in their midst. Maccoby notes that one Oracle executive when speaking of Oracle CEO, Larry Ellison and his narcissistic tendencies stated, “The difference between God and Larry is that God does not believe he is Larry” (Maccoby, 2004, p. 94). The work of these authors focuses on demonstrating how narcissists have risen to the top of organizations due to their dedication to task, extreme work ethic, and visionary nature. However, there are two primary concerns that have not been addressed: how does one cope with an individual who exhibits narcissistic tendencies when forced to work with him or her every day, and how is the coping process impacted when the narcissist is not positioned at the highest levels of the corporate structure? While the work of these authors demonstrates many positive qualities of the narcissist, narcissistic qualities have generally been perceived to negatively influence productivity (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

This study will examine how individuals with narcissistic tendencies are perceived by their coworkers at the lower and mid-levels of organizations. In particular,

the study will focus on the individual experiences of those who interact with narcissists in their day-to-day work lives. Some authors have suggested various coping methods, such as training the narcissist to be a team player, allowing the narcissist time to give feedback (Lubit, 2004), simple placation of the narcissist (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Pelusi, 2006), or avoidance of, or non response to, the narcissist all together (Cacaiola & Lavender, 2000; Maccoby, 2004). One of these methods, placation, which is described as potentially effective (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Pelusi, 2006) seems to contradict the assertions of the popular Satir Conflict Model which points out that placation often leaves the person engaged in placation feeling helpless and hopeless (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991). The purpose of this study is to determine if these suggested coping methods are being used in the organization and if other undiscovered coping methods exist. Further, the study will seek to determine if there are certain coping methods that are preferred over others. Finally, the study will attempt to ascertain the perceived effectiveness of these methods by the individuals using them.

Definitional Application

This study will use the definition of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) given in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), as the guideline for people with narcissistic tendencies. However, it is important to note that the study does not seek to classify the respondent's accounts as being true diagnoses of NPD. Rather, the responses will be reviewed only to determine if the person described by the respondent possesses strong narcissistic tendencies. This will serve as the basis for inclusion of the response in the study.

Communication Impact

In popular media, there is an interest in how to work through conflict with different people, and this interest may extend to working through conflict with the person displaying narcissistic personality tendencies (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lubit, 2004). To be sure, communication is interactional; however, there is a rich tradition of looking at individual responses (Putnam, 1987; 1988). Looking at how the individuals respond to a given situations informs us how various interactions may unfold. This study seeks to examine individual responses to narcissistic tendencies, and in doing so, we may be able to attain a greater understanding of how the interactions unfold including possible determination of the method individuals use to cope with such interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a review of the literature associated with narcissism and difficult persons in the workplace, as well as the coping mechanisms that have been suggested to deal with narcissism and difficult persons. To begin the chapter, a review of historic literature associated with the clinical definition of narcissism will be presented. The clinical definition will serve as the operational definition of the narcissist for the study. The chapter will then proceed with a discussion of recent studies concerning individuals with narcissistic tendencies and difficult persons in the workplace with an emphasis placed on what coping methods were suggested by the authors to deal with these types of people. The chapter will conclude with the research questions that were developed and served as the guiding framework for this study.

The Origin and Definition of Narcissism

The credit for the initial identification of narcissism as a psychological condition belongs to Sigmund Freud. The work of Freud initially served as a basis for the definition of the narcissist. Yet, Freud only scratched the surface of the narcissistic personality. As it would later be discovered, his focus was on the more generalized description of the narcissistic personality. Further, Freud spent the majority of his writing dealing with what psychological factors caused a person to become narcissistic (Freud, 1914/1991). In the end, narcissism was defined via the American Psychiatric Association years later.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, defines narcissism as: A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning in early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five or more of the following:

1. has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g.), exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements
2. is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
3. believes that he or she is “special” and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people or institutions
4. requires excessive admiration
5. has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
6. is interpersonally exploitive, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
7. lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
8. is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her
9. shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 661)

The DSM-IV goes on to explain that narcissists often assume that other people are overly concerned with their welfare and point of view. As a result of this perception, they tend to discuss their own ideas in very self important ways while giving little or no weight to the opinions of others. They often explain their point of view in loquacious detail while failing to recognize that other parties have anything to add to their perspectives. Additionally, when other parties attempt to express their views, the narcissist will often become impatient with the conversation, and may be oblivious to the damage that their lack of concern causes in the other party. Finally, when they do recognize the feelings of others, they tend to regard those feelings as a sign of the weakness of the person exhibiting them. This weakness, to the narcissist, is something to

be exploited but never pitied, as pity is something that the narcissist does not feel for others (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The DSM-IV also notes that the narcissist is often very vulnerable to any criticism, especially to defeat. The narcissist will almost never show outward signs of emotional injury, but he or she experiences them nonetheless. These feelings often haunt the narcissist to the point of obsession and begin to impact the day-to-day life of the narcissist. When the narcissist finally does show outward signs of emotional injury the narcissist typically will react with significant levels of aggression to everyone around them, especially to the individual that is perceived as the cause of the “hurt.” This phenomenon leads to difficulty with any type of interpersonal relationship and may cause the perception that the narcissist is hard to deal with (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The DSM-IV notes that the overwhelming ambition and confidence that tends to typify the narcissistic personality is often associated with unusually high levels of achievement (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). This may account for the aforementioned prevalence of narcissistic CEO’s throughout the corporate environment, as high levels of drive and ambition are some of the things that set the modern CEO apart (Maccoby, 2004). The narcissist is also not fond of failure. Failure is often not even a present reality in the mind of the narcissist. This does not prevent the narcissist from failing, but even when the narcissist does fail, he or she will often project the cause of that failure to others involved in the task (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

It would seem, based on the criteria listed in the DSM-IV, that the narcissist would have significant problems functioning in the team environment present in many

organizations. The DSM-IV states, "...performance may be disrupted due to intolerance of criticism or defeat" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 659). Additionally, prolonged feelings of humiliation may lead to social withdrawal and even depression (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). This social withdrawal may be why narcissists are often perceived by their subordinates and coworkers as being unapproachable and difficult to talk with (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004).

It is noteworthy that there has been some research to differentiate between the clinically diagnosed narcissist and someone with what might be termed as having unusually high self-esteem. Lubit (2004), for example, states that while one may perceive outward displays of self-confidence as compelling evidence of a narcissistic personality, this alone is not sufficient to make the determination. People with a healthy self-esteem still have the ability to empathize with others, support others, and deal with intimacy and self-disclosure. Further, they have no inherent need to engage in abusive tactics toward others. However, the abusive narcissist most often demonstrates a total lack of values and empathy. In addition, the resulting paranoia brought about by chronic insecurity that is inherent to narcissism is not present in the extremely self-confident. Due to this observed misdiagnosis of the narcissist, Lubit suggests that one must operationally define narcissism and then adhere to the established criteria firmly to verify that a strong narcissistic tendency exists (Lubit, 2004).

In an effort to further define narcissistic tendencies, some have demonized the attributes of the narcissist. According to Lasch (1979), the organizational narcissist may be described and defined as, "the liberal personality of our time with his charm, his

pseudo-awareness of his own condition, his promiscuous pan-sexuality, his fascination with oral sex, his hypochondria, his productive shallowness, his avoidance of dependence, his inability to mourn, and his dread of old age and death.” (Lasch, 1979, p. 304). While Lasch may be overstating a few things, one of which is the perception that the narcissist is always male (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lubit, 2004), it is clear the negative perception of what a narcissist is and how the narcissist is perceived by others remains present in the literature.

Others have attempted to define narcissism in more operational terms. The work of Lubit (2004), for instance, identifies five practical characteristics of the narcissistic manager, “grandiosity and preoccupation with oneself, arrogance and devaluation of others, a sense of entitlement to whatever one wishes, sensitivity to slights resulting in rage or desire for revenge, and lack of attachment to values” (Lubit, 2004, p. 13-14). The definition supplied by Lubit does not encompass many of the factors that are stipulated in the DSM-IV definition. Additionally, it is unclear if the definition of Lubit (2004) or of other simplified definitions used in research (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000) had a significant effect on what coping methods those authors eventually suggested in their work. Thus, for the purpose of clarity, the definition stipulated in the DSM-IV will not be altered when used for data collection or analysis of this study. Rather, the DSM-IV definition will serve as the sole guide in the directions given to respondents and will be used in analysis of the data itself to determine if narcissistic tendencies exist.

A Different Perspective on Narcissism

Freud (1914/1991) noted in his initial research that the narcissistic personality had two central attributes: the productive and the destructive. From the beginning, Freud

also noted that there were some positive aspects to the narcissistic personality that he claimed should be considered. Freud focused on the positive attributes in his early research on the subject, noting that narcissistic people are creative and capable of providing a fresh level of stimulation toward the development of culture, yet in doing so they may cause serious harm to the status quo (Freud, 1914/1991). Freud alluded to those qualities that make narcissistic people so valued in the upper levels of the workplace, as the narcissist brings forth new ideas with a “never say die” attitude that lends itself to pushing an organization to higher levels (Boyett, 2006; Sandowsky,1995). Freud observed some of the same characteristics that recent researchers have become fascinated with: how and why those with narcissistic tendencies are advancing in all levels of the leadership structure in the market today (Boyett, 2006; Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Maccoby, 2004; Sankowsky, 1995). In his studies Freud suggested that the narcissistic personality, while significant, was not terribly prevalent in society overall (Freud, 1914/1991). Yet, according to Maccoby (2004), the narcissistic personality has been found at literally every level of the corporate America.

One of the main factors that has been determined as essential to the success of individuals with narcissistic tendencies is that of goal setting. As Buss and Chiodo (1991) found, narcissists tend to set higher goals than they can possibly achieve in the time frames given. However, narcissists push toward those goals at a tremendous pace and tend to achieve at very high levels regardless of the fact that they do not achieve their own personal goals. Even more interesting is that when the narcissist fails to achieve their lofty goals, he or she then normally self deprecates for a period of time but then works even harder in the future. This pattern results in a viscous cycle of goal setting,

personal failure masked in public achievement, self-deprecation, and then reframing, and even more aggressive, goal setting. The narcissist's level of achievement is satisfying to everyone involved, with the exception of the narcissist who sets out to push harder and harder. At each outstanding achievement, the narcissist still perceives that he or she has failed, as their original lofty goal was not met. This leads the narcissist to push even harder, setting even higher goals and working even harder to achieve them. Thus, with each "achievement" the narcissist becomes even more focused and more aggressive (Buss & Chiodo, 1991).

The Dark Side of Narcissism

A great deal of work has been done toward developing a proper measure that might aid in describing the characteristics of the individual with narcissistic tendencies. Of interest is the Destructive Narcissistic Pattern (DNP). This pattern, as described by Brown (1996), "was developed to describe behaviors, reactions, and feelings about some individuals encountered in the workplace. These individuals may be co-workers, bosses, supervisors, or fellow team members" (p. 264). Brown (1996) goes on to state that DNP individuals, "consistently provoke feelings of frustration, anger, and inadequacy" (p. 265)

Kernberg (2004) states that individuals who exhibit characteristics of narcissism have a need for acceptance and excessive praise from others. He notes further that this need extends to a need for admiration and potentially for tribute from others in their scope of social interest. It is this increased need, in his view, that leads to the inflated personal self-concept that is commonly associated with the narcissist. In conjunction, Yalcom (1985) notes that narcissistic group members need to be the center of attention, want to be admired, and want others to perceive them as unique and special but have no

desire to reciprocate the kindness to others. He notes that the narcissistic person feels absolutely entitled to this type of treatment by those in their social spectrum, and that failure to extend such adulation to the narcissist often results in narcissistic rage. Finally, he notes that when they are involved with group work, the narcissist is often only interested in listening to his own opinions and is often prone to overt displays of disinterest when faced with the opinions of others (Yalom, 1985).

Kohut (1971) explained that when narcissists perceive that others are not giving them proper reverence, they become frustrated and often exhibit fits of narcissistic rage. This overt display of anger is commonly associated with narcissism, and tends to take place in situations where the individual does not feel as if they are in total control of the entire situation in which they find themselves or in situations in which the narcissistic person feels that they are being challenged in some way. These displays are often violent and potentially disruptive to all that witness them. (Kohut, 1971).

Narcissistic rage responses tend to differ only in their severity and intensity. While the rage episodes may vary in intensity, they tend to have common triggers that bring them about. These episodes of rage tend to be precipitated by perceived frustrations on the part of the narcissist, typically with others surrounding the narcissist and interacting with him or her. The narcissist does not typically take responsibility for his or her actions, yet he or she will consistently internalize frustrations and failures (Ornstein, 1999). For example, if the narcissist sets a goal, or has a goal set for him or her that is not achieved, the narcissist will consistently fail to assume personal responsibility for the failure outwardly. The narcissist will often outwardly project that the reasons for the failure were due to some external factor (perhaps another team

member or someone in the immediate vicinity) and will manifest that determination publicly. Still, even when this projection of rage is manifested, the narcissist will consistently self deprecate over the failure and begin to push harder to achieve goals. In doing so, the narcissist will perpetuate the cycle of rage in a similar fashion to the narcissistic pattern described earlier as described by Buss & Chiodo (1991).

Ornstein (1999) goes on to describe rage episodes among his patients. He notes that any perceived trauma to the “self” of a narcissist will often trigger the rage episode. Ornstein cites an episode with a patient in which the patient’s girlfriend had left him. In this case, the narcissist accepted no outward responsibility for the fact that his girlfriend had departed. Rather, the narcissist immediately projected blame to another individual that his girlfriend had now chosen to date. Suddenly, the narcissist determined that the fact that his girlfriend had left him was not his fault in the public sense. The narcissist now had someone to blame his misfortune on.

In the case cited by Ornstein (1999), the individual also immediately engages in violent fantasy episodes about what he would like to do to the person who is perceived to be the cause of the wrong, in this case the new boyfriend of the narcissist’s ex-girlfriend. In the case cited by Ornstein, the individual stated that he had fantasized about physical confrontation with the new boyfriend. It is also interesting that Ornstein notes that the individual was fairly frail in stature, so he would have likely been unable to carry out such threats, yet the fantasies have more to do with having or maintaining control over the perceived wrongdoer. Ornstein also notes that the fantasies are not a passing thought, but that they became pervasive. The wronged narcissist lived for the opportunity to revenge himself.

This perceived need for totalitarian control is one that may lead to great success (Boyett, 2006; Sandowsky, 1995), but can also make the person almost impossible to tolerate during periods of personal interaction in the workplace (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004; Maccoby, 2004). In some situations, narcissistic behavior is far from disruptive, and some have even said that it is part of a normal developmental process for every individual (Kobut, 1971). Yet, in that same study, Kobut acknowledges that when mild narcissistic traits such as self confidence, burgeon forth into a sense of extreme self importance, delusions of unlimited power and influence, requirements for constant and uninterrupted attention from others, and sensitivity to anyone questioning their motives, that the resulting personality will likely prove destructive. Kobut further notes that when those displaying weak narcissistic tendencies evolve to have stronger narcissistic tendencies, any form of critical behavior by others that is directed toward the narcissist will result in the narcissist slipping into a kind of depressive state in which exhibitions of rage are common (Kohut, 1971). Thus, drawing on this determination by Kohut, it is those individuals that display strong narcissistic tendencies which pose the greatest potential for conflict and disruption in the organizational structure.

Prevalence of Narcissism

The perception among many researchers is that the presence of narcissism in the organization is growing (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lubit, 2004). With increased prevalence, some have attempted to alter the perception of the narcissistic person. Brundidge (2005) suggested that the media was serving to enhance the growing “pro-narcissism” phenomenon in the United States and the world. He noted that the

proliferation of reality television shows has served to allow individuals to reshape their identities through a capitalistic view of individualistic behavior being preferable to that of the institutional norms that dominated cultures of the world for centuries.

Brundidge (2005) goes on to state that the rise of capitalistic society has destroyed the more traditional social norms that were established through institutions such as churches. Brundidge further asserted that the increased focus on capitalism and capitalistic values in a social system has fostered new levels of competition within society and has brought about a “survival of the fittest” attitude among many people. Finally, Brundidge goes on to provide a recent example, the reality television show *The Simple Life*, as evidence of a television show that was specifically designed to show the value of strong narcissistic tendencies. In the story, the independently wealthy Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie live on a farm for no other reason, according to the author, than to add additional notoriety to their already bulging self-perceptions.

Maccoby (2003) demonstrates that the narcissist is an active member of organizations, and that narcissists are finding their way into leadership roles. In the upper levels of management, the narcissist is normally praised for visionary capability and tireless personal work. However, looking at narcissists in middle management, Cavaiola and Lavender (2000) and Lubit (2004) found that those displaying strong narcissistic tendencies at work may be responsible for chronic inefficiency and potential financial loss. However, the researchers note that while the costs to the organization may be stunning, they estimate that corporations annually pay millions of dollars in damages to the victims of interactions with difficult persons in the workplace; these costs are difficult to measure as they are not as conspicuous as other types of loss. These losses manifest in

other ways outside of the legal spectrum as well. Narcissists tend to be so consumed with their own greatness that they tend to ignore the potential cost saving ideas of others and cause tremendous instances of turnover because of their behavior. All of these actions not only stifle innovation in the workplace but also serve to cost corporations millions of dollars in legal fees, unemployment, worker's compensation, and continuous retraining of new staff (Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lubit, 2004).

Due to the impact of individuals with strong narcissistic tendencies in the workplace, this paper will now review the literature detailing suggested coping strategies that could be used to deal with individuals with strong narcissistic tendencies at work. The following section is a review of the literature dealing with those coping methods.

Coping Strategies

What must then be asked is, how does one deal, in day-to-day work life, with those people who display strong narcissistic tendencies in the workplace? The nature of the personality characteristics associated with narcissism breed conflict (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Freud, 1914/1991; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004) and this conflict creates communication difficulties in the workplace (Bacal, 2000; Cavaiola & Lavender, 2000; Lasch, 1979; Lubit, 2004). For instance, how does one communicate with someone who is self-centered, degrades other people's ideas, and fails to heed the warnings of others? Even more intimidating: how does one take a person with those characteristics and attempt to integrate them into the team format? Cavaiola and Lavender (2000) state that "one cannot expect the narcissist to behave in a rational, giving, or cooperative manner,

and if you do, you will experience nothing but frustration in your interactions with them” (p. 32).

Pelusi (2006) offers some suggestions, but in each case they are designed to placate the narcissistic offender. Further, when one looks at the work of Maccoby (2003, 2004), one discovers no real process for dealing with the narcissist personality at work other than to avoid the narcissist and thus not respond to him or her or to alter one’s perception of what would provide a fulfilling job. While this might prove comforting to some, it would be difficult to believe that dealing with people with strong narcissistic tendencies would be as simple as saying, “Maybe I can just ignore it and it will go away.”

Still, this type of logic is suggested for implementation in most of the literature in which an author attempts to indicate how the narcissist should be dealt with. Bacal (2000) indicates that while these people are very difficult to fire or to discipline, the best thing that a person might do is simply learn to deal with the narcissist by placating their behavior. Bacal goes on to state that if one is managing such a person, one needs to differentiate between the person and their behavior patterns, and should not blame the narcissist for the problem. He suggests that one should internalize the situation and attempt to determine what one can change so that one can continue to cope with the narcissist and his or her behavior. Further, Bacal advocates that one should avoid assumption of a “victimized” posture when confronting narcissistic behavior, and focus only on what implications the narcissistic behavior might have on the work environment as opposed to focusing on how the behavior makes one personally feel. Interestingly, the later work of Cavaiola and Lavender (2000), and Lubit (2004) both advocate positions

similar to that of Bacal and take the stand that to deal with the narcissist in the workplace, placation of the narcissist is essential to success.

However, not every author agrees that simply ignoring or placating the narcissist will bring about positive results. The Satir Model of Conflict specifically argues against placation, for to Satir and her colleagues, ignoring or not responding in some way to the narcissistic behavior would have also been considered a form of placation (Satir et al., 1991). Satir and her colleagues repeatedly argue against their concept of placation. In their view it ignored the conflict dynamic with respect to the offended party; in this case the person offended by the narcissist's behavior. In such cases, Satir and her colleagues indicate that placation, again which in their view encompassed ignoring and non-response, produced a long term negative effect on the conflict situation. They go on to state that the offended party will likely walk away from a given conflict situation in which placation is used feeling helpless and hopeless about the situation and with no sense of equality or resolution. Satir and her colleagues state that placation fueled intractable conflict situations between the parties due to the lack of satisfaction felt over time by the individual forced to placate the other person (Satir, 1988; Satir et al., 1991; West & Turner, 2007).

When one is dealing with a subordinate that is difficult and whose narcissism in the workplace is proving counter productive to work relationships, one might assume that the focus on teamwork would win out and potentially lead to the termination of the narcissist. Yet, this is not advocated by Bacal (2000), Cavaiola and Lavender (2000), or Lubit (2004). In fact, Bacal proposes that the narcissist may not only prove productive in the overall scheme of the organization, but may prove to be indispensable which, harkens

back to the earliest assertions by Freud (1914/1991) that the narcissist may indeed prove productive.

While Bacal (2000) does make a compelling argument, it is interesting that no power structure is highlighted in the argument. For example, does one use a strategy of placating the narcissist if one is the boss of the narcissist? Bacal does not go into detail about this. Similarly, Cavaiola and Lavender (2000) and Lubit (2004) do not deal with the concept of power in their work. Engaging in placating activity when one is dealing with a superior would seem difficult because of the narcissist's position of authority as one might risk repercussions from their superior if that superior was confronted concerning their behavior. Nevertheless, what if one is dealing with a coworker or subordinate? Is it practical to assume that one would placate the narcissist in that scenario? One questions how practical or applicable this approach is when one is not dealing with a superior.

There is some literature that suggests that a different course of action might be appropriate when dealing with individuals with strong narcissistic tendencies (Monroe, Borzi, & DiSalvo, 1989, 1993; Monroe, Vincent, Lewis, & Borzi 1990). It should be noted, that while the aforementioned authors present these alternatives, their work is not directly associated with narcissism. Rather, their work is associated with what they define as a "difficult person." They describe the difficult person as having essentially three characteristics: "self esteem problems (in their case a lack of self esteem), deficiencies in interpersonal skills, and predictable approaches to relational negotiation" (Monroe et al., 1989 p. 313). It is important to note that the three characteristics indicated here are not perfect matches for the narcissistic personality this paper focuses

on, but they do share some similarities. One of the three characteristics, in particular, is a less than perfect fit. When we consider our earlier definition of narcissism, the narcissist does not necessarily show predictable patterns of relational negotiation. Still, the work of these authors may prove applicable to this paper, as the difficult person and the narcissist do share some similarities.

There have been other attempts to look at difficult people in organizations for example, the work of Parrish-Sprowl (1987) examines the behavior of difficult clients in sales environments. Some scholars have endeavored to determine levels of satisfaction with conflict management, such as the work of Putnam and Poole (1987) which attempted to determine the satisfaction level of subordinates facing a conflict management situation with their superior. However, Monroe et al. (1989) first began to contemplate the satisfaction levels that managers felt when implementing various strategies to deal with difficult employees.

The first and primary objective of the research of Monroe et al. (1989) was to determine what characteristics difficult employees exhibited in conflict situations were perceived by managers as being difficult. The authors identified four trends within the data. These trends became the basis for the authors' categorization of the difficult person.

Avoidance. The first response to conflict is often to flee from it. This is the case with avoidance. In this case, the subordinate, after being approached and openly criticized by his or her superior, will often flee the workplace or maintain a very low profile so as not to be noticed and confronted further (Monroe et al., 1989).

Apparent Compliance. In this case, negative feedback is given to the subordinate and is apparently accepted and assimilated. However, once the conflict episode comes to an end, the employee will often revert to the old behaviors with which he or she has the highest level of comfort (Monroe et al., 1989).

Alibis. Here the employee refuses responsibility all together. In this case the employee will state that, “It was not my fault...Bob did it.” In this case, the employee simply attempts to put the blame on someone else and thus avoid conflict all together while passing it off to someone else (Monroe et al., 1989). The similarity between this and the vicious cycle described by Buss and Chiodo, (1991) is striking.

Relational Leverage. In this scenario, the subordinate hears the conflict and then redefines it in terms of the relationship with his or her superior as opposed to focusing simply on the feedback itself (Monroe et al., 1989).

Additionally, the researchers sought to determine what coping tactics were used to deal with conflicts as they arose with difficult subordinates. Finally, they attempted to determine if those coping methods proved effective. The results of their studies proved somewhat as expected. Previous to their work, Monroe et al. (1989) noted that the literature had indicated that managers had relied on two basic tactics for managing conflict: forcing, or threatening an employee with punitive action should that employee not comply, and collaboration, or an effort to work with the employee in order to work the problem out to a mutually beneficial solution. Collaboration, at the time of Monroe, Borzi, and DiSalvo (1993), was still considered a management “buzz word” in terms of managing employees. In 1993, the team concept of management was still in its relative infancy in the United States, but was a growing force in organizational structures. The

old ways of doing things, forcing in this case, still hung around, but they were being challenged by the idea that the organization could function productively in a team environment. This is shown repeatedly in the work of Monroe and his associates. In all three pieces of work, the authors note that managers often attempted collaboration first. However, when it did not work, they resorted to the more “tried and true” method of forcing their employees to do what they wanted (Monroe et al., 1989, 1990, 1993).

Also of interest were two relatively new and quickly emerging strategies for dealing with conflict in the organization: minimal coping and structural strategies. Minimal coping, “represents an attempt to minimize the effects of difficult subordinate behavior upon the manager by approaching the relationship from a task-only perspective; refusing to deal with the personal or relational issues” (Monroe et al., 1993). In this scenario, the manager attempts to get past all of the personal baggage that the employee is prone to bring onto the conflict management battlefield. Rather, the manager informs the employee that from now on, bringing personal issues into the work environment will not be tolerated, and that any future interaction between the two parties will revolve around business issues only. The supervisors in this study went to considerable lengths to make sure that the employees did not somehow twist conflict episodes into something that was of a more personal as opposed to a professional nature. For example, one supervisor stated that he would no longer take the phone calls of one problem employee, but he would insist that the employee put his concerns in writing so that they could be dealt with formally (Monroe et al., 1993). In doing so, the manager was able to eliminate some of the more petty problems that his employee would typically want to address.

Simply, if it was not a big enough deal for the employee, the employee would not bother writing it all down and the issue would simply disappear.

Secondly, the authors determined that a new type of managerial tactic was being used in organizations to deal with the problem employee: structural strategies. This strategy might best be described as one in which the employee is “out of sight and out of mind.” In this case, the manager deals with the difficult employee by using the structure of the organization to put a barrier between the manager and the employee. For example, if a manager were having significant problems with an employee, the manager would move the employee to another department so that the employee would then be under the control of another supervisor. In another case, the employee might be promoted or even have a new position created specifically for them. The method used by the manager to move the disruptive employee within the organizational structure is immaterial; the only aspect of significance is that the troubling employee is no longer a problem of that specific manager (Monroe et al., 1993).

While it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of these types of strategies, Monroe et al. (1993) endeavored to determine which of these strategies brought about the highest levels of satisfaction among the supervisors that were using them. Interestingly, the highest levels of satisfaction reported by managers involved the two relatively new techniques of minimal coping and structural strategies. Forcing and collaboration were reported to have produced significantly less satisfaction when used (Monroe et al., 1993).

The work of Monroe et al. (1989, 1990, 1993) does have certain limitations with regard to this paper. First, and as mentioned earlier, the authors were not specifically concerned with individuals with strong narcissistic tendencies but with a broader

definition that they called the “difficult person.” Further, the authors were only concerned about how managers would deal with problem subordinates and the satisfaction levels of those managers. However, the authors do not address how employees might deal with difficult managers or how they might deal with difficult coworkers who they were forced to work with.

Research Questions

Considering the literature reviewed, there are two areas that present concern. When considering the coping mechanisms suggested by Bacal (2000), Cavaiola and Lavender (2000), Lubit (2004), Maccoby (2003, 2004), Monroe et al. (1989, 1990, 1993), Pelusi (2006), it is unclear if these coping mechanisms are actually being used. These authors present no evidence of the effectiveness of the techniques that they present as potential coping solutions. Thus, the following research questions are posited:

RQ1: What coping strategies have been used by employees to deal with organizational members who exhibit narcissistic personality characteristics?

RQ2: Of the coping strategies identified, is there a coping strategy that is preferred by the respondents?

RQ3: Are some coping strategies perceived as more effective than other strategies?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants for this study were graduate and undergraduate students at IUPUI. Seventy-five students from two sections of Interpersonal Communication, two sections of Public Speaking, and one section of Research Methods were included in this study. Due to the need to satisfy the three research questions, the distribution of the survey was limited to those individuals who either worked or had worked previously.

Methods and Procedures

The methodology in this study was based on Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Flanagan suggests that the critical incident is one in which the respondent is considered as being primary and having a significant impact on the overall context of the situation that the respondent faced. In this case, the researcher was interested in obtaining critical incidents of those respondents that had faced a organizational member with strong narcissistic tendencies at some point in their work career and had employed tactics to deal with that coworker. CIT is epistemological in nature and qualitative data is collected from the respondents to detail their real world experiences. The use of this approach generated data that is rich in complexity and allowed the researcher to focus on identifiable trends within the data which satisfy research question one.

Flanagan (1954) suggests four primary steps in implementing the CIT procedure: 1) specification of generalized goal for research, 2) data collection subjects and methodology, 3) determination of desired incidents to be reported, and 4) data analysis.

Specification of Goal for Research

First, according to Flanagan, a specific goal should be identified prior to implementation of the study. The goal should be specific enough to serve to outline the goals of the project, but ambiguous enough to allow for modification depending on the data received (Flanagan, 1954). This is of particular concern considering the qualitative nature of this type of research. In the case of this study, the primary goal was to identify what coping strategies are used when people are dealing with an individual with strong narcissistic tendencies, determine if one such method is preferred over another, and then to assess the respondents perception of the effectiveness with those coping methods, thus satisfying the research questions specified.

Data Collection Subjects and Methodology

Second, Flanagan (1954) indicates that respondent groups and methodology should be specified, and he goes on to describe three steps that should be followed in order. In step one, the respondent should be asked to focus on an incident with a strong positive or negative influence on the overall result of the interaction. In step two, the respondent should be asked to describe in detail what led up to the incidents in question. Finally, the respondent should be asked how the incident affected the overall resolution of the interaction. These three steps were implemented within the questions presented to the respondents and will be detailed below.

Determination and Indication of Desired Incidents to be Reported

The instrument was presented to selected classes at IUPUI. All respondents were assured of complete confidentiality in their responses. The research tool presented the respondents with the list of characteristics from the DSM-IV to determine if they have

had to work or interact with an individual displaying strong narcissistic tendencies in the past. If they had done so, the respondent was then asked to describe the person that they were employed with in detail and with consideration given to the criteria of the DSM-IV definition. The description provided was used to determine if the person described by the respondent displayed strong narcissistic tendencies. Some specific nominal data was then collected concerning the work relationship of the respondent and the person that they described including what the employment relationship of the respondent was relative to the coworker that they described and how long the respondent and their coworker were employed together. Next, the respondent was asked to review the criteria from the DSM-IV again and make selections as to which particular criteria applied to the coworker that they described. The respondent was then asked to describe a memorable experience or encounter that they had with their coworker with specific emphasis placed on how the respondent worked through the experience that they described, which served as the basis for satisfying research question one. Finally, the respondent was asked to respond to five Likert-style items concerning their perceived effectiveness of the coping method they chose to use. The effectiveness questions focused on five areas: satisfaction with how the situation worked out, reflection on whether the method was the best method the respondent could have chosen, belief that the tactic prevented further conflict, whether the respondent would use the same technique again, and the effectiveness of the technique on coworkers other than the one formerly described by the respondent. Through analysis of the effectiveness questions described here, the second and third research questions were satisfied.

The original research tool was piloted to 21 undergraduate students to determine if the tool would serve as an accurate and effective method of collecting data for the proposed topic. The pilot respondents were divided into groups of five (one group had six) and asked to follow the directions indicated in the tool and fill out the questionnaire. The respondents were then asked to discuss the tool in an effort to determine if the tool allowed simple understanding and facilitation.

The discussion with the four groups found several commonalities that led to the revision of the original questionnaire. First, the students objected to the presentation of all nine criteria indicated in the DSM-IV with respect to narcissistic personality disorder. Many indicated that they only read the first two or three and then moved on. All parties agreed that it would be better if the descriptions were shortened and put into more simple language that would be easier to understand. Because of this input, the questions were revised and shortened so that all nine criteria were still used but in an abbreviated and simplified format.

Also, several respondents indicated that the wording in the instructions was confusing. The original instructions asked the respondent to reflect on a work situation but failed to specify what type of work in particular. Some of the respondents felt that verbiage concerning work in reference to actual employment would have been helpful. As a result, the questionnaire was updated with new verbiage that specified that the respondent focus on employment situations.

Finally, on the third page of the survey, several nominal items existed which the respondents felt would be improved by better separation from the remainder of the questionnaire. In particular, several respondents believed that simply including

numbering with these items would assist in differentiating them from the remainder of the document. As a result numbering was added in this section, and the formatting of the section was changed to further separate these items from the narrative portion. See Appendix A for a copy of the complete data collection instrument.

Data Analysis

Flanagan (1954) specifies analysis of the recorded data. The first analysis task of the project was to determine if the respondents had truly described individuals that had strong narcissistic tendencies. The respondents were presented with the list of criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder from the DSM-IV and asked to review those criteria. The respondents were then asked to consider an individual that they had been employed with who had any of the characteristics listed and to describe that person in detail in narrative form. The respondents were later presented with the list of criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder from the DSM-IV and asked to reflect on the person that they chose to describe in their narrative. The respondents were then asked to select each narcissistic criterion that they believed to be applicable to the person that they described.

First, the list of selected narcissistic criteria selected by each respondent was reviewed to determine how many criteria were selected from the list. The DSM-IV stipulates that for a person to be diagnosed as having Narcissistic Personality Disorder, the person must demonstrate five of the nine criteria indicated (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). As stipulated earlier, this study did not seek to strictly diagnose or have the respondent attempt to diagnose Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Rather, the study only sought to identify responses which focused on an individual demonstrating

strong narcissistic tendencies. Responses that highlighted five of the nine narcissistic characteristics indicated in the DSM-IV were considered “strong” and were included in the data set. Surveys were separated initially by the number of criteria selected by the respondent with those surveys with five or more criteria selected (group A) and those with five or less than five criteria selected (group B).

The next step in the process was a full review of the narrative supplied by each respondent in reference to the person that they chose to describe. All narratives in group A were reviewed in full to determine if the criteria selected by the respondent were represented accurately in the narrative description provided by the respondent. In the event that the narrative did not provide evidence of each of the selected criteria, the survey was excluded from the sample. If the survey showed evidence of each of the criteria selected, the survey was included in the sample (See Appendix B).

Each survey from group B was then reviewed in an identical fashion to those in group A to determine if there were narcissistic criteria demonstrated in the narrative description that remained unmarked when the respondent reviewed the criteria supplied by the DSM-IV. In the event that such a discrepancy was noted, the survey was reviewed to determine how many criteria were inadvertently left unmarked. If a determination was made, at the conclusion of the review, that five or more criteria were clearly demonstrated in the narrative, the survey was then included in the sample. If, from this analysis, five or more criteria were not met, the survey was excluded.

With the sample size finalized, the responses were then reviewed to determine commonalities within the description of coping methods provided by the respondent. This review facilitated categorization of the responses which satisfied research question

one. The categories, as well as the responses to the Likert-scale items were input in SPSS and data analysis was conducted. This data analysis satisfied both research questions two and three.

RESULTS

Introduction

After data collection was completed, the surveys were reviewed and data analysis was conducted to determine the answers to the research questions. To begin, the surveys were analyzed to determine that the persons described by the respondents exhibited at least five of the criteria of narcissism as described by the DSM-IV, establishing the person they described as having strong narcissistic tendencies. Originally 75 surveys were distributed. Of those 50 responses will be used for analysis, as they met the criteria described above.

Reliability

Three measures of reliability were sought. First, twenty randomly selected surveys were selected for intercoder reliability. A fellow graduate student was asked to review each of the surveys referencing the DSM-IV criteria for narcissism as described in the methods section and make an independent determination of applicability of the survey response to the study. At the conclusion of that independent process, the data was compared to the original determinations made by the researcher. The comparison revealed that the independent review and the initial review of the researcher were in agreement 100% of the time.

The second intercoder reliability test sought to determine if a fellow graduate student could independently corroborate the categories of coping methods as determined by the researcher based on the critical incident reported by the respondent. Upon independent review, a fellow graduate student was asked to review the narrative data supplied in 20 randomly selected survey responses and assign each of those responses to one of the five categories noted by the researcher. A Kappa Coefficient analysis was

performed, producing a Kappa value of .935 [See Table 1 below], which demonstrated the necessary reliability for categorization.

Table 1

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T(b)	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.935	.063	7.892	.000
N of Valid Cases		20			

Third, a reliability measure was sought for the four items that comprised respondent's perceptions of the effectiveness of their approach. Cronbach's Alpha produced a value of .792 for these measures.

Results for Research Question One

Research question one asked, what coping strategies have been used to deal with coworkers who exhibit strong narcissistic tendencies. As indicated in the methods section, the respondents were asked to describe a specific memorable situation involving the individual that they described and to describe in detail how they worked through that moment. The responses were in narrative form and were analyzed to determine if similarities in responses existed and if those similarities were profound enough to warrant the creation of categories for responses. Five categories were found: 1) Non-responding, 2) confronting the individual in a face-to-face encounter, 3) informing management of the individual's conduct, 4) befriending the individual, and 5) quitting the job.

Category Definition

After reviewing the narratives of the respondents, the following definitions were applied to the categories.

1. Non-responding. Coping methods were classified as “non-responding” when a respondent indicated that they simply put up with the behavior of the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies and did nothing about it. As an example, one respondent noted, “I just went on with my day and put up with it; because, it didn’t bother me to the point of trying to get even or anything.”
2. Confronting. Coping methods were defined as “confronting” when a respondent indicated that they had a face to face interaction with the person that they described to expose their frustration with the narcissistic tendencies demonstrated. An example noted by one respondent was, “After two weeks of being yelled at, the three of us confronted her directly. We told her the whole deal. She took it as a personal attack on her and fired us on the spot.”
3. Informing Management. Coping methods were defined as “informing management” when a respondent indicated that they spoke to management concerning the behavior of the person described in the hopes that management would step in and solve the problem. One respondent, later categorized under informing management stated, “He (the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies) wouldn’t listen so we all got fed up and went to management. They (management) did the best they could and things began to change for the better.”
4. Befriending. Coping methods were defined as “befriending” when a respondent indicated that they attempted to befriend the described person in some way. One

respondent who indicated this befriending effort stated, “He (the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies) offered me a spot in their clique and I took it.

It wasn’t as great as I thought, but there were privileges beyond what I imagined.”

5. Quitting. Coping methods were defined as “quitting” when a respondent indicated that they left their place of employment to avoid further contact with the described person. As an example one respondent stated, “But two weeks after the incident I walked out because I was fed up. I have never talked to or seen him (the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies) again.”

Results for Research Question Two

Research question two asked, if one of the identified coping strategies was preferred by the respondents. To answer this question, Chi Square was calculated to test the hypothesis that respondents preferred a particular type of coping method. The results supported that hypothesis ($X^2(4) = 22.6, p. < .05$). As shown in Table 2, respondents preferred non-responding to any other approach.

Table 2

Category	Frequency	Percentage
1. Non-responding	20	40%
2. Confrontation	12	24%
3. Inform Management	13	26%
4. Befriend	2	4%
5. Quit Job	3	6%

Remaining Tests and Homogeneity of Variance

All remaining tests for this study were ANOVA’s. For each test, Levine’s test for homogeneity of variance was conducted. Two of the three tests run met the assumption of homogeneity. One test did not satisfy the homogeneity of variance test: that test

compared employee relationship of the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies and the respondent to the overall perceived effectiveness, and required additional analysis. In that case where the assumption of homogeneity indicated that the variances were unequal, the ratio of largest to smallest size group was less than 4:1 and the ratio of variance in the largest group compared to the smallest group was less than 10:1, thus satisfying the criteria for the F-max test. As F-max was satisfied, the ANOVA was then calculated.

Results for Research Question Three

Research question three asked, what the respondent's perceived overall effectiveness was with respect to the tactic he or she employed to cope with the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies. To answer this question a one-way ANOVA comparing the categories of coping behavior to the overall effectiveness item was conducted, ($F(3,31) = 4.319, p < .05$). The respondents differed significantly in their level of belief that their tactic was an effective way to resolve the situation. Post-Hoc comparisons were conducted using Least Squared Differences (LSD). As seen in Table 3, a significant difference was noted between non-responding ($m = 10.81, sd = 5.089$) and informing management ($m = 15.11, sd = 2.571$). A similar difference was noted between non-responding and quitting job ($m = 17.50, sd = 2.121$). In both cases significance was noted ($p < .05$). Additionally, a significant difference was noted between confrontation ($m = 10.13, sd = 1.959$) and informing management and confrontation and quitting job ($p < .05$). Note that only four categories were represented due to the low quantity of responses for the "befriending" category.

Table 3

(I) Coping Category	(J) Coping Category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1. Non-responding	Inform Management	-4.299(*)	1.627	0.013
	Quit Job	-6.688(*)	2.929	0.029
2. Confrontation	Inform Management	-4.986(*)	1.897	0.013
	Quit Job	-7.375(*)	3.087	0.023
3. Inform Management	Non-responding	4.299(*)	1.627	0.013
	Confrontation	4.986(*)	1.897	0.013
4. Quit Job	Non-responding	6.688(*)	2.929	0.029
	Confrontation	7.375(*)	3.087	0.023

Subsidiary Analysis

Two additional tests were conducted. A one way ANOVA comparing the employment relationship of the described person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies and respondent to the perceived overall effectiveness item was conducted. No significant difference was found ($F(3,31) = 1.995, p > .05$). The respondents did not differ significantly in their perceived level of effectiveness when considering their relationship to the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies.

The final independent variable to be compared was that of the length of employment relationship of the described person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies to the perceived overall effectiveness. A one way ANOVA comparing the length of employment relationship with the respondent had with the person that they described to the overall effectiveness item was conducted. No significant difference was found

($F(2,32) = .016, p > .05$). The respondents did not differ significantly in perceived level of effectiveness when considering the length of employment relationship with the person demonstrating narcissistic tendencies.

DISCUSSION

This section will discuss what was learned from this study referencing each of the research questions with an explanation of the corresponding test results and direct reference to the existing literature. Limitations of the research will be reported, as well as the conclusions reached and their practical application.

Research Question One

First, a determination was made as to what coping methods were actively being implemented in the workplace. The identified coping methods included: non-responding, confronting the narcissistic person directly, informing management of the actions of the narcissistic person, befriending the narcissistic person, and quitting one's job.

The first category, non-responding, was also found in the work of Maccoby (2003, 2004) and Cavaiola & Lavender (2000) in which the authors indicate that one might simply avoid the described person with narcissistic tendencies at work or alter one's perception of the described person with narcissistic tendencies through a process of reframing in order to cope with the person.

Non-responding, is also identified by Bacal (2000) as a potential strategy for coping with a person with narcissistic tendencies. Bacal simply advocates that the best strategy would be to "learn to deal" with the person. Bacal then offers as a suggestion that one internalize the situation and determine what can be done to change oneself and thereby come to accept the person without asking the person demonstrating narcissistic criteria to take responsibility for his or her actions. While this view does not constitute non-responding in the proper sense, as it implies that one take an active responsibility, it

is as close as any of the categories that were actually observed to being what is advocated by Bacal. Still, this position by Bacal seems to place the burden of coexistence not on the described person with narcissistic tendencies, but on the person that is forced to cope with that person. Further, the position seems to suggest the placation of the narcissist that would be later suggested by Cavaiola & Lavender (2000) and later Lubit (2004) and Pelusi (2006) more so than the simple strategy of non-responding in and of itself.

Cavaiola & Lavender (2000) and Lubit (2004) advocate positions similar to that of Bacal and take the stand that to deal with the narcissist in the workplace, placation of the narcissist is essential. Again, this category is not evident when one considers this study, as none of the respondents indicated that they attempted to placate the narcissistic person. In contrast, the respondents to this study seemed very upset by the narcissistic personality and did everything that they could not to placate the narcissist from simply not responding in any way to quitting the job altogether.

The aforementioned category of non-responding warrants another concern when the work of Satir et al. (1991) is considered. These authors indicated that placation, which in their view included such tactics as ignoring and non-responding, was ineffective and led people using such tactics to dissatisfying results. This may serve to explain why placation was not noted in any of the coping category responses. It may further help to explain why non-responding was not preferred over other methods when perceived satisfaction was considered.

In stark contrast to Bacal's (2000), Cavaiola & Lavender (2000), and Lubit (2004) was the idea of confronting the person displaying strong narcissistic tendencies person face-to-face over his or her behavior. This coping technique is not advocated, or even

mentioned, in any of the literature discussed in this paper, yet it accounted for 24% of the responses given by respondents. It is interesting that so many of the respondents indicated that this was the coping method chosen, as it becomes clear that, on some level, society may still view direct confrontation in the workplace as a potential solution to interpersonal conflict. While this coping method failed to prove overly effective, it does suggest that the open aggression may still be part of the workplace and may be viewed by some as the only option that they have in dealing with personality conflicts such as those brought on by those perceived as narcissistic.

Bacal (2000), Cavaiola & Lavender (2000), and Lubit (2004) all fail to mention that using the hierarchy of the organization, or going to management with one's complaint toward the person displaying strong narcissistic tendencies, is even an option to be considered. However, 26% of the respondents in the survey indicated that this was the approach that they chose. Certainly, the fact that such a high percentage of the respondents considered this a primary option for dealing with the narcissistic situation necessitates further research. Interestingly enough, and as will be reported below in greater detail, this as yet unidentified method proved to be viewed as the most effective by the respondents.

It is interesting that two other strategies, quitting the job and befriending the person displaying strong narcissistic tendencies, were also indicated in the data but were not present in the literature. Both of these categories had extremely low sample sizes with quitting only being selected by six percent of the respondents and befriending only being selected by four percent of the respondents. Though the percentage of people responding under these categories is small, it is interesting that the categories exist. It

would appear that these techniques should be investigated further to determine their prevalence and effectiveness.

Finally, the work of Monroe et al. (1989, 1990, 1993) indicates that the idea of minimal coping or structural strategies may prove beneficial for dealing with difficult personalities at work. Neither of these strategies, as defined by Monroe et al., were found in this study. Thus, the effectiveness of these methods is difficult to determine, but it is interesting that the workers surveyed did not consider them an option for coping. This may be because the average worker is untrained in Monroe et al.'s method, or it could indicate that the average worker doubts the effectiveness of the technique toward a person with narcissistic tendencies. This conclusion cannot be reached from the data collected.

Research Question Two

When considering if one particular coping method was preferred over the others, it is interesting to note that non-responding proved significantly more prevalent in the study than any other form of coping category, with forty percent of the respondents indicating that they used non-responding as their chosen coping method. Only Maccoby (2003, 2004) and Bacal (2000) come close to advocating this position. In all other literature on the subject, the concept of using non-responding as a coping method is absent. The high percentage of individuals responding that this was their chosen method clearly indicates its significance in society. As will be indicated in the section below, while chosen often, the perceived effectiveness of this coping method was not significant in and of itself.

Research Question Three

When considering the overall effectiveness of the coping methods indicated by the respondents, it is interesting that two categories indicated by the respondents were found to be both absent from the existing literature and significant in their perceived effectiveness. Those coping methods, informing management and quitting, had significantly high perceptions of effectiveness overall. Yet, they remain unstudied and unidentified until now. When we consider the practical aspects of each approach, they stand in stark contrast to one another. The fact that respondents who indicated that they used the tactic of going to management also indicated a high level of effectiveness when considering that coping method, suggests that going to management may be an effective strategy. However, the fact that only 26% of the respondents indicated this as their preferred method may suggest that management may not be viewed as a viable alternative when dealing with this type of conflict.

Conversely, some employees felt that there was no other option other than quitting his or her job, which would indicate they felt there was no method, logistical or otherwise, capable of assisting them in dealing with the person displaying strong narcissistic tendencies. Further, this would seem to suggest that dealing with the person proved so detrimental that it outweighed all potential benefits of the job.

The final category of significant concern is that of non-response. As mentioned earlier, this response was indicated by respondents 40% of the time. When one looks at the other categories, and specifically quitting one's job, it would appear that the respondents selecting non-response might also feel that there is no method, logistical or otherwise, capable of assisting them with the narcissist. However, in this case rather than

quitting their job, they choose to stick it out. It is interesting that while those who indicated that they quit their job indicated high levels of effectiveness, those that chose to be non-responsive indicated a low level of effectiveness. This seems clear in that if one quit their job they would no longer have to deal with the narcissist on a day to day basis, but if one chose to simply be non-responsive and not seek any kind of resolution to the problem one would then have a somewhat intractable conflict situation in which one still had to deal with the negatives of narcissistic personality with no hope of resolution. Interestingly this is the exact scenario portrayed by the Satir model and the resulting conclusions drawn by Satir et al. (1991). Considering this, it seems apparent why the non-response category carried such a negative perception in relation to perceived effectiveness.

Limitations

When considering this study, several limitations present themselves. First, the sample size for this study consisted of only seventy-five respondents of which only fifty qualified for the study. This sample, though sufficient considering the need for qualitative analysis leading to coping category determination, is not large enough to generalize to the population. Since coping method categories have now been determined, future studies can be designed for distribution to a much larger sample size using these categories.

Secondly, the coping categories of befriending the narcissist and quitting job had very low response rates. This low rate of response was insufficient for significance testing. Increased sample size of future studies should correct for this problem.

Finally, this study was only concerned with obtaining an accurate understanding of what coping methods were being used in the workplace and gaining an understanding of the effectiveness of those methods overall. Once the sample size has been increased, it would also be interesting to note differences in responses based on gender, ethnicity, and age to determine if demographic differences have an effect on the coping method chosen or the perception of method effectiveness.

Conclusions and Practical Application

In the past, some have attempted to come up with solutions or coping methods for dealing with people displaying narcissistic tendencies, but as was evidenced in this study, many of the coping methods being used had not been identified by researchers. When considering the real world application of this research, it seems clear that some respondents feel that the only way out of the negative situation they face when dealing with people displaying narcissistic tendencies is to quit their job or not respond to the problem and simply be miserable. While 26% of the respondents indicated that they felt going to management to solve the problem was effective the remainder of the respondents, not including the four percent that indicated that they would befriend the narcissist, indicated that they found no other way of dealing with the narcissists other than handling it themselves. These respondents, via quitting their jobs, not responding to the problem and putting up with the resultant misery, or confronting the narcissist on their own sought solutions outside of the corporate structure. In looking at this closer, it seems that there could be perceived deficiencies in the chain of command in dealing with the narcissistic personality at work. This assertion warrants additional investigation, as if there is a method management can implement to successfully deal with the problem, such

a method needs to be identified. Further, should such a management technique exist, the average worker should be made aware of its existence so that it can be used to his or her advantage.

APPENDIX A

Please take a few minutes and thoughtfully complete the attached study.

The names of volunteers will be kept strictly confidential. Your complete confidentiality is guaranteed. No person will see the completed questionnaires other than the researcher, and reports will not cite information that may threaten anonymity.

In order to ensure confidentiality, please do not put your name anywhere on the study.

Your participation is totally voluntary, and you may elect to quit filling out the study at any point.

Thank you for your participation!

Considering your employment life, have you ever worked with anyone who had any of the characteristics listed below?

- exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior
- is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty
- believes that he or she is “special” and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
- requires excessive admiration
- has unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
- takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
- is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
- is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her
- shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes

Please mark one

NO, I have not worked with someone who had any of these characteristics. Please stop and do not continue.

YES, I have worked with someone who had at least one of these characteristics. Please continue.

Please describe one person you were employed with who had any of the characteristics listed above. Try to be as specific as possible when describing the person.

1. Was this person your (please circle one)

A. Subordinate (someone you supervised)

B. Co-worker

C. Immediate Supervisor or Manager

D. Other (please specify) _____

2. How long did you work with this person? _____

Now that you have described the person, please mark all the characteristics that apply to that particular person by placing an "X" in the box next to the characteristic.

- exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior
- is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty.
- believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
- requires excessive admiration
- has unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations
- takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends
- is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
- is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her
- shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes

Now that you have told your story, think about the how the situation worked out. Please answer the following by circling the response that best matches your agreement or disagreement with the statements.

Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (U), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA)

1. I am pleased with the way the situation worked out. SD D U A SA
2. I believe my tactic was the best way to work out the situation. SD D U A SA
3. I believe my tactic prevented future conflict with the person. SD D U A SA
4. If facing the situation again, I would use the same tactic to work through the problem SD D U A SA

Answer the following question only if it applies to you:

5. I have dealt with numerous people of this nature, and have found that this technique frequently is very effective. SD D U A SA

APPENDIX B

Statistics

Coping Category

N	Valid	50
	Missing	0

Coping Category

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ignore (Put up with behavior)	20	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Confrontation (Face to face with narcissist)	12	24.0	24.0	64.0
	Inform Management	13	26.0	26.0	90.0
	Befriend	2	4.0	4.0	94.0
	Quit Job	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	