



Are youths' feelings of entitlement always "bad"?: Evidence for a distinction between exploitive and non-exploitive dimensions of entitlement

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A B S T R A C T

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Previous personality research (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004) has described the sense of entitlement as a unifactorial construct. In this study, we examined characteristics of two potential facets of entitlement: exploitive entitlement, characterized by exploitive interactions and expectations of special treatment, and non-exploitive entitlement, or entitled beliefs that rest on notions of self-worth and fairness. 466 college students (mean age = 20.5) completed a questionnaire consisting of unifactorial and two-factor measures of entitlement and other personality dispositions and attitudes. As expected, both exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement were positively related to the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; $r = .51$ and $r = .43$, respectively), a unifactorial measure of entitlement. In other respects, exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement had quite distinct correlates. Exploitive entitlement was uniquely related to higher levels of psychopathy and neuroticism, and lower levels of work orientation, social commitment, and self-esteem; whereas non-exploitive entitlement was uniquely associated with higher self-esteem.

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Entitlement has received an increasing amount of media attention in recent years, with much of this attention focusing on the societally harmful effects of individuals' sense of personal entitlement. A search of Lexis/Nexis (2009) reveals that references in the print media to the term "sense of entitlement" have increased almost six-fold over the last decade, from 148 mentions in 1998–863 in 2008. A large portion of these articles and commentaries focus on a perceived rise in entitled attitudes among adolescents and young adults in the context of school and the workplace. Entitlement has also attracted extensive empirical attention as a component of narcissism, with entitlement described as "the expectation of special privileges over others and special exemptions from normal social demands" (Raskin & Terry, 1988, p. 890). Other researchers, viewing entitlement as a construct of importance in its own right, have defined it as a "pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others" (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004, pg. 31), and as an "expectation of special favors without reciprocating" (Emmons, 1984, pg. 292).

Trait entitlement, as operationalized in the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; Campbell et al., 2004) and in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory -Entitlement subscale (NPI-E; Raskin & Hall, 1979), is associated with a wide range of maladaptive personality characteristics, including distrustfulness, lack of self-control (Raskin & Terry, 1988), trait anger (Witte, Callahan, & Perez-Lopez, 2002), Machiavellianism (McHoskey, 1995), greed and aggression (Campbell et al., 2004), and interpersonal violence (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Entitlement also has been associated with

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measures of psychopathy (Benning, Patrick, Blonigen, Hicks, & Iacono, 2005; Mills, 2001). Entitled individuals are viewed by others as hostile or deceitful (Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Is inflated self-esteem the cause of youths' sense of entitlement?

Several researchers have noted that self-esteem has risen substantially over the last 40 years. In a meta-analytic study of college students who had taken the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) between 1968 and 1995, Twenge and Campbell (2001) found that the level of self-esteem has risen substantially over that time, with the average student in the mid 1990s having a higher self-esteem score than 73% of their late 1960s peers. Some researchers and commentators have argued that entitlement, along with other narcissistic attitudes such as vanity, exploitativeness, and manipulativeness, have increased as a result of a recent emphasis on increasing adolescents' level of self-esteem (Twenge, 2006).

The self-esteem "movement," an effort designed to protect adolescents' sense of self-worth from parents' and teachers' harsh criticism and negative appraisals, began in the 1970s and became more prevalent during the 80s and 90s. Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, and Bushman (2008), Twenge (2006); contend that this movement has been largely responsible for the observed increases in self-esteem over time, but has had the unanticipated side-effect of artificially inflating adolescents' feelings of self-worth, independent of their actual abilities and accomplishments (Crocker & Knight, 2005). The result, they argue, has led to an increase in attitudes such as entitlement. In a recent meta-analysis, Twenge et al. (2008) found that scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) increased substantially between 1982 and 2006 ($d = .33$), although they did not report the trend for the Entitlement subscale. In contrast, Trzesniewski, Donnellan, and Robins (2008), in a meta-analytic study of California college students, did not find that scores on the NPI increased over time but did note that the Entitlement subscale of the NPI increased somewhat between 1982 and 2007 ($d = .17$). Twenge and Foster (2010) reanalyzed data from their earlier study and from Trzesniewski et al. (2008), controlling for university, as there are substantial mean level differences in NPI among universities. They found that NPI scores had increased substantially over time. Overall, these findings suggest that although there may be regional and other sources of variation in levels of narcissism and entitlement, there is substantial evidence that these attitudes have increased, at least in the United States, over at least the last 27 years.

If Twenge et al. and other researchers are correct that the self-esteem movement, and the concomitant rise in self-esteem, has been a significant driver in the rise of entitled attitudes, there should be a substantial positive association between self-esteem and entitlement. However, although many studies have shown a strong association between self-esteem and narcissism (meta-analytic $r = .29$; Campbell, 2001), few studies have found a substantial association between entitlement and self-esteem. Campbell and colleagues reported a modest association between the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) and the RSE ($r = .13$), several studies have not found a significant association between the Entitlement subscale of the NPI and the RSE (Bogart, Benotsch, & Pavlovic, 2004; Strelan, 2007), and other studies have found an inverse association between these two variables (Emmons, 1984, 1987). Additionally, in a study of entitlement in the academic domain (Greenberger, Lessard, Farruggia, & Chen, 2008), this variable had a modest, negative association with the RSE ($r = -.14$). These findings suggest that entitlement, as currently assessed, has little relation to self-esteem.

Further, entitlement beliefs are perceived to have increased greatly over time (Twenge, 2006), and by some measures, that seems to be the case. By the late 1980s, 80% of adolescents agreed with the statement "I am an important person", up from just 12% who agreed with that same statement in the 1950s (Newsom, Archer, Trumbetta, & Gottesman, 2003). Fifty-one per cent of recent high school graduates expect to obtain a graduate or professional degree, even though only 9% of adults actually obtain these degrees (Twenge, 2006). Similarly, 63% of these recent high school graduates expect to be working in a professional job by age 30, far more than the 18% of 30-year-olds who actually hold such positions (Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sischo, 2006). However, although these unrealistically high aspirations are fairly pervasive, most older adolescents do not have very high levels of entitlement, as measured by the NPI-Entitlement subscale or the PES. For example, in one recent study, the average undergraduate participant agreed with 39% of the forced-choice NPI items. However, these participants agreed with only 24% of the Entitlement subscale items, suggesting that these views are not very widespread (Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009). Similarly, across a range of studies involving older adolescents, the average score on the PES was substantially below the midpoint, suggesting that most participants moderately disagreed with these items (Campbell et al., 2004; Moeller et al., 2009).

Is it possible to reconcile these research findings? Several areas of research have examined feelings of deservingness and entitlement that do not explicitly involve receiving special favors from others, but instead derive from one's feelings of self-worth and previous accomplishments in a given domain. Conceptually, self-esteem reflects a person's evaluation of his or her level of self-worth and self-acceptance (Rosenberg, 1965). Several items on the RSE, for instance, specifically tap the feeling that one is worthy of positive outcomes (e.g., "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an even plane with others"). Such beliefs – that one is worthy and has value and thus may be deserving of positive or beneficial outcomes – seem to tap into certain aspects of entitlement. A substantial amount of research suggests that having unstable self-esteem that is highly contingent on the ups and downs of daily experiences (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989) has negative psychological consequences for the individual, such as feelings of anger, hostility, and frustration, as well as for interpersonal relationships (e.g., acts of aggression in ego-threatening situations; Kernis, 2003). These findings suggest that individuals with stable, high self-esteem may sometimes feel worthy of, or entitled to, positive outcomes, even in situations when their objective deservingness is unclear.

Similarly, Major (1984) have argued that variations in entitlement beliefs explain widespread variations between individuals and groups, such as the higher pay that men consistently request (and receive) for the same type and quality of work, relative to women. They found that when individuals received positive feedback about a task, they asked for more compensation than did individuals who received negative feedback. However, in the absence of objective feedback, individuals based their feelings of deservingness and entitlement on perceptions of their own performance and previously-developed schemas about how pay should be allocated (Bylsma, Major, & Cozzarelli, 1995; Feather, 1999; Major, 1984). Major and her colleagues argued that when individuals make judgments about how much they are entitled to as a result of their contribution to a group, they rarely use interpersonal comparisons, but usually use internalized standards based on the quality of their efforts. Although there is wide variation in these types of entitlement beliefs, they argue that having a sense of entitlement or deservingness that is not entirely tied to one's actual level of accomplishment in a given situation is a widespread, if not universal, phenomena (Major, 1984).

What is the central difference between this conceptualization of a sense of entitlement with that described above by personality researchers? In both cases, individuals feel as though they are entitled to positive outcomes. However, those persons with "narcissistic" entitlement believe that they deserve "special favors" (Emmons, 1984) or "special privileges" (Raskin & Terry, 1988) from others, or can exploit others to achieve their ends. The belief that one deserves positive outcomes may not differentiate people with maladaptively entitled beliefs from those with positive self-views and a secure sense of self-worth.

The current study

The purpose of the current study was to examine older adolescents and young adults with respect to two types of entitlement: a sense of entitlement characterized by the exploitation of others (e.g., "If I am in a hurry, people should let me move ahead in line"), and a sense of entitlement that is characterized by the belief that one deserves (perhaps unrealistically) positive outcomes in life, but that does not involve a willingness to exploit others to achieve these ends (e.g., "I deserve the best things in life").

We hypothesized that both exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement would be positively correlated with an existing measure of entitlement, the PES (Campbell et al., 2004), as both measures tap into an underlying belief that the individual is deserving of, or entitled to, positive outcomes. We also expected that both measures of entitlement would be associated with narcissism. Feelings of entitlement are a key characteristic of narcissism as assessed with the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988)

We expected, however, that as with previous measures of entitlement, high exploitive entitlement would be associated with low levels of self-esteem, or that the two measures would be uncorrelated. We expected that exploitive entitlement would be related to manipulateness, irresponsibility, and callousness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Consistent with prior entitlement research, we also expected that exploitive entitlement would be related to neuroticism and anxiety (Campbell et al., 2004; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Consistent with our conceptualization that exploitively entitled individuals expect others to assist them in accomplishing goals, we anticipated that exploitive entitlement would be negatively related to work orientation: i.e., the ability to take pleasure in work and persist at difficult tasks. Last, given exploitively entitled individuals' emphasis on self-gain at the expense of others, we expected that they would put personal advancement ahead of socially important goals, and thus would score low on a measure of social commitment (Greenberger, Josselson, Knerr, & Knerr, 1975). Previous research by Campbell et al. (2004) found that the PES was associated with "overharvesting" and selfish allocation of resources in hypothetical situations.

We expected that non-exploitive entitlement would have quite different correlates. We expected that high levels of non-exploitive entitlement, with its close conceptual association with feelings of self-worth and self-value, would be associated with high levels of self-esteem (although not so high as to be synonymous with inflated self-esteem), and low neuroticism and anxiety. We also expected that non-exploitive entitlement would be positively related to work orientation. Although it is possible to have a high sense of self-worth without accomplishment, previous research has shown that most individuals with a high level of self-worth base their self-views on accomplishment in the domains that they view as important (Crocker & Knight, 2007), suggesting that young adults whose feelings of entitlement arise as a result of an underlying feeling of self-worth would be willing to work towards their goals.

Method

Participants

Participants were 466 undergraduates at a large public university. The sample included 364 females (78.1%) and 102 males whose age ranged from 18 to 25 ($M = 20.1$ years, $SD = 1.4$ years). The sample was ethnically diverse. Two hundred sixteen participants (46.4%) described themselves as East or Southeast Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or Vietnamese ancestry or a combination of these), 88 as Caucasian (18.9%), 50 as Latino (10.7%), and the remainder as one of the following: Middle Eastern ($n = 29$; 6.2%), Filipino ($n = 27$; 5.8%), South Asian ($n = 26$; 5.6%) African/African American ($n = 5$; 1.1%), and mixed ethnicity ($n = 24$; 5.2%). The gender and ethnic composition of this sample was similar to the university from which the sample was recruited.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through the Social Sciences Human Subjects Pool. After reading a Study Information Sheet and verbally assenting to participation in the study, participants anonymously completed a questionnaire booklet of demographic questions and personality scales. Participants completed measures of entitlement, psychopathy, narcissism, self-esteem, work orientation, social commitment, anxiety, and neuroticism. They received course credit for their participation. All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of California, Irvine.

Self-report measures

In a previous study (Lessard, 2008), 18 items were developed to assess the hypothesis that entitlement may have two distinct facets, one that is exploitive and often maladaptive and the other that is non-exploitive and often adaptive. Nine items assessed entitled beliefs that were characterized by feelings that one deserves special treatment (e.g., “I deserve more in life than others who have had it easier than me”) or that involved the exploitation or excessive utilization of others to obtain the outcomes to which one felt entitled (e.g., “If I am in a hurry, people should let me move ahead in line.”). This scale was labeled *Exploitive Entitlement*. The other 9 items were intended to assess entitled beliefs that do not involve socially comparative or exploitive components (e.g., “I deserve the best things in life”). This scale was labeled *Non-Exploitive Entitlement*.

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted using AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) to examine whether the exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement items loaded on the appropriate factors. In an initial CFA, 4 items had high modification indices (Byrne, 2001), indicating that these items loaded significantly on both factors of entitlement. In addition, 2 items did not have loadings above .4 on the hypothesized factor. These 6 items were removed from further analysis, and the CFA was rerun. After removal of these items, the hypothesized 2-factor model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(47, N = 466) = 111.7, p < .001, CFI = .96; RMSEA = .05, CI: .04–.07; \chi^2/df = 2.4$. Based on these analyses, *exploitive entitlement* was assessed with 7 items ($\alpha = .75$) and *non-exploitive entitlement* was assessed with 5 items ($\alpha = .76$). Participants responded to items on both scales on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*.¹

Impression management was assessed with the 20-item Impression Management subscale ($\alpha = .79$) of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The Impression Management subscale includes items such as “When I hear people talking privately, I avoid listening”. This subscale has item responses range on a 7-point scale from 1 = *not true* to 7 = *very true*.

Entitlement was also assessed as a unifactorial construct with an existing measure, the 9-item PES (Campbell, 2004; $\alpha = .86$). The PES includes items such as “I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others”, and participants responded to items on a 6-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. The PES was included to provide convergent validation of the measures of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement that were developed for this study.²

Narcissism was measured using the total score for the forced-choice, 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988; $\alpha = .86$). A sample item is “If I ruled the world, it would be a better place.”

Self-esteem was assessed with Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; $\alpha = .81$). This scale includes items such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and has item responses that range on a 6-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*.

Neuroticism was assessed with a 10-item subscale of the Big Five Personality Traits Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992; $\alpha = .81$). The neuroticism subscale includes items such as “I see myself as someone who worries a lot”. Item responses ranged on a 5-point scale from 1 = *disagree strongly* to 5 = *agree strongly*.

Anxiety was assessed with the 20-item Trait Anxiety Inventory ($\alpha = .90$; Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970). This scale includes items such as “I feel tense”, and participants were asked to rate how they *generally* feel. Item responses range on a 4-point scale from 1 = *almost never* to 4 = *almost always*.

The relevant subscales of the 50-item Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI; Andershed, Gustafson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2002) were used to assess *Manipulativeness* ($\alpha = .85$; e.g., “To get people to do what I want, I often find it efficient to con them”), *Callousness* ($\alpha = .83$; e.g., “I seldom regret things I do, even if other people feel that they are wrong”), and *Irresponsibility* ($\alpha = .84$; e.g., “I like to do things just for the thrill of it”). The YPI has item responses that range on a 4-point scale from 1 = *does not apply at all* to 4 = *applies very well*.

Social Commitment (i.e., the willingness to subsume personal gains to the advancement of larger social goals), was assessed with an 11-item subscale of the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (PSM Inventory; Greenberger et al., 1975; $\alpha = .79$). This

¹ In a separate sample of 325 participants (M age = 20.4 [$SD = 1.5$]; 70% female; 45% Asian American, 15% White, 10% Latino American, 31% other and mixed ethnicity) from the same university, this factor structure again provided a good model fit, $\chi^2(47) = 80.7, p < .01, CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05, CI: .03–.06; \chi^2/df = 1.7$. This provides further evidence for the construct validity of these measures.

² The NPI-Entitlement subscale (Raskin & Terry, 1988) was not examined as a measure of entitlement because of several shortcomings described by Campbell et al. (2004). These include items that lack face validity, a forced choice format that limits variability in the possible range of scores, and the strong wording of items that may cause people to reject the entitled options because they are so socially undesirable rather than because they lack feelings of entitlement. In addition, the NPI-E had a relatively low inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .54$ in the current study). However, non-exploitive and exploitive entitlement are both positively associated with the NPI-E (both $r_s = .34, p < .05$). The lower correlations of these measures with the NPI-E than with the PES are likely due to attenuation caused by the lower reliability of the NPI-E.

subscale includes items such as “It’s not really my problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help” (reverse coded). Responses range on a 4-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*.

Work Orientation was assessed with a 10-item subscale of the PSM Inventory ($\alpha = .75$). This subscale assesses the ability to persist at difficult task, resist distractions, and take pleasure in work well done. It has the same item responses as the social commitment subscale and includes items such as “I seldom get behind in my work”.

Data analytic plan

First, the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the main study variables were examined. In order to examine the hypotheses articulated above, we ran a series of multiple regression models. In these multiple regression models, demographic variables (gender, age, and ethnicity) were entered as controls, and self-related personality characteristics (self-esteem, neuroticism, anxiety, and work orientation) and interpersonal characteristics (manipulativeness, irresponsibility, callousness, and social commitment), were regressed on exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement. Broadly, the purpose of these regressions was to determine the unique contribution of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement to variation in the traits noted above.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Participants reported significantly higher levels of non-exploitive than exploitive entitlement ($t = 44.08, p < .001$; see Table 1). As seen in Table 2, more than 70% of participants agreed (i.e., responded “slightly agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree” to an item) that each of the non-exploitive items described themselves. In contrast, only 17–43% of participants agreed that any of the exploitive entitlement items accurately described themselves. However, there were similar levels of variation across all items (SDs ranging from 1.04 to 1.30), suggesting that floor and ceiling effects were not present. Non-exploitive entitlement was not significantly correlated with impression management, $r = -.05, ns$, but exploitive entitlement was significantly but modestly correlated with impression management, $r = -.17, p < .001$. The correlations of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement with impression management, as assessed using Fisher’s r -to- z transformations, did not significantly differ, $z = 1.88, ns$.

The bivariate associations of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement with theoretically-related variables were examined, and pairwise comparisons of the bivariate correlations were conducted, using Fisher’s r -to- z transformations (see Table 2). As expected, exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement were both significantly correlated with the unifactorial entitlement scale, PES, $r = .51, p < .001$, and $r = .43, p < .001$, respectively, and the correlations of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement with the PES did not significantly differ, $z = 1.57, ns$. Importantly, this association is similar to that found between the PES and the NPI-Entitlement subscale, the two most common unifactorial measures of entitlement, used in prior studies ($.45 < r < .54$; Campbell et al., 2004; Moeller et al., 2009). In contrast, and as expected, the correlation between the exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement scales, although significant, was modest, $r = .26, p < .001$.

Exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement had substantively different associations with all other variables. Non-exploitive entitlement was positively correlated with self-esteem, $p < .001$, whereas the opposite was the case for exploitive entitlement, $p < .001$. Exploitive entitlement was positively related to neuroticism and anxiety, $ps < .001$, as well as manipulateness, irresponsibility, and callousness, $ps < .001$, but was inversely associated with social commitment and work orientation, $ps < .001$. Non-exploitive entitlement had a weak positive association with work orientation and a weak negative

Table 1
Percentage of participants endorsing (slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree) exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement items.

| | % Agree |
|---|---------|
| <i>Exploitive entitlement items</i> | |
| I deserve more success in my life than others who have had it easy | 42.7 |
| I am willing to admit that I feel I am due more in life than other people | 25.1 |
| I shouldn't have to work as hard as others to get what I deserve | 24.7 |
| I shouldn't have to work harder than others to have the finer things in life | 24.2 |
| Because of the things I have been through personally, others should cut me a break in life | 19.1 |
| If I am a frequent customer in a restaurant, they should be willing to seat me ahead of some other people | 18.0 |
| If I am in a hurry, people should let me move ahead in a line | 17.0 |
| <i>Non-Exploitive Entitlement Items</i> | |
| I deserve to be treated with respect by everyone | 94.8 |
| I expect to be treated with respect, even by those who are rich and famous | 91.2 |
| I deserve the best things in life | 85.4 |
| I am entitled to get into the career that I want | 75.1 |
| I am entitled to have the best things in life | 70.6 |

Table 2
Intercorrelations among and means and standard deviation of study variables.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | Mean (SD) |
|--|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|
| 1. Exploitive Entitlement | – | | | | | | | | | | | 2.71 (.72) |
| 2. Non-Exploitive Entitlement | .26*** | – | | | | | | | | | | 4.63 (.82) |
| 3. Psychological Entitlement | .51*** | .43*** | – | | | | | | | | | 3.53 (1.07) |
| 4. Narcissism Personality Inventory ^a | .24*** | .37*** | .47*** | – | | | | | | | | .49 (.18) |
| 5. Self-esteem ^a | –.20*** | .30*** | .09 | .33*** | – | | | | | | | 4.47 (.65) |
| 6. Neuroticism ^a | .17*** | –.04 | .06 | –.16*** | –.53*** | – | | | | | | 3.13 (.78) |
| 7. Anxiety ^a | .20*** | .07 | .12* | –.16** | –.37*** | .49*** | – | | | | | 2.12 (.65) |
| 8. Work Orientation ^a | –.32*** | .10* | –.14** | .03 | .41*** | –.25*** | –.15** | – | | | | 2.85 (.41) |
| 9. Manipulativeness ^a | .35*** | .12* | .48*** | .56*** | –.01 | –.02 | –.03 | –.28*** | – | | | 1.94 (.49) |
| 10. Irresponsibility ^a | .21*** | .05 | .21*** | .26*** | –.16 | .11* | .12* | –.47*** | .53*** | – | | 2.18 (.44) |
| 11. Callousness ^a | .23*** | –.05 | .19*** | .26*** | –.05 | –.22*** | –.07 | –.23*** | .55*** | .43*** | – | 1.81 (.39) |
| 12. Social Commitment ^a | –.39*** | –.03 | –.34*** | –.21*** | .15** | –.05 | –.05 | .54*** | –.42*** | –.33*** | –.43*** | 2.97 (.39) |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

^a The correlations of exploitive entitlement and non-exploitive entitlement with this variable are significantly different ($p < .05$).

association with manipulateness, $ps < .05$, and its association with all other variables was non-significant. Non-exploitive entitlement was more strongly related to narcissism than was exploitive entitlement. The associations of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement with all of these variables were significantly different, all $zs > 2.01$, $ps < .05$.

Regression analyses

A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess the unique attributes associated with exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement. Separate regression models were run to predict youths' levels of narcissism, self-esteem, neuroticism, anxiety, work orientation, manipulateness, irresponsibility, callousness, and social commitment. In each regression model, one of the above-mentioned variables was first regressed on demographic variables (age, gender, and ethnicity). Gender was dummy coded (female = 1). Ethnicity was collapsed into three groups – Asian, Caucasian, and Other – and then dummy codes for Asian and Other were created and included in the model (reference group = Caucasian). At a second step, exploitive entitlement and non-exploitive entitlement were included in the model (see Table 3 for final models).

As hypothesized, a higher level of exploitive entitlement was associated with higher scores on measures of narcissism, neuroticism, anxiety, manipulateness, irresponsibility, and callousness, all $\beta s > .16$, all $ps < .001$, and lower levels of self-esteem, work orientation, and social commitment, all $\beta s < -.28$, all $ps < .001$. In contrast, and also as expected, a higher level of non-exploitive entitlement was associated with higher scores on measures of narcissism, $\beta = .36$, $p < .001$, self-esteem, $\beta = .37$, $p < .001$, and work orientation, $\beta = .16$, $p < .001$, and somewhat lower levels of neuroticism and anxiety, $\beta s < -.10$, all $ps < .05$. However, non-exploitive entitlement was not significantly associated with levels of manipulateness, irresponsibility, callousness, and social commitment. The combination of non-exploitive and exploitive entitlement significantly improved the fit of all models, after controlling for demographic variables, $\Delta r^2 s$ ranged from .03 to .19, all $ps < .001$.

Discussion

In the current study, we examined the characteristics associated with exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement, in order to determine whether these dispositions have distinctive individual and interpersonal correlates. We first wanted to determine whether both exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement would be related to general entitlement as measured by an independent, previously validated measure. We then examined the degree to which the associations of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement with other variables were similar or dissimilar. Last, we examined whether exploitive entitlement and non-exploitive entitlement had unique, non-shared correlates.

Both exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement were highly correlated with an existing measure of entitlement, the PES. Moreover, these correlations were of a similar magnitude, and of about the same size as has previously been found between the PES and NPI-Entitlement subscale (Campbell et al., 2004), the two most commonly used measures of entitlement. This finding suggests that both the exploitive and non-exploitive measures are actually tapping into aspects of the same broad construct (i.e., entitlement). Similarly, both measures of entitlement were robustly associated with narcissism, as has been found in previous research based on other measures of entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Despite these strong associations, however, exploitive entitlement and non-exploitive entitlement were only moderately associated with each other, and had different correlates. The two measures of entitlement had similar associations with impression management, suggesting that individuals who reported higher levels of exploitive entitlement were not simply less concerned about how others view them.

Table 3
 Hierarchical regressions of correlates of interest on exploitive entitlement, non-exploitive entitlement, and demographics (final models).

| | Narcissism | | Self-esteem | | Neuroticism | | Anxiety | | Work orientation | | Manipulativeness | | Irresponsibility | | Callousness | | Social commitment | |
|-------------------------|------------|--------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|-----------|--------|------------------|---------|------------------|--------|------------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------------|---------|
| | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | b (SE) | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | β | b (SE) | β |
| Gender ^a | .08(.02) | .18*** | .15(.07) | .10* | -.49(.09) | -.26*** | -.14(.05) | -.12* | -.03(.04) | -.03 | .25(.05) | .21*** | .06(.05) | .06 | .29(.04) | .30*** | -.16(.04) | -.17*** |
| Age | -.01(.01) | -.08 | -.00(.02) | -.01 | .01(.03) | .02 | .01(.02) | .03 | .01(.01) | .02 | -.01(.02) | -.03 | .01(.01) | .04 | .01(.01) | .03 | .01(.01) | .05 |
| Ethnicity ^b | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Asian | -.02(.02) | -.07 | -.14(.08) | -.11 | .17(.10) | .11 | .12(.06) | .13* | -.16(.05) | -.20** | -.03(.06) | -.03 | .05(.06) | .06 | .06(.05) | .07 | -.08(.05) | -.11 |
| Other | -.02(.02) | -.04 | -.09(.07) | -.08 | -.06(.09) | -.04 | .03(.06) | .03 | -.06(.05) | -.06 | .05(.06) | .05 | -.03(.06) | -.02 | .06(.05) | .07 | .04(.05) | .04 |
| Exploitive | .04(.01) | .16*** | -.26(.04) | -.28*** | .19(.05) | .18*** | .18(.03) | .29*** | -.18(.03) | -.32*** | .23(.03) | .34*** | .12(.03) | .20*** | .13(.03) | .24*** | -.20(.02) | -.38*** |
| Entitlement | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Non-exploitive | .08(.01) | .36*** | .30(.04) | .37*** | -.10(.05) | -.10* | -.08(.03) | -.16** | .08(.02) | .16*** | .03(.03) | .05 | .01(.03) | .01 | -.04(.02) | -.08 | .01(.02) | .03 |
| Entitlement | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Δr ² | | .18*** | | .15*** | | .03*** | | .08*** | | .10*** | | .12*** | | .04*** | | .05*** | | .13*** |
| Adjusted R ² | | .19*** | | .17*** | | .10*** | | .11*** | | .15*** | | .16*** | | .04*** | | .15*** | | .20*** |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

^a Female = 0; Male = 1.

^b Reference group is European ancestry.

High levels of exploitive entitlement (i.e., agreeing with items such as “I shouldn’t have to work as hard as others to get what I deserve”) were associated with higher levels of manipulateness, irresponsibility, and callousness, and viewing wider societal concerns as unimportant. Importantly, high exploitive entitlement was not associated with a robust sense of self-worth, but rather was associated with high neuroticism and anxiety. These results are consistent with previous findings from a variety of other studies that used other measures of entitlement (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004).

Those youths who scored higher on non-exploitive entitlement tended to agree with statements such as “I deserve the best things in life”, but did not necessarily think that others should have to help them get the things they wanted. High non-exploitive entitlement was associated with higher scores on well-known unifactorial measures of entitlement and with higher narcissism. In contrast to the smaller percentage of youths who endorsed exploitive entitlement items, however, a substantial majority of youths agreed that the non-exploitive entitlement items described them at least somewhat, suggesting that these beliefs are more widespread. This dimension of entitlement was also associated with higher levels of self-esteem, in sharp contrast with exploitive entitlement. Non-exploitive entitlement was also related to having a positive work orientation, suggesting that youths with high levels of non-exploitive entitlement may feel entitled to get things they want at least partially because they are willing to put in the necessary effort to obtain them. Having higher levels of non-exploitive entitlement is associated with high levels of self-esteem and relatively low levels of neuroticism and anxiety, consistent with the possibility that non-exploitive feelings of entitlement may reflect a relatively stable sense of self-worth. The current results suggest that youths who are high in non-exploitive entitlement have relatively robust feelings of self-worth, rather than a fragile self-esteem, anxiety, and feelings of self-doubt. Thus, those high in non-exploitive entitlement may be less vulnerable to threatening situations, such as upward social comparison or criticism, compared with more exploitively-entitled youths (Campbell et al., 2004; Kernis, 2003).

It is important, nonetheless, not to overstate the positive nature of what we have called “non-exploitive entitlement”. For one thing, although youths higher in non-exploitive entitlement appeared to have more positive self-views and expectations of positive outcomes, the benefits of holding such self-views do not seem to extend into interpersonally relevant areas. Non-exploitive entitlement was not associated with lower levels of manipulateness, irresponsibility, or callousness, and also was not associated with elevated levels of social commitment. Moreover, in the current economic climate, the expectation of positive outcomes may be quite unrealistic. The 75% of youths in the current study who agreed with the item, “I deserve to get into the career that I want”, may be destined for future disappointment. Future research should examine the psychological and career outcomes of those youths with high levels of non-exploitive entitlement. It is possible that their sense of self-worth deflates over time, if and when they encounter unforeseen obstacles to their personal and occupational goals.

The current study has several limitations. It is based on a cross-sectional design and reliance on self-report measures without accompanying behavioral data. These shortcomings should be addressed in future studies. However, the results suggest that the conceptual and empirical distinction between exploitive and non-exploitive feelings of entitlement merits further investigation. Two potential directions for research involving this construct would be to examine the origins of exploitive and non-exploitive entitlement and the causal relationship between these personality dispositions and socially problematic behaviors. In light of the small magnitude of the correlation between the two dimensions of entitlement, it may be possible to decrease exploitive entitlement, through educational or therapeutic interventions, without lessening non-exploitive entitlement.

In sum, the results presented support the argument that all feelings of entitlement are not “bad”. Rather, it appears that higher levels of exploitive entitlement are associated with a propensity toward taking advantage of others to achieve one’s ends and the belief that one should not have to put forth as much effort as others to get the same rewards. This dimension of entitlement is consistently related to attributes that have negative personal and interpersonal consequences. In contrast, higher levels of non-exploitive entitlement appear to be based on the perception that one deserves or has a legitimate right to positive outcomes, but that does not mean the right to exploit others and expect special treatment. Non-exploitive entitlement is positively related to self-esteem, and, after taking into account its associations with exploitive entitlement, is generally associated with prosocial attributes. The distinction between these two dimensions of entitlement in youths and the ability to assess them separately has important implications, not only for the study of entitlement but also for the study of related constructs such as self-esteem and narcissism. Further, these findings suggest that the ultimate outcomes of the self-esteem movement are not yet clear, and that some of the negative outcomes that have been anecdotally attributed to this movement may be off the mark.

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