

**I'M GOOD ENOUGH  
I'M SMART ENOUGH  
AND DOGGONE IT, PEOPLE LIKE ME**

THE UPSIDE OF NARCISSISM IN THE WORKPLACE





# we are fast becoming a nation of narcissists

...at least according to a recent study by psychologists Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell. In their book *Living in the Age of Entitlement*, the two present findings from a survey of more than 37,000 college students showing that narcissistic personality traits rose as fast as obesity from the 1980s to the present.

Although some criticize Twenge and Campbell's study as little more than kids-these-days moralizing, just the thought of an influx of arrogant, self-promoting members of generations Y (Millennials) and Z (Digital Natives) keeps many managers and HR practitioners up at night.

But what if narcissism wasn't necessarily a bad thing? Narcissism is typically associated with negative outcomes; however, our research shows that, in controlled doses, narcissism can be a valuable tool for advancing one's career.

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The driving force behind narcissistic behavior is an individual's belief that he or she is unique or exceptional in some way, the origins of which can often be traced to adult caretakers providing children continuous positive feedback without the boundaries and discipline necessary for learning their own and others' limits.

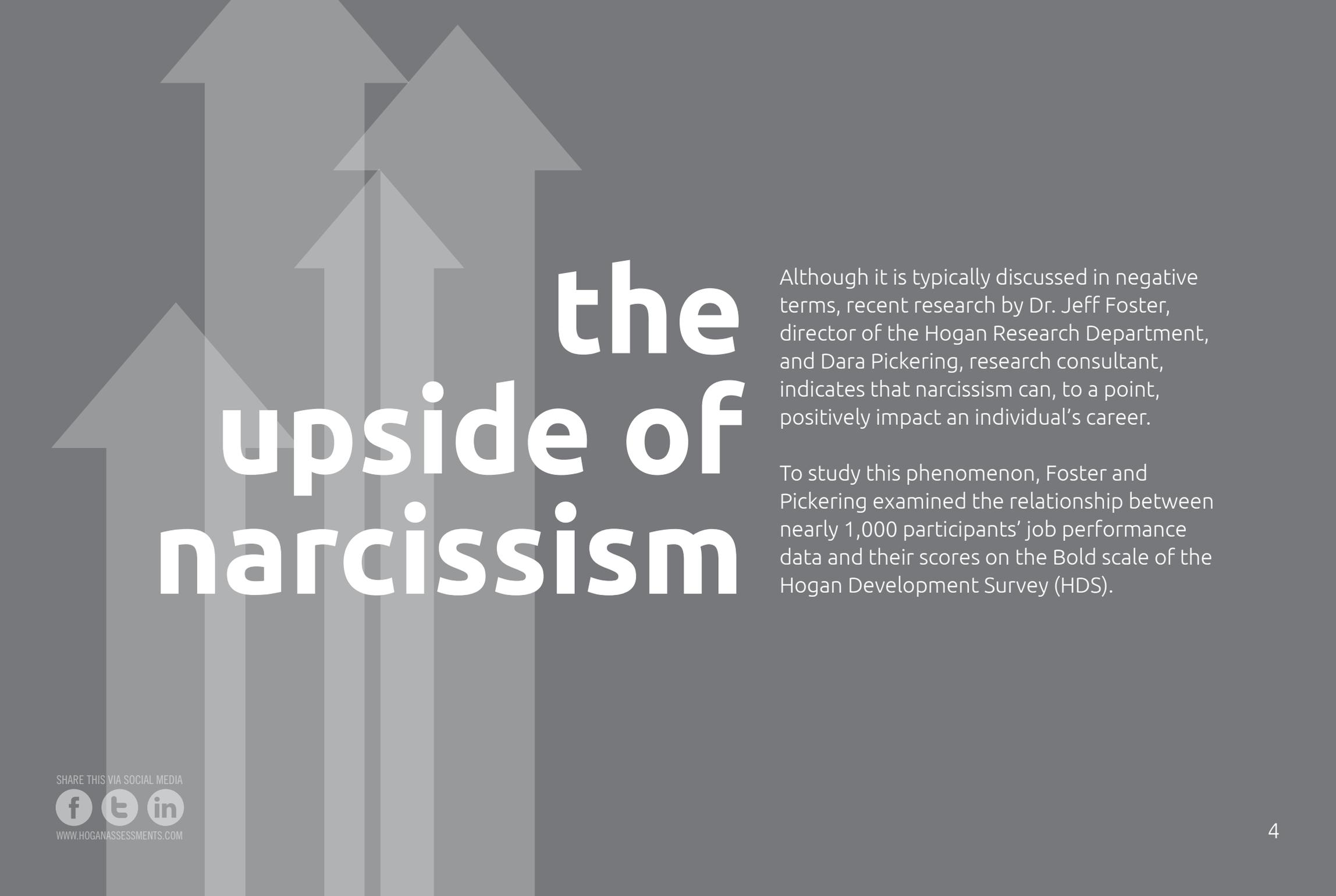
Sometimes an individual's history of exclusion, rejection, and/or illness can create a belief in his or her own exceptionality – in other words, the individual is exceptional by the virtue of having experienced challenging circumstances. These individuals' public self-confidence masks private self-doubt; however, their negative feelings may be so deeply buried that they are inaccessible.

**everyone  
is special  
in every  
way**

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# the upside of narcissism

Although it is typically discussed in negative terms, recent research by Dr. Jeff Foster, director of the Hogan Research Department, and Dara Pickering, research consultant, indicates that narcissism can, to a point, positively impact an individual's career.

To study this phenomenon, Foster and Pickering examined the relationship between nearly 1,000 participants' job performance data and their scores on the Bold scale of the Hogan Development Survey (HDS).

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The Hogan Development Survey measures dark-side personality – interpersonal tendencies that may be strengths under normal circumstances, but which, under stress or pressure, can become overused and damage an individual’s ability to form and maintain relationships with others. The Bold scale aligns with the narcissistic personality disorder described in the *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

# HDS Bold scores and narcissism

## Low

Dependability  
Financial Acumen  
Organizational Commitment  
Planning/Organizing  
Service Orientation  
Teamwork  
Trustworthiness  
Valuing Diversity

## Moderate

Active Listening  
Goal Setting  
Vigilance  
Work Attitude

## High

Employee Development  
Industry Knowledge  
Initiative  
Managing Performance  
Motivating Others  
Communication Skills  
Sales Ability  
Work Skills

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“these  
results are  
exactly what  
you would  
expect”

said Foster. “On the one hand, at the low end of the scale, individuals are unlikely to engage in self-promoting behaviors, and are therefore seen as dependable team players. Unfortunately for them, although team players are often liked by their colleagues and managers, they aren’t as likely to be considered for promotion.

“People on the high end of the scale, on the other hand, are more likely to be seen as knowledgeable about their industry, excellent at taking initiative, managing their performance, and achieving results. The question is whether these individuals are actually more effective at work, or if they are simply better at self-promotion and advancing their own agenda.”

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# Off the rails

Narcissistic behavior can be beneficial in limited doses, but under increased stress or pressure, it can become detrimental to an individual's performance.

People with high scores on the Bold scale (which indicates a proclivity toward narcissistic behavior) are likely to be:

- Aggressively ambitious and fearless when facing difficult tasks, regardless of actual past performance
- Impulsive and resistant to negative feedback
- Unrealistic in evaluating their abilities and competencies, and willing to make decisions without seeking input from others
- Feeling entitled to leadership positions and special consideration
- Intimidating and insensitive in dealing with peers and subordinates, blaming them for all performance issues

“When people are under an increased amount of stress or pressure, they tend to overuse their strengths to compensate,” Foster said. “So, what you see with narcissistic people is self-confidence in its extreme form. They overestimate their abilities, make decisions without consulting others, and scapegoat when they get it wrong.”

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# dealing with narcissism in the workplace

“It comes down to self-awareness,” Foster said. “If you provide your employees with a realistic understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and behavioral tendencies, they can harness the positive outcomes associated with narcissism and avoid taking it overboard.”

Narcissistic individuals believe in their own superior talent and typically resist developmental feedback. If personal development is presented as a strategy for advancing their personal agenda, however, narcissistic individuals can be persuaded to:

- Lower their expectations for special treatment, and try to accept responsibility for their occasional mistakes
- Recognize that they ignore negative feedback, and seek feedback from family, and friends who are not competitors and whose feedback is usually well-meaning
- Stop regarding team interactions as opportunities for competition in which only one person can win; remember that the real competition is outside the organization, not within
- Realize that subordinates are most likely to be productive when they feel respected; learn how to offer positive feedback to others when they contribute
- Use their confidence, energy, and determination to motivate rather than intimidate others

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Founded in 1987, Hogan Assessments pioneered the use of personality assessment to improve workplace performance. Twenty-five years later, we are committed to continuing the same spirit of innovation and attention to science.

Hogan's assessment solutions help businesses reduce turnover and increase productivity by hiring the right people, developing key talent, and evaluating leadership potential.

# about Hogan

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