"I want it all and I want it now!" An examination of the etiology, expression, and escalation of excessive employee entitlement

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ABSTRACT

Excessive entitlement is a pervasive and pernicious social issue, one that has considerable significance for human resource management. Despite its implications for work settings, relatively little research has examined this construct through a management lens. In this paper, a definition of excessive entitlement is offered and a model describing how it is expressed and encouraged in organizational settings is proposed. Key human resource functions drawn from the practitioner literature on employee entitlement (recruitment and socialization tactics, performance appraisal and reward structure; Wellner, 2004) are situated as interacting with employee trait levels of excessive entitlement to trigger counterproductive work behaviors. To the extent counterproductive behaviors are rewarded, the psychological correlates of excessive entitlement will spiral in an upward fashion, ultimately reinforcing trait expression. In contrast, ignoring or punishing the behavioral outcomes of excessive entitlement will prompt "regulation," whereby individuals disavow their entitled attitudes or "retribution," which may include retaliation, disengagement, and turnover. The implications of this work, along with strategies for advancing the study of excessive entitlement in work settings, are discussed.

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It has been suggested that we are living in the "Age of Entitlement" or the "New Gilded Era" (e.g., Samuelson, 1995). Indeed, it seems as though individuals are increasingly subscribing to the belief that they should get exactly what they want, when they want it — oftentimes without regard for the well-being of others. While the antecedents of this rise in feelings of personal deservingness are difficult to pinpoint, several factors have been proposed, including a general increase in the standard of living, proliferation of technology and the "instant gratification" such advancements often bring, and expansion of the welfare safety net (Samuelson, 1995). Whatever the catalysts, it would appear that entitlement-related attitudes are now influencing life in many of our social institutions. For instance, much has been made of entitlement in education (Côté & Allahar, 2007; Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008; Jayson, 2005; Roosevelt, 2009), government (Gomery, 2005), and the family (Allers, 2005; Tyre, Scelfo & Kantrowitz, 2004), and recent press reports suggest entitlement is a significant problem in the workplace (Irvine, 2005; Rushowsky, 2007).

Despite growing interest in entitlement, a lack of consensus regarding construct definition and dearth of theoretically-grounded work on this topic in the organizational sciences has limited understanding of entitlement as it pertains to work life. The absence of a clear research framework related to entitlement at work is disconcerting, as entitlement attitudes have been implicated in the new psychological contract and noted among individuals with diverse backgrounds working in a variety of industries (e.g., Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman 2004; Rousseau, 2005). Indeed, the significance of entitlement for contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) is particularly salient, as many practitioners have reported frustration with what they perceive to be a workforce with "shockingly high expectations for salary, job flexibility, and duties but little willingness to take on grunt work or remain loyal to a company" — entitled views that seem especially rampant among the newest generation of workers (i.e., "GenY" or the "MeGeneration"; Irvine, 2005, p. E2; also Twenge, 2006).

To date, much of the literature has been inconsistent in acknowledging that entitlement can have both positive and negative connotations — an issue that has detracted from the clarity of this construct's definition and one compounded by the subjective nature of the criteria upon which entitlement is evaluated (Naumann, Minsky & Sturman, 2002). Thus, a primary purpose of this article is to introduce the construct of *excessive entitlement* (Levin, 1970) to the human resource management literature. A second purpose is to present a model outlining the psychological and behavioral consequences associated with reinforcing excessive entitlement in work settings. According to the model, features of the organizational environment can 'activate' excessive entitlement, increasing the likelihood of trait expression. The model describes how rewarding the behavioral correlates of excessive entitlement triggers an escalation effect wherein employees describe wanting and deserving more than others for contributing less. In contrast, ignoring or punishing excessive entitlement is posited to result in a) regulation, whereby individuals abandon their entitled views and engage in productive task-related behaviors or b) retribution, which may include retaliation, disengagement, and organizational exit. Further understanding of excessive entitlement and its implications for work life is important in that it will allow organizations to design interventions that prevent the escalation of entitlement-related attitudes and behaviors as well as manage their consequences when they emerge.

1. Construct definition of excessive entitlement

The term entitlement has become part of our collective lexicon, and yet popular conceptualizations of the word are predominantly negative, a feature that can fundamentally misrepresent the nature of this construct (Naumann et al., 2002). Broadly speaking, entitlement reflects "an entire family of human events associated with social justice: issues of equity, deserving, rights, fairness, and the justice of procedures, distribution and retributive acts" (Lerner, 1987, p. 108). Importantly, there is nothing inherently negative about entitlement, as beliefs about what an individual feels he or she has a right to receive can be "normal" (e.g., the right to claim benefits as granted by law or contract), "restricted" (e.g., women have been noted to self-allocate less compensation than men for comparable work; Hogue & Yoder, 2003) *or* "excessive" (e.g., Levin, 1970). Whether entitlement is categorized as normal, restricted, or excessive ultimately hinges on observer evaluations of a focal individual's level of deservingness, a subjective judgment closely linked to the correspondence between behavior and its consequences (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Feather, 1999a, Feather, 2003; Naumann et al., 2002). When the consequences of one's actions are deemed consistent with the intentions behind it (i.e., "good things happen to good people" or an "eye for an eye") they are considered deserved; when inconsistent (e.g., those who contribute little get ahead), they are said to be undeserved (Feather, 2003). Individuals are therefore said to be deserving of, or legitimately entitled to, outcomes for which they have contributed an appropriate amount or type of input (e.g., those who have contributed payroll taxes are said to be entitled to claim social security benefits, with such claims reflecting a normal sense of entitlement; Campbell et al., 2004; Naumann et al., 2002). Of course, beliefs about one's personal control over behavior and its consequences must also be taken into account, as people are generally considered undeserving of outcomes — positive or negative — they are not responsible for (Feather, 1999b, p. 5).

Considering an individual's level of deservingness provides insight into the legitimacy of his or her entitlement and yet this criterion is conceptually problematic in that it resides entirely in the eye of the beholder. Perceptual and self-serving biases such as tendencies toward positive self-presentation and commitment of the fundamental attribution error make it unlikely that individuals will acknowledge their perceived entitlement as undeserved or excessive (Feather, 1999b). Judgments concerning the nature of entitlement therefore rest — at least in part — on how observers evaluate a focal individual's preferred equity ratio *vis-à-vis* societal norms for resource allocation (e.g., Deutsch, 1985; Heath, 1976; Naumann et al., 2002; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992). In capitalist societies where rewards are typically distributed according to principles of equity (i.e., individual outcomes are commensurate with, or equal to inputs; Heneman, 1992), entitlement will be deemed excessive when an individual's desire for outcomes exceeds what is considered socially normative based on the nature of his or her inputs. Importantly however, evaluations of deservingness may also be influenced by characteristics of the actor and the nature of the relationship that person shares with the evaluator (Feather, 1999b). Perceptions of strong moral character — along with interpersonal liking — are just two factors that minimize the likelihood a rater will judge an actor's entitlement as being undeserved (Feather, 1999b). To avoid such biases, agreement among multiple neutral (e.g., third party) assessors may be needed to classify the nature of an individual's entitlement.

Wanting more, coupled with beliefs that one is more deserving than others, is one way excessive entitlement has been defined and measured (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004). This conceptualization is limited however, in that it necessarily — yet erroneously — classifies both the greedy and ambitious person as illegitimately or negatively entitled (i.e., the greedy and ambitious person's desire for outcomes will exceed his or her current levels). Thus, the ability to categorize entitlement as excessive requires assessing not just beliefs regarding the type and amount of outcomes an individual wants or believes are owed to him or herself, but also necessitates assessing that person's attitudes toward the type and amount of inputs that should be contributed (e.g., the Equity Sensitivity Instrument; Huseman, Hatfield & Miles, 1985; also Naumann et al., 2002). The excessively entitled individual's preference for a small input: outcome ratio does not negate the fact that he or she may contribute inputs though to observers, those inputs would be viewed as either irrelevant to the calculation of the equity ratio or as reflecting low levels of investment (e.g., time, effort, skill) relative to their expected pay-off (Naumann et al., 2002). For instance, excessively entitled individuals are likely to view subjective characteristics and experiences as comprising valid inputs, believing they are deserving simply because of "who they are or what they have done" in the past (e.g., Lerner, 1987, p. 108). Individuals high in excessive entitlement could therefore be expected to endorse the idea that they deserve to receive a disproportionately greater amount or kind of outcome than what would be predicted on the basis of their objective performance-related contributions.

1.1. Excessive entitlement defined

Individuals who possess *excessive* levels of entitlement have been characterized as self-righteous, as harboring grandiose thoughts, and as being overly demanding in their personal relationships (Bishop & Lane, 2002) — characteristics that are not surprising given well-documented linkages between this form of entitlement and Narcissistic Personality Disorder (e.g., Raskin & Novacek, 1989; Wink, 1991, 1996). In fact, entitlement and exploitative attitudes form the central core of narcissism (e.g., Emmons, 1984) and while they do not use the term excessive, it is undoubtedly this type of entitlement scholars refer to when they note entitled individuals often demand "special, preferential treatment from others" and are quick to denigrate those they perceive as undermining or threatening their elevated sense of self (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, Finkel, 2004, p. 895).

Although narcissism has received some attention from management scholars (e.g., Brown, 1997; Hiller & Hambrick, 2005; Judge, LePine, Rich, 2006; Penney & Spector, 2002), relatively little work has been dedicated to the study of excessive entitlement specifically — a significant omission given the conceptual independence of these constructs.[1] Equity sensitivity (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987) is, nevertheless, one individual difference discussed in the organizational literature that recognizes some people feel they ought to get more (or less) for their inputs than others. Equity sensitivity reflects a continuum of reward preferences represented by a benevolent type on one end and an entitled type on the other. Under the rubric of equity sensitivity, an entitled individual is one who prefers situations of over reward (i.e., his or her outcome: input ratio is larger than that of a referent standard). Entitled individuals place greater emphasis on receiving outcomes than on contributing inputs and therefore, are *relatively less tolerant of under reward* and *relatively more tolerant of over reward* (King, Miles & Day, 1993). Central to these ideas is the notion of unequal, yet self-serving social exchange in which entitled individuals believe they are deserving of more rewards — relative to a given level of input — than others. Even when they may be considered objectively well-off, entitled individuals could be expected to endorse the notion that they have a right to more (Huseman et al., 1987). In this sense, the nature of entitlement described by equity sensitivity researchers reflects the excessive type.

In this paper, a comprehensive definition of excessive entitlement is provided, one that simultaneously addresses the role 1) input: outcome orientation, 2) resource allocation norms, and 3) negative psychological and behavioral consequences play in shaping this construct. To this end, excessive entitlement is defined as a trait that reflects an aristocratic rather than ambitious personality profile, one that is fueled by *inaccurate perceptions regarding the number or type of outcomes owed to the self (formed in response to distorted views of the validity of one's performance inputs) that exceeds what would be considered normative according to prevailing social allocation rules and that when acted upon, may negatively impact others.* Simply put, excessive entitlement reflects the unfounded belief that one "possesses a legitimate right to receive special privileges, mode of treatment, and/or designation when, in fact, one does not" (Kerr, 1985, p. 8). At its core, excessive entitlement is a product of believing one's inputs are better (i.e., higher quantity or quality) and therefore more valid or deserving of reward than they actually are — a belief that stems, at least in part, from excessively entitled individuals' inflated self-esteem.[2] The fact that excessively entitled individuals over-value their inputs suggests they will reliably perceive distributive injustice and focus on correcting this inequity (e.g., Giacalone, 1985) — whether that means getting more than others or improving outcomes relative to some personal standard hinges on referent choice (e.g., peer versus self).

2. Behavioral correlates of excessive entitlement

Excessive forms of entitlement predict a constellation of negative behaviors, including competitiveness, selfishness, and aggression in social relationships (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Reidy et al., 2008). Like other types of negative behavior, excessively entitled individuals may engage in these acts in an effort to "right" a perceived "wrong" (e.g., obtain rewards believed to be owed to them) or to protect and promote a positive self-image (see Giacalone, 1985). For excessively entitled individuals, any sense of outcome deprivation will be deemed an "unjust injury" and justify subsequent claims to exorbitant compensation (Bishop & Lane, 2002, p. 740). Thus, regardless of the specific form it takes, the behavior of excessively entitled individuals will be targeted toward maximizing personal outcomes relative to a given level of personal input. Such an assertion is consistent with claims that entitled individuals prefer conditions of overreward and try to reify their feelings of deservingness by engaging in a variety of acquisitive behavioral tactics (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Huseman et al., 1987).

In organizational settings, one might argue that excessive entitlement has contributed to the rise of "Idiosyncratic-Deals" and employees bargaining for themselves (e.g., Rousseau, 2005). Whereas philosophies espousing the value of hard work and deriving meaning from contributing inputs define traditional work values (e.g., Mirels & Garrett, 1971), some suggest today's society possesses an excessive sense of entitlement that lead many to want the best without working to make such aspirations a reality (Elkind, 1987). Consistent with this view, one business consultant suggests excessively entitled employees are less likely to go above and beyond — a stance that ultimately erodes performance-oriented organizational cultures (Anderson, as cited in Wellner, 2004). Requesting a salary increase despite poor or marginal performance, demanding perks for completing the most basic of job

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[1] Whereas narcissism speaks predominantly to self-adoration, entitlement is "explicitly interpersonal, emphasizing one's assumptions about how others should treat the self" (Exline et al., 2004; p. 895).

[2] Narcissism and its facets (e.g., entitlement) are correlated with high (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Emmons, 1984; Raskin et al., 1991), yet unstable (i.e., fragile) levels of self-esteem (Baumeister, Bushman & Campbell, 2000). Individuals with fragile self-esteem tend to tie their self-image to specific outcomes or events and require continuous boosting of their egos (Kernis, 2005). Furthermore, unstable high self-esteem has been linked to anger and hostility — affective states also tied to excessive entitlement (Exline et al., 2004; Kuppens et al., 2003).

tasks, and seeking a payout after being terminated have been offered as just a few examples of how excessively entitled employees could be expected to behave on the job (Wellner, 2004, p. 62). These examples reinforce the notion that behavioral outcomes of excessive entitlement will be conceptually related to, although perhaps not empirically redundant with, a variety of counterproductive work behaviors targeting the fulfillment of self-serving goals.

2.1. Excessive entitlement and counterproductive work behaviors

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) reflect voluntary acts intended to harm an organization or its members (Spector & Fox, 2002; p. 271). Overall, CWBs vary in magnitude, pervasiveness, and target and can take any number of forms including production (e.g., working slowly, wasting resources), property (e.g., sabotaging equipment) and political deviance (e.g., gossiping, blaming others for personal mistakes), as well as personal aggression (e.g., verbal and physical abuse; Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 565). Empirical work supports the multidimensionality of CWBs and yet these dimensions are often conceptually and statistically correlated, meaning different forms of counterproductive behavior can co-occur (e.g., Gruys & Sackett, 2003; Spector et al., 2006).

Existing research points to a positive relationship between narcissism and CWB, as such behaviors may be enacted to punish those who threaten the narcissist's inflated ego, thereby reasserting that individual's feeling of superiority over others (Penney & Spector, 2002; p. 128). Like narcissism, excessive entitlement encompasses a variety of personality indicators (e.g., low agreeableness and emotional stability, high trait anger; Campbell et al., 2004; Harrington, 2006; Kohut, 1972) and motivations (e.g., ego enhancement and protection) also tied to CWB (Berry et al., 2007; Fox & Spector, 1999; Spector & Fox, 2002). In light of evidence linking excessive entitlement and its personality markers to general forms of deviance, and in accordance with research showing deviant acts tend to coexist, excessively entitled employees will be at greater risk for engaging in a variety of CWBs (e.g., production, property, political and personal deviance) than non-entitled employees (see Fig. 1).

Proposition 1. *Trait levels of excessive entitlement will predict participation in CWB such that individuals high in excessive entitlement will be more likely to engage in a) production, b) property, c) political and d) personal deviance than individuals low in excessive entitlement.*

3. Excessive entitlement: the role of person and situation

Although individual differences in excessive entitlement are predicted to influence participation in counterproductive work behaviors, this construct can be fully understood only by focusing on both its individual *and* environmental precursors. Contemporary views of person–situation interactionism maintain individuals selectively respond to the "psychological features" of situations by generating stable yet unique sets of goals and behaviors (Mischel & Shoda, 1995, p. 255). This perspective suggests that even when individuals report similar trait levels of excessive entitlement they will behave differently depending upon the ability of the situation to elicit perceived outcome inequity. Although there may be very little variability in the work behaviors of employees who consistently report high levels of excessive entitlement (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004), an interactionist perspective allows for the possibility that those typically low or variable in excessive entitlement may come to think and act in entitled ways in response to organizational practices.

State versus trait entitlement. The notion that psychological and behavioral markers of entitlement may change over time and in response to environmental cues takes issue with prevailing trait definitions to argue that entitlement may, under some conditions, reflect state-like characteristics (Naumann et al., 2002). Just as mood (George, 1991) and some individual differences (e.g., self-efficacy; Lindsley, Brass & Thomas, 1999) can reflect state *and* trait-like properties, it is plausible that entitlement may also exhibit both tendencies. While trait-measures of entitlement (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004) tend to assume stability in perceived deservingness, a person may feel more or less entitled at different points in time or across different situations. For instance, it seems reasonable to suggest that an individual may feel deserving of outcomes at work but not at home (i.e., that situational factors can trigger or mitigate excessive entitlement).

The idea that entitlement is more likely to manifest itself behaviorally in some environments than others is consistent with the concept of trait activation which can be defined as the emergence of personality characteristics in response to pertinent environmental cues (Tett & Burnett, 2003). This principle, according to Tett and Burnett (2003), would suggest that if one seeks to understand the relevance of entitlement for the workplace, assessment should occur under those work conditions where entitlement is likely to flourish. Tett and Guterman (2000) tested the tenets of trait activation and concluded that environments differ in the extent to which they provide trait-relevant cues and further, that the behavioral manifestation of traits varies predictably with the existence of these cues. Participants in their study completed measures for targeted traits and indicated their behavioral intentions in a variety of scenarios. Overall, support for the tenets of trait activation was found — behavioral intentions and their correlations with trait-measures were strongest in those situations deemed trait-relevant (e.g., risk-takers were more likely to report a tendency to engage in risky behaviors in scenarios designed to elicit that trait).

3.1. HRM practices as triggers of excessive entitlement

Permissive management practices — or those that reinforce patterns of indulgency — are proposed to trigger employee behaviors reflective of excessive entitlement (e.g., CWB). According to Gouldner (1954) indulgent patterns of organizational functioning are those in which management consistently relinquishes "something that it might not have to" or gives up "something
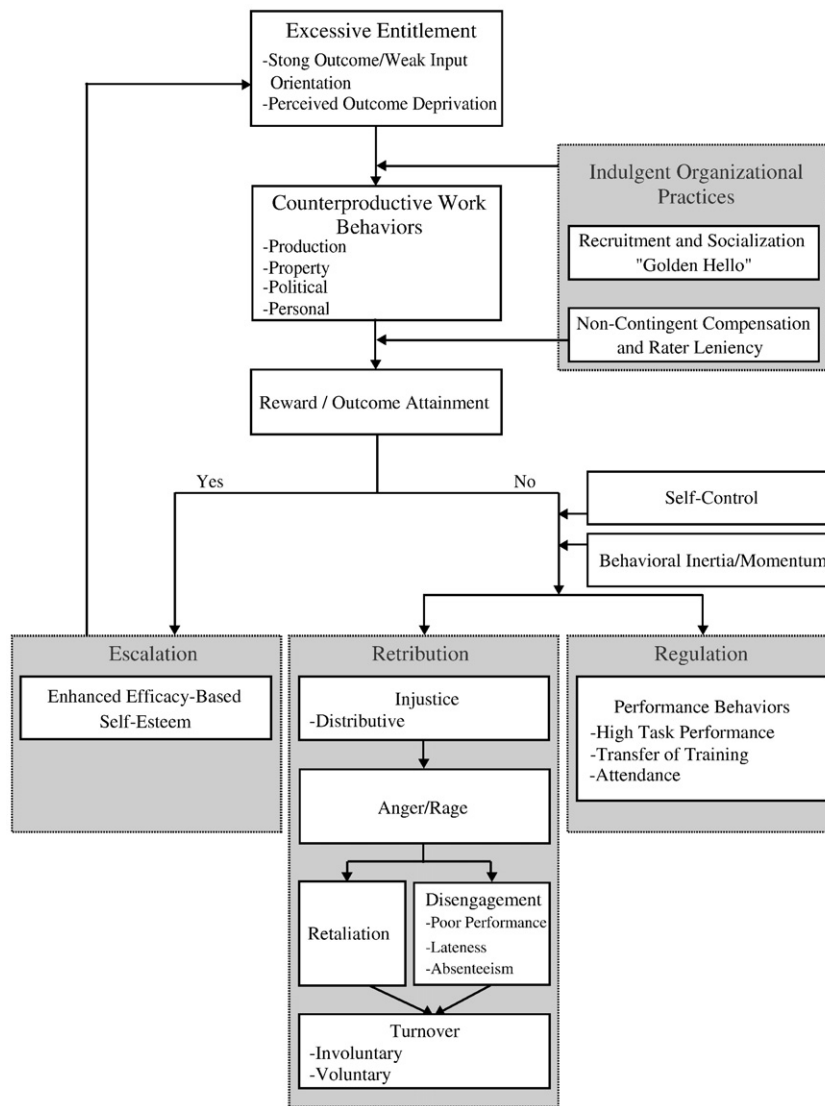
Fig. 1. A model of excessive employee entitlement.

for which no compelling claim could be made" (p. 53). In keeping with a social-interactionist stance, human resource management practices expected to contribute to indulgent organizational conditions and thereby stimulate excessive employee entitlement, are outlined below. The factors reviewed highlight and build upon those presented in the practitioner literature (e.g., Wellner, 2004) and are not intended to be an exhaustive listing; rather, it is hoped they will provide a foundation for examining the organizational catalysts of excessive entitlement.

Recruitment and socialization. Unmet expectations negatively impact newcomers' organizational adjustment (Wanous, 1980) and therefore, mismanagement of the psychological contract during the recruitment and socialization of new employees will potentially activate excessive entitlement (Naumann et al., 2002; Wellner, 2004). Psychological contracts are established largely through pre-employment experiences and reflect beliefs regarding the obligations shared between an employee and his or her employing organization (Rousseau, 2001). The fact that individuals begin to form employment expectations prior to organizational entry leaves organizations in a difficult predicament. Companies may feel pressured to offer employees a variety of perquisites (e.g., signing bonuses and work–family benefits) with the hope of attracting top performers and yet this focus on "selling" the organization and "giving" to applicants may serve to attract individuals with high trait levels of excessive entitlement and contribute to elevated outcome expectations on the part of "normal" candidates. In addition, rewarding — or promising to reward — "A" (e.g., past behavior and credentials) while hoping for "B" (e.g., future performance; Kerr, 1975) at the outset of an individual's employment sends the message that the organization values employees for *who* they are and not for *what* they do — a condition that may bolster employees' feelings of superiority, uniqueness, and perceived deservingness. Finally, offering applicants a "golden hello" sets high expectations for reward and may lead organizational stakeholders to make promises they are

unable to keep, increasing the likelihood of perceived outcome deprivation and future contract breach (e.g., Buckley et al., 2002; Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1995). It is this sense of perceived deprivation that will strengthen the relationship between trait levels of excessive entitlement and CWB, as employees could be expected to engage in counterproductive acts as a means to attain outcomes promised and therefore "owed" to them.

Proposition 2. *Recruitment and socialization practices that inflate reward expectations will moderate the relationship between excessive entitlement and CWB such that the relationship between these constructs will be stronger for employees low or variable in excessive entitlement.*

Performance appraisal and compensation. Rewards that fail to discriminate between poor, average, and excellent performance also have the potential to weaken the role of reciprocity in the employment context, thereby bolstering employee feelings of deservingness and increasing the likelihood of engaging in CWB (Lawler, 1971; Martinko & Gardner, 1982; Naumann et al., 2002; Wellner, 2004). Overly lenient performance feedback and fixed pay plans are two such 'rewards' that emphasize the organization's obligation to provide outcomes (e.g., salary) while minimizing the employee's obligation to contribute high quality performance inputs (Milkovich & Wigdor, 1991). Lawler (1971) cautions that non-contingent rewards have poor motivating potential, as such outcomes reduce incentives to perform by positioning substandard or mediocre performance contributions as being equally — if not more — attractive than high performance. For instance, under lenient appraisal and fixed pay systems, employees can expect to receive rewards *regardless* of effort expended or performance quality, leaving the basis for understanding how outcomes are allocated ambiguous (Kanter, 1991, p. 45). In light of such ambiguity, the extent to which outcomes received are actually deserved becomes susceptible to interpretation. Without a clear understanding of what constitutes legitimate performance-related input, individuals may come to over-estimate the value of idiosyncratic, non-performance-related attributes (e.g., age, tenure) in their calculations of deservingness and be prone to believing those inputs are worth more than they really are — beliefs that may induce perceptions of deprivation and activate an excessive sense of entitlement (Naumann et al., 2002; Wellner, 2004).

Proposition 3. *Non-contingent rewards, as reflected by a) overly lenient performance ratings and b) fixed pay administered on a continuous reinforcement schedule will moderate the relationship between excessive entitlement and CWB such that the relationship between these constructs will be stronger for employees low or variable in excessive entitlement.*

4. Reinforcement of excessive employee entitlement

On a societal level, there is evidence to suggest that entitlement-related attitudes have increased in recent decades (e.g., Trzesniewski et al., 2008; Twenge, 2006), and yet there is a relative paucity of research tracing these perceptions and their work-related consequences across time, *within-person*. It is argued here that the attitudinal and behavioral correlates of excessive entitlement can increase over time and that their escalation can be understood using principles of organizational behavior modification (OBM). OBM encompasses the processes by which job-related behaviors are encouraged to occur more or less frequently via dispensation of pleasant or aversive consequences (Kreitner, 1982). Contingent reinforcement has been noted to impact a variety of work-related behaviors including performance quantity and quality, absenteeism, safety, theft and customer service (see O'Hara, Johnson & Beehr, 1985 for a review), with meta-analytic work demonstrating a significant positive effect of OBM interventions on task performance ($d = .51$, Stajkovic & Luthans, 1997). Although rooted in classic writings on behavior reinforcement and operant conditioning, contemporary models of OBM recognize the mediating role of cognition in stimulus–behavior relationships (Davis & Luthans, 1980; Luthans & Kreitner, 1985). Recognizing the effect of OBM efforts on cognitive processing is significant, as it allows for the possibility that counterproductive work behaviors will become more or less common as a result of how reinforcement (i.e., reward or outcome attainment) influences individuals' self-perception (e.g., their self-esteem; see Fig. 1).

4.1. Reinforcement of excessive entitlement via outcome attainment

Previously, it was proposed that individuals would engage in CWB as a means to reduce perceptions of outcome inequity typical of excessive entitlement. In keeping with an OBM approach, it is expected that when CWB results in the attainment of desired outcomes, such behavior will become more probable in the future. Conversely, if CWB does not result in desired outcomes, such behavior will become less probable. Although it seems unlikely that any organization would deliberately reward those who participate in counterproductive behaviors, the fact that excessively entitled individuals can be interpersonally difficult suggests it may be easier to concede to these employees than manage the fallout associated with not meeting their inflated expectations. In the field of education, for example, some have suggested that it is not uncommon for teachers to award high grades to objectively undeserving students in an effort to address institutional pressures (e.g., government funding is often tied to enrollment and graduation rates) and avoid student and parent backlash (e.g., Brown, 2007; Côté & Allahar, 2007). Nevertheless, while rewarding CWBs may be effective in the short-term, this strategy poses significant long-term risk. Not only does such a strategy reinforce negative behavior on the part of individual actors, it may also trigger excessively entitled attitudes and related behaviors in others through vicarious learning processes (e.g., Bandura, 1977).

Reward structure as a moderator of the CWB-reward relationship. In addition to moderating the relationship between excessive entitlement and CWB, appraisal leniency and non-contingent compensation are also situated as moderating the relationship between CWB and outcome attainment. Performance ratings have significant implications for resource allocation, as positive

evaluations are typically associated with more (or better) organizational rewards than negative evaluations (Ilgen et al., 1979). To the extent rater leniency and fixed pay have the potential to mask undesirable work behaviors, the probability such behaviors will be rewarded and repeated increases. In contrast, under contingent reward programs such as merit or equity-based pay, the importance of task-related inputs for attaining desired outcomes is clear (Gerhart & Rynes, 2003); a characteristic that along with rating accuracy, reduces the likelihood that counterproductive behaviors will be reinforced.

Proposition 4. *The relationship between CWB and outcome attainment will be stronger when a) rewards are not contingent on performance-related contributions and b) performance ratings reflect rater leniency.*

4.2. Escalation of entitlement-related attitudes and behaviors over time

Consistent with the tenets of OBM and Social Cognitive Theory (e.g., Bandura, 1986), it is proposed that rewarding counterproductive behaviors will ultimately strengthen attitudes and behaviors associated with excessive entitlement. Outcome attainment could be expected to inflate employees' efficacy based self-esteem which in turn, will shift expectations regarding what they can and should get and therefore, what they are entitled to (Bandura, 1982, 1986; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Outcome attainment may also signal that the attitudinal and behavioral correlates of excessive entitlement are both legitimate and deserved. Over time however, the possibility exists that individuals who successfully secure their undeserved and inflated wants will become habituated to a given level or type of outcome and need "more" to maintain their self-worth. Such an assertion is consistent with original conceptualizations of the hedonic treadmill (e.g., Brickman & Campbell, 1971) and aspiration level theory (e.g., Inglehart, 1990) in that individuals often respond to improved economic and social conditions by setting higher goals and consuming more (Binswanger, 2006). The behaviors associated with excessive entitlement (e.g., CWBs) could therefore be expected to increase in frequency and/or range across performance episodes where such behavior is reinforced. Stated another way, as long as individuals are able to increase their outcome: input ratio, self-esteem and behavior will continue to unfold and escalate (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Lindsley, Brass & Thomas, 1995). In contrast, if individuals are unable to reduce the discrepancy between their actual and entitled wants, regulation or retribution will occur.

Proposition 5. *Over time, reinforcement of CWB will result in a) quantitative and/or b) qualitative increases in these behaviors.*

Proposition 6. *Over time, reinforcement of CWB will increase the excessively entitled employee's a) self-esteem, and b) illegitimate perceptions of outcome deservingness (i.e., excessive entitlement).*

4.3. Non-reinforcement of entitlement-related attitudes and behaviors: regulation versus retribution

Previously, the consequences associated with reinforcing CWB were described and yet it is equally plausible that such behaviors will go *un*rewarded. For example, organizations that clearly delineate performance criteria and subscribe to equity-based compensation systems should be less likely to reward and/or more likely to punish non-productive performance based inputs. Under such conditions, excessively entitled employees who are unable to fulfill their desire for more will enter one of two pathways (see Fig. 1). First, when faced with organizational conditions that do not concede to their entitled behaviors, some employees will re-appraise their inputs and outcomes. Thus, it is possible that some will come to see their beliefs as excessively entitled and therefore, undeserved. It is these employees who are most likely to be receptive to the self-regulatory and self-management training techniques discussed by others (e.g., Frayne & Latham, 1987). An employee's ability to self-manage is desirable from the organization's perspective, as self-regulatory tactics predict a variety of positive work behaviors including sales (i.e., task) performance (e.g., Frayne & Gerringer, 2000; VandeWalle et al., 1999), adaptive transfer of training (e.g., Keith & Frese, 2005) and job attendance (e.g., Frayne & Latham, 1987).

Retribution: Retaliation, disengagement, and turnover. Consistent with work on the relationship between frustration and aggression (e.g., Berkowitz, 1978; Dollard et al., 1939; Spector, 1978), models of ego threat (Baumeister et al., 1996) and the OBM literature more generally (e.g., Luthans & Kreitner, 1985), an entitled employee who has their path to a desired incentive blocked may also experience negative affective, attitudinal, and behavioral states. Frustration at not being able to secure desired work-related outcomes and correct a perceived "injustice gap" will leave the employee feeling unfairly treated (Exline et al., 2004). To the extent injustice elicits narcissistic or entitlement rage (e.g., Kohut, 1972), employees could be expected to behave aggressively toward those perceived as withholding desired rewards (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Spector et al., 2006). Such behavior is likely to be targeted toward a specific referent and enacted in response to perceived personal slight and therefore, the term retaliatory, not counterproductive, is used in this phase (Aquino et al., 2001; Bies & Tripp, 2005). Aggressive or retaliatory behavior is particularly likely, as previous research indicates excessively entitled individuals are vindictive and unwilling to forgive the transgressions of others (Exline et al., 2004).

At "some point during sustained unrelieved frustration organisms begin to give up" and therefore, over time, frustration and anger resulting from not getting what one wants may give way to lowered self-esteem, disappointment, and disengagement (Klinger, 1975, p. 10). Such low arousal negative emotions could be expected to extinguish the entitled employee's drive to engage in active forms of retaliation and instead, encourage a more passive-aggressive response. For the excessively entitled employee, self and work identity hinge on securing desired outcomes and therefore, when those outcomes cannot be attained, disengagement (e.g., poor decision making and task performance, lateness and absenteeism) will occur (e.g., McNeese-Smith, 2000). Ultimately, employers may choose to terminate their relationship with excessively entitled employees, particularly when they

respond in hostile and vindictive ways to not having their entitled demands met. Excessively entitled individuals may also choose to leave the organization of their own accord, believing their inflated wants will be fulfilled elsewhere. Although excessively entitled employees may perceive turnover as a way to get even (e.g., Kelloway et al., 2009), their exit may be quite functional for the organization. Overall, the likelihood of voluntary turnover will depend, at least in part, on the strength of an employee's affective reaction to non-reinforcement as well as his or her evaluation of the number and quality of perceived employment alternatives (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000).

4.4. Predictors of regulation versus retribution

Regardless of the form it takes, the absence of reinforcement often leads to emotional behavior that "threatens to diminish rather than enhance personal performance effectiveness and organizational goal attainment" (Luthans & Kreitner, 1985, p. 141). The ability to predict how employees will react when their reward expectations are not met is important in that it will help organizations plan for, and manage, both passive and aggressive forms of employee responding. Two factors proposed to influence the likelihood of regulation versus retribution are described in more detail, below.

Self-control. Low levels of self-control, or the inability to self-monitor, self-evaluate, and self-reinforce one's own behavior, has been discussed in relation to ineffective self-management (e.g., Kanfer, 1980; Latham & Locke, 1991; Locke & Latham, 2002). People with low self-control tend to seek immediate gratification of their desires, often without consideration of future consequences (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Low self-regulatory control predicts a variety of negative outcomes including endorsement of risky behaviors (e.g., Magar et al., 2008) and participation in aggressive — even violent — acts (e.g., DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2007; Fisher, Hall & Bevin, 2008). Generally speaking, narcissism is negatively correlated with self-control (Wink, 1991), suggesting regulation will be unlikely for those individuals that consistently report high levels of excessive entitlement (i.e., individuals for whom excessive entitlement is a personality trait).

Behavioral inertia or momentum. In addition to self-control, attitudes and behaviors that have been held and reinforced for long periods of time will be difficult to stop (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Retaliation and disengagement are therefore most likely to occur when intervention efforts are focused late in the individual's behavioral repertoire, after counterproductive behaviors have become entrenched in employee performance patterns.

Proposition 7. *When CWB is punished or ignored, individuals will regulate or seek retribution, with regulation being more likely when a) employees are high in self-control and b) behavior has not been previously reinforced.*

5. Discussion

At its most basic level, entitlement encompasses a "set of attitudes about what a person feels he or she has a right to, and about what that person feels he or she can expect from others" (Meyer, 1991, p. 223). Although entitlement has been described as having pervasive effects on the experience of those working in modern organizations, relatively little has been written about this topic in the organizational behavior and human resource management literature. Building on work from clinical and social psychology, the term excessive entitlement describes employees who perceive themselves as deserving of organizational rewards that exceed what would be considered normative in light of their contributions. The form of entitlement discussed here is described as excessive, an important distinction because when expressed, the construct can reflect positive, negative, or even benign attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Levin, 1970). The need to assess an individual's preference for receiving outcomes and contributing inputs when defining entitlement (e.g., Adams, 1965; Huseman et al., 1985, 1987; Naumann et al., 2002) is also acknowledged, as focusing solely on an individual's outcome orientation risks misrepresenting those who want more but are willing to work for it (i.e., ambitious individuals).

In addition to providing a definition of excessive entitlement, a model is presented that describes *how* and *when* excessive entitlement is expressed in organizational settings. Consistent with the OBM literature (e.g., Davis & Luthans, 1980; Kreitner, 1982; Luthans & Kreitner, 1985), the role of reinforcement and punishment on the work-related consequences associated with excessive entitlement are outlined. More specifically, it is posited that rewarding the behavioral correlates of excessive entitlement can trigger spirals defined by inflated self-esteem, increased levels of excessive entitlement, and the escalation of self-serving, counterproductive work-related behaviors. In contrast, not rewarding or punishing the behavioral outcomes of an individual's perceived entitlement is described as leading employees to self-regulate or retaliate.

Overall, the model's contribution to the literature is twofold. First, it reviews existing practitioner-oriented literature regarding organizational triggers of excessive employee entitlement (e.g., Wellner, 2004). Second, the possibility of intra-individual changes in entitlement-related attitudes and behaviors is acknowledged and the specific mechanisms though which these changes occur are explicated. Although entitlement has been acknowledged as varying in intensity, focus, duration, and frequency, this view is not well-represented in the literature (Moses & Moses-Hrushovski, 1990). Like the colloquial phrase "give 'em an inch and they'll take a mile," it is suggested that as long as they are indulged, attitudes and behaviors associated with excessive entitlement will continue to escalate. Similar to the notion of the "hedonic treadmill" (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), it is proposed that some employees inevitably take organizational rewards (e.g., promotions, salary increases) for granted such that outcomes will need to continuously increase in order to have the same initial reinforcing effect. Unlike the hedonic treadmill however, which presumes individuals will continue to exert effort to attain desired rewards, entitled employees may come to believe that they deserve more for doing less and in this sense, are reclining in the "hedonic armchair."

5.1. Implications for future theory development and testing

The model and propositions presented in the paper are testable, a feature that strengthens their value to the literature. Laboratory and field experiments should be devised to test the suggestion that organizational practices strengthen the relationship between employees' trait levels of excessive entitlement and participation in counterproductive work behaviors. Furthermore, although some suggest reward attainment promotes complacency rather than agency — particularly when assessed within-person over time (Vancouver, Thompson & Williams, 2001) — such an assertion seems less relevant for those who are excessively entitled, as these individuals reliably perceive inequity and are motivated to reduce it (Giacalone, 1985; O'Neill & Mone, 1998). Laboratory techniques used to test reciprocal relationships between self-efficacy and performance could be adapted to test the proposition that under conditions of positive reinforcement, attitudes and behaviors reflective of excessive entitlement escalate over time (e.g., Shea & Howell, 2000). Future research should also consider whether excessively entitled employees can ever be satisfied with attained rewards. Repeated presentation of a single reward satiates desire for that reward while variations in reward type sensitizes it, suggesting the boundaries of reinforcement as related to excessive entitlement be explored (Haddad, McCullers & Moran, 1976; McSweeney & Swindell, 1999). Overall, within-person testing over multiple performance episodes is needed to test the dynamic components of excessive entitlement modeled here.

In addition to acknowledging potential increases in attitudinal and behavioral markers of excessive entitlement, the possibility remains these attitudes and behaviors may *decrease* over time (e.g., Exline et al., 2004). The ability of organizational policies and practices to mitigate excessive entitlement would seem to be a particularly important idea to test and yet this line of inquiry has not generated much empirical investigation. Although not rewarding any form of entitlement-related behavior may lead to behavioral decline, Pierce and Epling (1999) note absence of reinforcement may trigger *extinction burst* (i.e., an initial increase in frequency of behavior upon withdrawal of reinforcement), increased *behavioral force* (i.e., post-extinction reactions may be more potent than those made during reinforcement sessions), high arousal *negative emotions* (i.e., emotional behavior during extinction is often aggressive) and changes in *behavior topography* (i.e., previously conditioned behavior assumes new forms). Thus, in terms of extinguishing excessive work-related entitlement, it may be that employee behavior gets worse before it gets better.

Moving beyond the current model, an important area in need of further conceptual development is consideration of the level from which excessive entitlement is examined. The present work focuses on entitlement at the individual level and yet the concepts and relationships described here may be applied to promote understanding of entitlement within groups and organizations (Naumann et al., 2002; p. 162). As a result of emergence at higher levels, cultural patterns (i.e., behaviors, values and assumptions) and artifacts (e.g., language, narratives, practices and physical structures) unique to the experience of excessive entitlement may develop (e.g., Gomery, 2005). Examining the emergence and spread of excessive entitlement within organizational teams would be one point of departure for this stream of research.

A final issue for future research involves the measurement of excessive entitlement. It may be that individual employees will report excessive entitlement in only the most "clinical" (i.e., pathological) of cases. To avoid some of the conceptual and empirical issues with self-report measures, a multi-rater (360°) strategy may help to isolate "true" trait effects. In addition, the ability to fully capture excessive entitlement requires assessing individuals' reward preferences as well as their attitudes toward contributing inputs. The Equity Sensitivity Instrument (Huseman et al., 1985; 1987) and Equity Preference Questionnaire (Sauley & Bedeian, 2000) are two measures that tap input–outcome orientation. Lastly, Major (1994) notes little is known about the behavioral correlates of entitlement and therefore, future research should explore how excessively entitled employees act on the job, giving special attention to the predictive validity of that construct beyond other negative work behaviors.

5.2. Implications for practice

To combat excessive entitlement, organizational stakeholders may find it useful to reduce employees' motivation to think and act in entitled ways. Contingency-management, or the linking of rewards to desired performance behaviors as emphasized in traditional models of behavior modification could be applied to curb excessive entitlement and increase employee task performance (Naumann et al., 2002; Wellner, 2004). Although compensation strategies that make performance–reward linkages salient have the potential to increase competition and narrow employees' definitions of their work roles, they have been touted for guarding against the "entitlement psychology" and low performance orientation that can emerge when rewards are distributed on a non-contingent basis (Heneman, Fay & Wang, 2001; also Wellner, 2004). In support of this view, meta-analytic work demonstrates contingent financial incentives yield larger performance improvements than many other motivational tools, including goal-setting, job enrichment and employee participation (Gerhart & Rynes, 2003). To prevent the misalignment of pay and performance, Bebchuk and Fried (2005) recommend a) tying bonuses to long-term performance goals, b) incorporating hold- or claw-back terms into employment contracts and c) avoiding "soft-landing" or "golden parachute" arrangements that reduce or eliminate exit benefits for poor performers (p. 669–672). Such recommendations have typically been discussed in regard to executive compensation, yet it seems reasonable to suggest these practices could be implemented to curb excessive entitlement at a more general level.

Human resource managers may be able to manage excessive entitlement through internal screening and treatment. For instance, after demonstrating job-relatedness, testing could be used to remove individuals with high levels of excessive entitlement from the application process. Implementing socialization practices such as expectation lowering procedures (ELPs) and realistic job previews (RJPs) may also help to shift employees' expectations, reducing perceived entitlement to organizational

rewards (e.g., Buckley et al., 1998; 2002).[3] As a complement to selection and socialization efforts, training and development programs dedicated to cognitive restructuring and perspective taking, along with the building of constructive self-regulatory skills, could channel attitudes of excessive entitlement into the service of productive ends. More specifically, programs that a) define excessive entitlement and explain its implications for work-related attitudes and behaviors, b) engage employees in identifying how attitudes of excessive entitlement are triggered and c) involve employees in the administration of performance-related rewards or punishments could potentially curb excessive entitlement (see Frayne & Latham, 1987). Empathy development programs (i.e., teaching individuals to recognize affective cues, take the perspective of another, and embrace their own emotions) may also reduce excessive entitlement by influencing individuals' willingness to engage in social exchange and prosocial behaviors (e.g., Pecukonis, 1990). Finally, it is important that organizations teach managers to avoid rating errors — particularly leniency biases — in their appraisals of employee performance. Frame-of-reference or rater error training sessions may help to reduce "false positive" performance evaluations, decreasing the likelihood that undeserving employees will receive organizational rewards.

At a macro level, fostering high quality interpersonal relationships — particularly between organizational leaders and employees — could deter excessive entitlement. High quality relationships impart a sense of shared responsibility in maintaining performance standards (Beu & Buckley, 2004) and can temper unmet expectations (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, Gardner, 1995) — factors described in this paper as playing an important role in the development of excessive entitlement. Sharing organization and industry-relevant information is an additional strategy by which employees' excessive entitlement may be alleviated and a culture of accountability promoted (Cohen, 1993; Wellner, 2004). Secrecy surrounding organizational policies (e.g., pay) may lead employees to genuinely — yet erroneously — believe that others are getting more than they are, triggering feelings of injustice and relative deprivation (e.g., Colella, Paetzold, Zardkoohi, Wesson, 2007; Wellner, 2004). Transparency, in the form of "making standards clear, giving everyone similar opportunities for growth in earnings, and reserving a portion of the earnings of stars or star sectors for distribution to those who have played a role in the success" may help to reduce interpersonal conflict over resource allocation (Kanter, 1991; p. 52).

6. Conclusion

Excessive entitlement, as it exists in the workplace, is a timely and important issue. Drawing on the well-established principles of organizational behavior management, the model outlined here describes how fluctuations in the attitudes and behaviors associated with excessive entitlement occur as a function of organizational practices and reward systems. Practically, answers to questions such as "who is entitled and why?" and "does the environment shape perceived deservingness?" have significant implications. Greater understanding of the triggers and consequences of excessive entitlement will aid in the development of workplace policies targeted toward discouraging employees from developing an unwarranted case of the "gimmes." It is hoped that the views presented here will spur interest in excessive entitlement as it occurs in organizational settings, thereby providing a springboard for future research and practice.

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[3] Highly qualified applicants are less likely to pursue interviews with organizations that convey a significant amount of negative information in job previews (e.g., Bretz & Judge, 1998) and are more likely to drop-out of multiple hurdle selection processes (e.g., Ryan, Sacco, McFarlane & Kriska, 2000). Consequently, while some of the practices recommended here have the potential to exert adverse selection effects, organizations possess a high degree of control over the consequences associated with their HR strategies. Monitoring how recruitment messages are delivered and by whom, balancing the negativity of realistic job information, and highlighting desirable job characteristics can reduce negative self-selection effects (see Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991; Saks, Wiesner & Summers, 1996).

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