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Abstract: In the workplace, narcissists engage in more morally questionable behavior (Blickle et al., 2006). However, little is known about whether this behavior would extend to academic dishonesty. The current study assessed academic dishonesty among college students. Higher scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), and the exhibitionism dimension in particular, were associated with cheating behaviors. The role of exhibitionism in cheating was explained by a lack of guilt. These findings held controlling for relevant demographic variables and other factors within narcissism. A control condition, which asked participants to judge a peer on cheating behavior, showed no relationship with the dimensions of narcissism. Thus, the ambitions of the self appear responsible for narcissists' lack of guilt and their engagement in dishonesty.

July 8, 2010

Dr. Tony Vernon
Editor-in-Chief
Personality and Individual Differences
University of Western Ontario

Dear Dr. Vernon,

Attached is the electronic copy of our manuscript entitled, "Narcissism and the Willingness to Cheat in School: The Exhibitionism Dimension and the Lack of Guilt," which Dr. Sara Staats, Dr. Jamie Barden, Dr. Julie Hupp and I are submitting for publication in *Personality and Individual Differences*. These data have not been published previously, are not under review at another journal, and comply with APA ethical guidelines. The word count for our paper is 4971 words.

Thank you for your consideration. Please address further correspondence to me at Department of Psychology, The Ohio State University at Newark, 1179 University Drive, Newark, OH 43055 or by email at brunell.2@osu.edu.

Sincerely,

Amy B. Brunell Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

The Ohio State University at Newark

Running head: Narcissism and Academic Dishonesty

Narcissism and the Willingness to Cheat in School: The Exhibitionism Dimension and
the Lack of Guilt

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Abstract

In the workplace, narcissists engage in more morally questionable behavior (Blickle et al., 2006). However, little is known about whether this behavior would extend to academic dishonesty. The current study assessed academic dishonesty among college students. Higher scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), and the exhibitionism dimension in particular, were associated with cheating behaviors. The role of exhibitionism in cheating was explained by a lack of guilt. These findings held controlling for relevant demographic variables and other factors within narcissism. A control condition, which asked participants to judge a peer on cheating behavior, showed no relationship with the dimensions of narcissism. Thus, the ambitions of the self appear responsible for narcissists' lack of guilt and their engagement in dishonesty.

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In personality and social psychology, narcissism is viewed as a personality dimension that is measured in the normal population (for recent reviews, see Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006; Campbell & Foster, 2007; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), and is most commonly assessed with the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). One can conceptualize a narcissist as someone who has inflated, positive self-views, a self-regulatory style that maintains these self-views, and superficial and shallow interpersonal relationships. For example, narcissists are self-serving (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998), self-centered (Emmons, 1987), and unlikely to consider how their decisions can affect the outcomes of others (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 2005). In interpersonal contexts, narcissists' goal is to acquire social status by associating with high-status people (Campbell, 1999). They desire admiration from others (Campbell, 1999; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and will show-off, brag, and draw attention to themselves (Buss & Chiodo, 1991) to get it.

One particular challenge for narcissists is how to appear impressive when there are clear measures of performance. Narcissists use a number of approaches to maintain a positive self-image. Narcissists inflate their performance in achievement domains (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998) and frequently fail to acknowledge the contributions of others (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; John & Robins, 1994). Narcissists shine when there is an opportunity for glory, but underperform when such opportunities are not made available (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). This drive for performance may push narcissists to set aside ethical norms for behavior to maintain their inflated self-views. Thus, it is probably not too surprising that in the workplace, narcissism is associated with a host of negative behaviors, such as impulsive, risky decision-making (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007), counterproductive workplace behavior (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; Penney & Spector, 2002),

and white collar crime (Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006), which indicate that narcissists will do what it takes to get ahead.

Excellence in academics is highly valued in many societies and is seen as a gateway to status and power, making the appearance of academic achievement a must for narcissists. However, it also presents a particular challenge for narcissists because performance is often measured against an external standard that allows for direct comparison to peers. Overall, little is known about the role of narcissism and violating ethical norms in the academic realm, such as cheating to achieve academic performance. One study (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009, Study 3) found that narcissism was associated with rationalized cheating, which is when people do not explicitly intend to cheat, but instead are able to explain away their cheating behaviors so they can interpret their behavior as something other than cheating (see von Hippel, Lakin, & Shakarchi, 2005). However, in the case of deliberative cheating, when people cheat through their own explicit intention, the positive association with narcissism was not reliable. So, while research in workplace settings indicate a generalized tendency to set aside moral standards in order to get ahead, the impact of narcissism on similar behaviors in the academic realm remains an open question.

In the domain of moral behaviors, it is often the case that the experience or anticipation of negative emotions, such as shame and guilt, determines whether or not moral behavior will take place (e.g., Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). For example, among college students, guilt-proneness was negatively associated with the likelihood of stealing (Tangney et al., 2007) and self-reported criminal activity (Tibbetts, 2003). It follows, then, that the experience or anticipation of shame and guilt would deter students from engaging in academic misconduct (Staats, Hupp, & Hagley, 2008). Narcissists are less likely than non-narcissists to experience

guilt (Campbell, Foster, & Brunell, 2004), leaving them more susceptible to engaging in immoral behavior, such as academic misconduct. Thus, a lack of guilt could be expected among those who are more likely to engage in behaviors that violate moral standards.

In the present study, we examine the extent to which NPI scores predict self-reported academic misconduct. A recent factor analysis (Kubarych, Dreary, & Austin, 2004) demonstrates that the NPI has three separable, correlated factors that measure *power* (e.g., “I have a strong will to power”), *exhibitionism*, (e.g., “I will usually show off if I get the chance”) and *special person* (e.g., “I think I am a special person”). A case can be made that each of these three dimensions of narcissism could predict cheating behaviors. *Power* reflects narcissists’ desire for power, as demonstrated by their high achievement motivation (e.g., Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Novacek, 1991; Raskin & Terry, 1988) and desire for prestigious and influential occupations (Roberts & Robins, 2000). In their pursuit for power, it could be that narcissists are willing to engage in immoral behavior, including academic dishonesty. *Exhibitionism* reflects narcissists’ tendencies to show off for others to gain their admiration. It has been suggested that exhibitionism is narcissists’ mechanism for flaunting their superiority to others (Rose & Campbell, 2004). In their quest to demonstrate their impressive academic performance to others, it could be that narcissists are willing to engage in academically dishonest behavior. Finally, *special person* reflects narcissists’ beliefs that they are special and unique, and therefore entitled to more than others are. Because the closely related variable of entitlement is associated with cheating intentions (Brown et al., 2009, Study 3), special person could also be associated with academic dishonesty. Thus, the current research explores the role of narcissism in academically dishonest behavior, focusing on which factors within narcissism are most directly involved.

In the present study, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that concerned either (a) their own cheating behavior and experience of guilt for cheating, or (b) their perception of the typical college student's cheating behavior and experience of guilt for cheating. With its emphasis on the self, narcissism is expected to be associated with greater cheating by the self, but narcissism is not expected to be associated with reports of cheating by others. Thus, this manipulation should highlight whether the self is required for any observed relationships between narcissism and reported cheating behaviors. Finally, it is likely that responses will represent a self-enhancing pattern of responding where others are seen as more likely to engage in cheating behavior than the self, as in past research (Staats et al, 2008).

Method

Participants

Participants were 199 Introductory Psychology students at a regional Midwestern college. Of these students, 112 were female and 87 were male. Participants were 19.87 years old on average (SD = 4.29).¹

Materials & Procedure

Narcissism was measured using the 40-item NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), which is a forced choice measure. Each item on the NPI contains a pair of statements (e.g., "I am no better or no worse than most people" versus "I think I am a special person"); a score of 1 is assigned to the narcissistic response and a score of 0 is assigned to the non-narcissistic response. Scores are summed across the 40 items; higher scores represent higher levels of trait narcissism. The NPI is a commonly used self-report measure of narcissism in normal populations and has adequate reliability and validity (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995). The 10-item power

dimension, the 5-item exhibitionism dimension, and the 8-item special person dimension were computed by following the 3-factor solution described by Kubarych et al (2004). Internal reliability was good for the present sample ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 16.66$, $SD = 6.78$).

Self-esteem was assessed as a control variable using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). Internal reliability across the 10-item scale was good ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 39.89$, $SD = 6.37$).

The next questionnaire asked participants about their experience of guilt for engaging in academic dishonest behaviors and the extent to which they engaged in academic dishonest behaviors. Participants were randomly assigned to answer questions for the self ($n = 99$) or for a typical student on campus (the other; $n = 100$). First, guilt concerning academic dishonest behaviors was assessed using 4 questions from the Agnew and Peters (1986) measure of the neutralization of guilt. The first question asked participants how guilty they would feel in general for cheating on an exam (1 = *not too guilty*, 2 = *somewhat guilty*, 3 = *very guilty*). The next three questions used the same scale and asked participants how guilty they would feel for cheating if (a) the instructor gave an overly difficult exam, (b) classmates refused to share notes or help out, and (c) friends pressured the participant to cheat. Reliability for the measure of guilt was adequate ($\alpha = .82$ in the Self condition, $\alpha = .64$ in the Other condition).

The next three questions asked participants about their academically dishonest behaviors. The first two questions asked participants the number of times they cheated on exams and assignments during the past 12 months. Respondents indicated the number of times they have cheated using the following categories: 0 times, 1-2 times, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, and more than 10 times. The third question asked respondents to use a 5-point

scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*) to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement, “In the next 30 days, I will cheat in one of my classes.”

Reliability for this measure was good ($\alpha = .79$ in the Self condition, $\alpha = .74$ in the Other condition).

Because academic dishonesty is inversely related to academic achievement (McCabe & Trevino, 1997), participants reported their grade point average along with demographic information on gender and age, which have both been associated with academic dishonesty (McCabe & Trevino, 1997), with male students and younger college students being more likely to cheat.

Results

The means and standard deviations for the measures of narcissism, self-esteem, guilt, academic dishonesty, GPA, and age for the Self and Other conditions are reported in Table 1. Consistent with expectations, participants in the Other condition reported more academic dishonesty and less guilt for academic dishonesty than people in the Self condition. Consistent with random assignment to condition, no differences were observed in narcissism scores, self-esteem, GPA, and age. In addition, the gender breakdown between groups was similar ($\chi^2 = .30, p = .58$).

The correlation of variables in the Self and Other conditions are displayed in Tables 2A and 2B. In the Self condition, narcissism was associated with academic dishonesty, but not with the experience of guilt. A look at the three dimensions of narcissism reveals that exhibitionism and power were associated with academic dishonesty, but special person was not. Self-esteem was not associated with academic dishonesty. Of these variables, only exhibitionism was associated

with the anticipation of guilt for cheating; those who score high on exhibitionism reported lower levels of guilt. In addition, consistent with previous research (McCabe & Trevino, 1997), older students were less likely to report academic dishonesty and more likely to anticipate feeling guilty for cheating. There were no gender differences with respect to admitting academic dishonesty, but men were less likely to experience guilt for academic dishonesty.

In the Other condition, narcissism was not associated with the perception of other students' academic dishonesty or how much guilt they believed other students experience when they cheat. Further, none of the dimensions of narcissism were associated with the perception of academic dishonesty and guilt. However, people with higher self-esteem were less likely to perceive their classmates as engaging in academic dishonesty and more likely to believe their classmates would experience guilt for cheating.

The initial analyses indicated that the three factors of narcissism had distinct roles in guilt feelings and academically dishonest behavior, so multiple regression analyses were conducted using the dimensions as separate predictors. Initial analyses were conducted incorporating the three factors of narcissism (exhibitionism, special person, and power), self-esteem, and demographic variables relevant to guilt and dishonesty (gender, age, and GPA). Gender was dummy coded (Women = 0, Men = 1). All variables were regressed simultaneously on guilt as well as academically dishonest behavior with separate analyses in the Self and Other conditions (see Table 3).²

Predictors of past and future academic dishonesty were investigated first. In the Self condition, exhibitionism predicted dishonest behavior, $b = .27$, $t(91) = 2.31$, $p < .05$. Age also predicted academic dishonesty, $b = -.22$, $t(91) = -2.17$, $p < .05$, consistent with prior findings (all other factors, $p > .12$). By contrast, in the Other condition, exhibitionism failed to predict

dishonest behavior, $b = -.05$, $t(92) = 0.46$, $p = .65$. In this analysis, self-esteem was the only factor to predict estimates of other's academic dishonesty, $b = -.34$, $t(92) = -3.32$, $p < .01$, (all other factors, $p > .20$).

Parallel analyses were conducted predicting guilt. In the Self condition, exhibitionism predicted guilt, $b = -.30$, $t(91) = -2.80$, $p < .01$. Age also predicted guilt, $b = .34$, $t(91) = 3.72$, $p < .01$, as did gender, with men reporting less guilt than women, $b = -.32$, $t(91) = -3.44$, $p < .01$. None of the other additional factors were reliable (all $p > .20$). In the Other condition, exhibitionism failed to predict guilt, $b = .04$, $t(92) = 0.39$, $p = .70$. The only factor to approach reliability was the effect of self-esteem on guilt, $b = .20$, $t(92) = 1.84$, $p = .07$, (all others factors, $p > .20$). Thus, when referring to the self, exhibitionism predicted feeling less guilty for being dishonest and more academically dishonest behavior and no effects were observed for the other factors of narcissism. Consistent with the key role of the self, there was no impact of exhibitionism on either guilt or behavior when referring to others.

Self-Other Condition Comparison. Further multiple-regression analyses were conducted to establish that the relationships between exhibitionism, guilt, and academic dishonesty were reliably different for Self and Other conditions as suggested by the earlier analyses. In addition to the expected Self-Other x exhibitionism interaction, it was expected that the Self condition would lead to more guilt feelings and less academic dishonesty than the Other condition. The Self-Other manipulation was dummy coded (Other = 0, Self = 1) prior to conducting the analyses, and exhibitionism was mean centered to simplify the interpretation of effects. Analyses were conducted in a hierarchical manner, so that the main effects were entered in the first step, 2-way interactions in the second step. Each effect was evaluated in the step in which it was added, as suggested by Aiken and West (1991).

When exhibitionism and the Self-Other manipulation were regressed on guilt, a main effect indicated that more guilt was reported for the self than others, $b = .34$, $t(199) = 5.26$, $p < .001$. There was also a marginal effect of exhibitionism indicating that overall higher exhibitionism tended to be associated with less feelings of guilt, $b = -.12$, $t(199) = -1.86$, $p = .06$. However, these main effects were qualified by the critical overall 2-way Self-Other \times exhibitionism interaction, $b = -.19$, $t(198) = -2.15$, $p < .05$. This interaction was decomposed by investigating the impact of identification separately for participants in the Self and Other conditions. Consistent with the earlier analyses, exhibitionism was associated with less guilt in the Self condition, $b = -.26$, $t(198) = -2.85$, $p < .01$, but showed no relationship with guilt in the Other condition, $b = .02$, $t(198) = 0.18$, $p = .86$, see Figure 1A.

When exhibitionism and the Self-Other manipulation were regressed on academically dishonest behaviors, a main effect indicated that fewer dishonest behaviors were reported for the self than others, $b = -.49$, $t(198) = -7.91$, $p < .001$, and a second main effect indicated that exhibitionism predicted more dishonest behaviors, $b = .12$, $t(198) = 1.98$, $p < .05$. However, these main effects were qualified by the critical overall 2-way Self-Other \times exhibitionism interaction, $b = .18$, $t(197) = 2.08$, $p < .05$. The impact of exhibitionism was investigated separately for participants in the Self and Other conditions. In the Self condition, exhibitionism was associated with more dishonest behavior, $b = .25$, $t(197) = 2.89$, $p < .01$, but showed no relationship with dishonest behaviors in the Other condition, $b = -.01$, $t(198) = -0.05$, $p = .96$, see Figure 1B. Overall, these analyses show that the effects observed in the Self condition, that exhibitionism predicted less guilt and more academically dishonesty, were reliably different from the null effects of exhibitionism observed in the Other condition.

Mediational analyses. Within the Self condition, the mirror image effects of

exhibitionism on guilt and academically dishonest behavior suggest that guilty feelings could serve as a key explanation for the relationship between exhibitionism and dishonest behavior. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether guilt mediated the impact of exhibitionism on academically dishonest behaviors.

The regression analyses were conducted using exhibitionism as the independent variable, academic dishonesty as the dependent variable and guilt as the mediator (see Figure 2). Prior analysis established that in the Self condition, exhibitionism predicted both guilt feeling and academically dishonest behavior. To test the third criterion for mediation, dishonest behavior was regressed on exhibitionism and guilt. Experiencing less guilt significantly predicted dishonest behavior ($b = -.50, p < .001$). In addition, exhibitionism was reduced to a marginal predictor of dishonest behavior ($b = .17, p = .06$). Results from the Sobel (1982) test established that the reduction in the path from exhibitionism to dishonest behavior was significant when guilt was included in the regression equation ($z = 2.33, p < .05$). This suggests that guilt mediates the relationship between exhibitionism and dishonest behavior (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Discussion

The present study demonstrated a link between narcissism and academic dishonesty. Further, this study investigated the three dimensions of narcissism and identified, for the first time, the unique role of exhibitionism, which was associated with academic dishonesty above and beyond the other dimensions of narcissism and the control variables. Exhibitionism reflects narcissists' desire for admiration and functions as a means for demonstrating their superiority to others (Rose & Campbell, 2004). Thus, in order to succeed and impress others academically, it appears that exhibitionists are willing to cheat their way to the top.

Our research also offers a mechanism for the link between exhibitionism and academic dishonesty. That is, exhibitionists report that they experience less guilt for cheating. However, it is not that exhibitionists underestimate the experience of guilt in general; rather, the report of guilt was specific to the self, indicating a lowering of compunction against immoral behavior.

Although narcissism was not associated with academic dishonesty or guilt in the Other condition, self-esteem was negatively associated with the perception that other students are engaging in academic dishonesty. At the same time, students with higher self-esteem also report a higher GPA. Thus, it may be the case that those with higher self-esteem have less inclination to cheat—perhaps because of confidence in their own abilities—and also experience less pressure to cheat because they assume that others are cheating to a lesser extent than do those with lower self-esteem.

Based on previous research (e.g., Staats et al, 2008), we expected to find that participants would indicate less academic dishonesty and more guilt in response to academic dishonesty in the Self condition than in the Other condition. Our analyses confirmed this expectation. Research shows that when people are asked to judge others, they tend to incorporate self-relevant information, in part because they overestimate how much their self-relevant information is shared by others (Vorauer, in press). Thus, it is likely that the motivation to maintain a positive self-view plays a role in reporting greater academic dishonesty for others than the self.

In sum, narcissists are more inclined to engage in academically dishonest behavior. This finding adds to the literature on narcissism and immoral behaviors more generally, such as that explored in organizational contexts. It is likely that the same people who engage in counterproductive workplace behavior (Judge et al., 2002), and white collar crime (Blickle et al., 2006) are also the ones cheating in the classroom.

Notes

1. Eight participants were dropped because they failed to complete the measures in their entirety. Restricting the sample to the 199 participants who completed all study measures did not alter any results in a meaningful way.
2. These analyses were also conducted using total NPI scores. In these analyses, total NPI scores did not predict cheating behaviors or guilt in either the Self or the Other conditions.

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Figure 1A

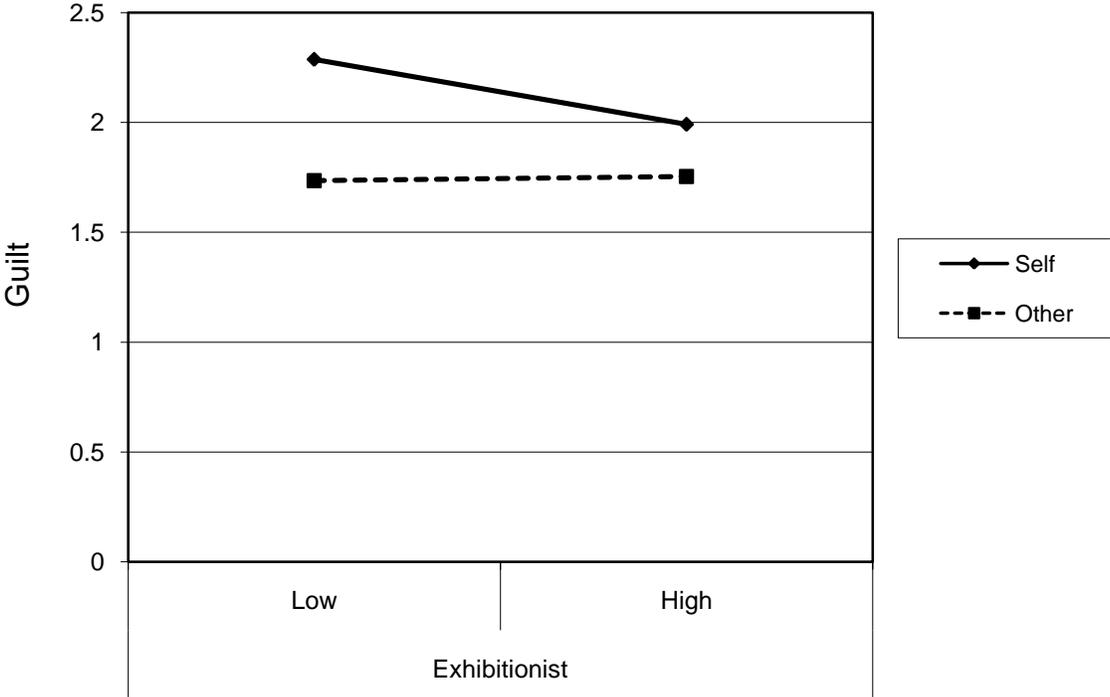


Figure 1B

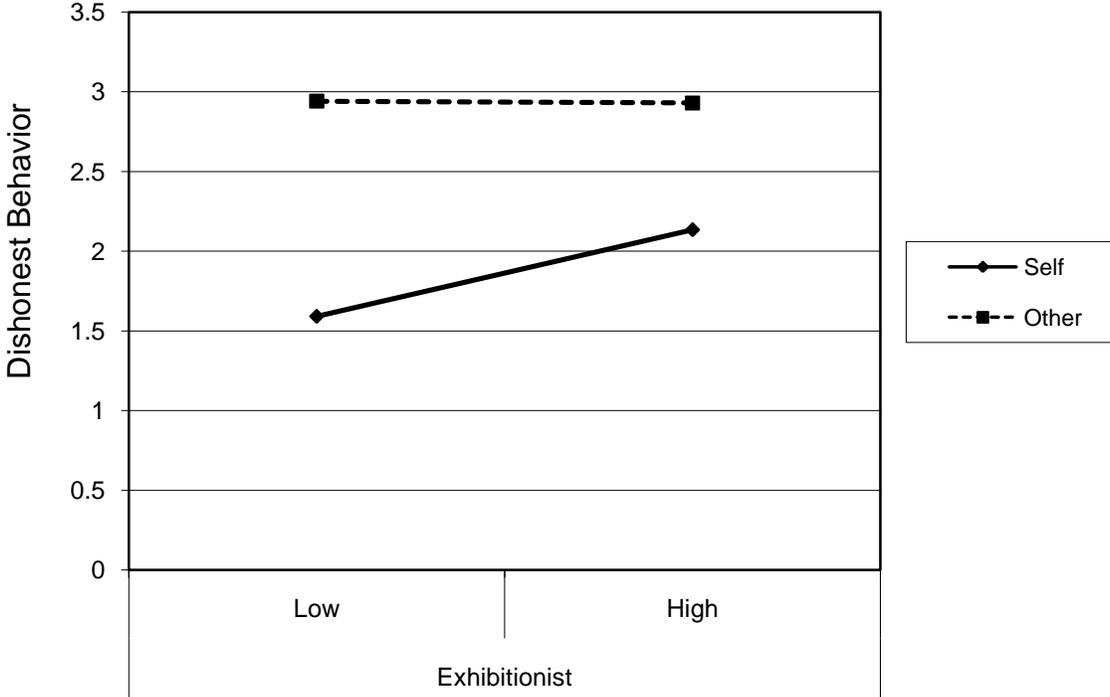


Figure 2

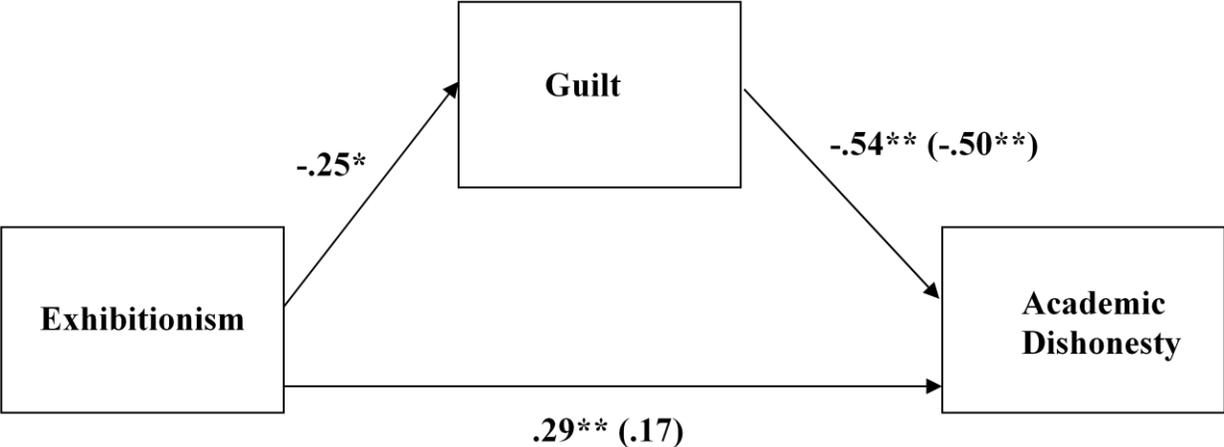


Figure Captions

Figure 1. Exhibitionism predicting guilt (1A) and academically dishonest behavior (1B) for the self and others. Exhibitionism was handled as a continuous variable with means plotted at +1 SD and -1 SD.

Figure 2. The association between the exhibitionism and academically dishonest behavior, as fully mediated through guilt in response to dishonesty. Standardized betas are reported. Coefficients outside parentheses represent parameter estimates for a regression model containing both predictors. Asterisks indicate parameter estimates that differ from zero at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Variables in the Self and Other Condition

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Self (n=99)</i>		<i>Other (n = 100)</i>		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Narcissism (NPI Total)	16.06	6.79	17.26	6.75	-1.25
Self-Esteem	39.03	6.61	40.73	6.03	-1.90
Academic Dishonesty	1.86	.94	2.94	.97	-7.92***
Guilt	2.14	.59	1.74	.45	5.29***
Grade Point Average	2.88	.67	2.88	.60	.04
Age	19.96	4.22	19.77	4.37	.32

Note: *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 A: *Correlation of Variables in the Self (n = 99) Condition*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Narcissism (NPI Total)	—								
2. Exhibitionism (NPI)	.71***	—							
3. Power (NPI)	.85***	.50***	—						
4. Special Person (NPI)	.72***	.42***	.51***	—					
5. Self-Esteem	.29**	.09	.19*	.42***	—				
6. Academic Dishonesty	.23*	.29***	.20*	.03	-.09	—			
7. Guilt	-.11	-.25**	-.04	.06	.14	-.54***	—		
8. Grade Point Average	-.05	-.07	-.02	.13	.23*	-.14	.19*	—	
9. Gender	.16	.13	.12	.03	.05	.13	-.31**	-.24*	—
10. Age	-.25*	-.14	-.22*	-.20*	-.04	-.24*	.30**	.08	.09

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. For gender, women = 0 and men = 1

Table 2 B: *Correlation of Variables in the Other (n = 100) Condition*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Narcissism (NPI Total)	—								
2. Exhibitionism (NPI)	.66***	—							
3. Power (NPI)	.82***	.44***	—						
4. Special Person (NPI)	.67***	.24*	.42***	—					
5. Self-Esteem	.25**	.13	.18	.23*	—				
6. Academic Dishonesty	.10	-.01	.08	.14	-.27**	—			
7. Guilt	.01	.02	-.04	.08	.20*	-.52***	—		
8. Grade Point Average	.08	.07	.01	.11	.14	.06	.01	—	
9. Gender	.21*	.02	.21*	.16	.18	.08	.04	.003	—
10. Age	-.02	-.04	.05	-.04	.09	-.14	.07	-.01	-.02

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. For gender, women = 0 and men = 1

Table 3: *Regression of NPI Factors and Control Factors on Guilt about Dishonesty and Academically Dishonest Behavior in the Self and Other Condition*

Variable	<i>Self (n = 99)</i>		<i>Other (n = 100)</i>	
	<i>Guilt</i>	<i>Behavior</i>	<i>Guilt</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
Exhibitionism (NPI)	-.30**	.27*	.04	-.05
Special Person (NPI)	.15	-.13	.09	.17
Power (NPI)	.13	.08	-.14	.07
Self-Esteem	.11	-.08	.20	-.34**
Grade Point Average	.03	-.05	-.03	.10
Gender	-.32**	.11	.02	.10
Age	.34**	-.22*	.06	-.10
R^2	.30	.17	.06	.15

Note: Standardized betas (*b*) and overall R-squared from multiple regression. For gender, women = 0 and men = 1.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.