

EXCESSIVE ENTITLEMENT, PSYCHOLOGICAL  
CONTRACT FULFILLMENT, AND  
EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES:  
THE MODERATING EFFECT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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Abstract: Excessive entitlement attitudes of employees are an increasing problem for organizations. However, there has been little research regarding a clear framework related to the construct of excessive entitlement, and articles in top-tier management journals are almost nonexistent. This study presents a thorough overview of the nomological network for entitlement, and it takes the unique approach of studying entitlement as a separate lower-level facet instead of as a part of narcissism. This study's findings support the hypothesis that excessive entitlement attitudes of employees have a negative effect on their perception that the psychological contract has been fulfilled, with psychological contract fulfillment then predicting employee performance and counterproductive work behaviors. Contrary to expectations, my results suggest that accountability may actually exacerbate problems associated with employees who exhibit excessive entitlement attitudes, such that these employees perceive less psychological contract fulfillment when accountability is high versus low. This research both extends current understanding of entitlement attitudes of employees and underscores the need for additional research.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Dissertation Background**

Throughout history, thought leaders have concerned themselves with the idea of what a person is entitled to and the potential harm arising when those entitlement beliefs may become out of balance. Plato (1921) addressed this imbalance in *The Laws* when he wrote, “Equal treatment results in inequality when it is given to what is unequal” (p. 757a). One of the earliest mentions of entitlement in behavioral research appeared when Freud (1916) wrote that certain of his patients, whom he called “The Exceptions,” demonstrated they have the right to special privileges. Jung wrote, “An elevated and unrealistic sense of superiority, goodness, worthiness, and entitlement to privilege results when anything is overdone, whether those things be lovely, dark or evil,” (Jung 1953; Woodruff, 1996). Certainly the problem of disproportionate entitlement attitudes is not new. But it continues to perplex both researchers (Bardwick, 1991; Fisk, 2010; Naumann, Minsky, & Sturman, 2002; Tomlinson, 2013) and practitioners (Hams, 2012; Stein, 2013).

For practitioners, entitlement is an issue that is more than salient: It is sizzling. To test whether this description is hyperbole or perhaps even understatement, ask any group of managers if they are experiencing issues with increasing entitlement attitudes among employees, and one can feel the temperature of the room start to rise. As part of this research, I asked the CEO of a Midwestern company if he had noticed any change in the expectations of what employees feel entitled to.



The CEO became visibly upset. He then went on to recount the story of salesmen who asked for “guaranteed incentive compensation,” a bit of a misnomer. One salesman in particular who worked for this CEO took his company car on a personal vacation and turned in the gas receipts from his vacation to the company for reimbursement. When the CEO challenged the appropriateness of asking for reimbursement for the salesman’s vacation fuel, the salesman countered, “Well, it’s your car!” (R. L. Hudson, personal communication, February 13, 2014). Anecdotally, stories like this abound.

The relevance of entitlement and its apparent increase has not gone unnoticed by the business and popular press. In 2012, the *Wall Street Journal* asked rhetorically, “Are entitlements corrupting us?” Eberstadt (2012) went on to make a compelling case for the damage done by a population who believes they are entitled to more and more with less and less given in return. Shortly thereafter, *Time* ran a cover story called “Millennials: The Me, Me, Me Generation,” in which Stein (2013) discussed the increase in entitlement attitudes and called America’s newest generation of working adults lazy, entitled, selfish, and shallow. Statements as provocative and bold as these raise skepticism and demand substantiation. Despite this virtual throwing down of the gauntlet by practitioners and the business press, there has been little theoretically grounded research written in the management literature that treats entitlement as a specific construct, and articles on the topic in top-tier journals are almost nonexistent (Fisk, 2010).

The concepts of entitlement and excessive entitlement have been defined in different ways by authors over the years (Naumann et al., 2002). However, the core idea is generally the same and focuses on an imbalance between what one receives from an exchange and what one contributes to that exchange. The focus of this study is excessive employee entitlement attitudes, and for the purposes of this project, I defined excessive entitlement as the employee’s belief that he or she is due a disproportionately high ratio of outputs from an exchange compared to what the employee has contributed to the exchange.

By many accounts, excessive entitlement is a growing problem for practitioners in business organizations (Tomlinson, 2013). However, there has been little research regarding a clear framework related to the construct of excessive employee entitlement (Fisk, 2010), which is surprising given its saliency for practitioners and the attention given to it in the popular press (Baron & Lachenauer, 2014; Eberstadt, 2012; Stein, 2013). If, in fact, excessive entitlement attitudes on the parts of employees are as significant a problem as suggested, then it is important for organizations to understand how to mitigate such a threat. One way to establish the importance of studying excessive entitlement in the management literature is to investigate its relationship with potentially unfavorable outcomes. I proposed that entitlement is conditionally related to employee performance and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). In particular, I proposed that accountability moderates the relationship between entitlement and job performance and CWBs, as explained by fulfillment of the psychological contract (see Figure 1 in Appendix B). I specifically proposed that organizations may mitigate the threat of excessive entitlement attitudes through the greater use of accountability. Managers who hold their subordinates accountable increase the probability that the excessively entitled employee is more likely to experience psychological contract fulfillment, which then results in higher employee performance and lower CWB. Conversely, when managers do not hold their subordinates accountable, excessively entitled employees could be less likely to perceive psychological contract fulfillment, which in turn affects employee performance and counterproductive work behaviors.

It is particularly useful to view my theoretical model through the lens of social exchange theory (SET). SET is an established theory (Blau 1964) first proposed in the early twentieth century (Malinowski 1922; Mauss, 1925). Blau (1964) described social exchange as “voluntary acts of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (p. 91). Although a few researchers have related the concept of entitlement to SET (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2004; Fisk, 2010; Hochwarter, Summers, Thompson, &

Perrewe, 2010; Lerner, 1987; Naumann, 2002), to my knowledge, none have yet empirically studied excessive employee entitlement within the framework of SET.

Historically, when excessive entitlement has been considered in research, it has often been as a part of the study of narcissism (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013; Ackerman et al., 2011; Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004; Pryor, Miller, & Gaughan, 2008; Raskin & Terry, 1988). However, excessive entitlement is just one facet of narcissism. Raskin and Terry (1988) identified seven subscales or facets of narcissism, which included authority, superiority, exhibitionism, entitlement, vanity, exploitiveness, and self-sufficiency. More recently Judge, Rodell, Klinger, Simon, and Crawford (2013) found that facets or lower-level personality traits better predict job performance. I argue that the excessive entitlement facet of narcissism is prevalent among a broader range of employees more generally and does not need to be limited to full-fledged narcissism specifically. If excessive entitlement is indeed more common among employees, then it may have more utility in predicting important organizational outcomes. Practically, it is important to understand factors that may counterbalance the ill effects of employee excessive entitlement. Based on previous research (Frink & Ferris, 1998, 1999; Frink & Klimosky, 2004; Tetlock, 1983, 1985; Tetlock & Kim, 1987; Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989), I suggested that the use of accountability would moderate the effect of entitlement through fulfillment of the psychological contract on job performance and counterproductive work behaviors.

### **Summary**

The rest of this study follows the outline described here. Chapter II includes a thorough review of the nomological network for entitlement. After discussing the concept of excessive entitlement in general, I explain how excessive entitlement attitudes in individuals manifest themselves at organizational and even national levels. I discuss more specifically the effect of excessive entitlement on organizations and differentiate excessive entitlement from other similar

constructs, explaining why they are, in fact, different. I discuss the consequences of excessive entitlement, antecedents of excessive entitlement and constructs that have been studied as either mediators or moderators of entitlement. I then describe research that has studied entitlement as either a moderator or mediator and compare and contrast two common measures of entitlement. I conclude the literature review by presenting my theoretical rationale and hypotheses for my specific research model. In Chapter III I describe the method that I used for my field study, including the participants and procedures, measures and analysis. In Chapter IV, I report the results of my research, including confirmatory factor analyses of the measures and tests of my hypotheses using PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). Lastly, in Chapter V I discuss the contributions this research makes to theory and practice, describe the limitations of my research, and suggest areas for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

#### **Entitlement Literature Review**

##### **General Use**

Entitlement has been characterized as representing an “entire family of human events associated with social justice, issues of equity, deserving rights, fairness, justice of procedures, distribution, and retributive acts” (Lerner, 1987, p. 108). Entitlement has been defined in different ways depending on the domain in which it is being used (Naumann et al., 2002). Below I have briefly examined the use of the word *entitlement* in other domains to provide the proper context for this study. However, the focus of my research is excessive entitlement attitudes on the parts of employees.

Entitlement has been defined as “the benefits that people believe they deserve under the implicit contract” (Heath, Knez, & Camerer, 1993, p. 76). It has also been described as a set of beliefs about what a person feels he or she has a right to and what that person feels he or she can expect from others (Meyer, 1991). Tomlinson (2013) defined entitlement as “an actor’s beliefs regarding his or her rightful claim of privileges” (p. 71) and suggested that those beliefs may or may not match the judgment of an objective third party. Entitlement in the social sciences generally has its roots in equity theory (Adams, 1965; Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987; King, Miles, & Day, 1993) and the idea of a social or psychological contract (Campbell et al., 2004). While Fisk (2010) and Naumann et al. (2002) examined the use of entitlement in the management literature based on equity sensitivity, later Tomlinson (2013) examined entitlement through the

lens of social psychology, which presents the construct from the perspective of an observer of the actor.

Entitlement in the legal domain is considered a measure of one's right that cannot be taken away without due process (Black, 1990). However, a legal right is often confused with a privilege (Hohfield, 1913). A legitimate right under the law pertains to actual rights such as "life, liberty, or property," whereas misguided entitlement occurs when someone tries to claim a privilege (Farber, 2006; Kontorovich, 1991). The difference between legitimate and misguided entitlement has sometimes blurred certain social issues. Well-meaning proponents on both sides of hot-button social issues like same-sex marriage and voter identification argue over whether the issue in question is a privilege or a legal right.

### **Governments**

One of the more common uses of the word entitlement refers to government welfare and benefit programs like Social Security and Medicare. More recently in the United States, there has been an emotional debate of whether or not healthcare is a right or a privilege. Healthcare reform is both important and necessary. Nevertheless, with several trillions of dollars in new federal government deficits projected over the next decade, the United States is rapidly running out of "other people's money" to pay for entitlements (Mackey, 2009). Opposite sides of the political aisle argue whether individuals are "entitled" to equal outcomes or merely equal opportunity.

The entitlement attitudes of individuals may be reflected collectively at both organizational and national levels. The United States has endured as a country for over two centuries. However, it is quite different from the country founded on freedom and rugged individualism. Something new and different about the United States today is the system of entitlement payments that has grown 727% over the past half century even after adjusting for inflation and population (Eberstadt, 2012). In 2010 alone the U.S. government transferred

payments to individuals equal to more than \$7,200 for every person in America; based on a typical family of four, the burden of entitlements in 2010 was nearly \$29,000 per family (Eberstadt, 2012). In 1960 entitlements accounted for about one-third of all government outlays, and by 2010, entitlements accounted for about two-thirds of all government outlays (Eberstadt, 2012). Although it is trendy to think of Democrats as the party of entitlements, entitlement spending over the past half century has been statistically higher under Republican administrations than Democratic administrations (Eberstadt, 2012), and as recently as 2014, Republican-leaning states ranked higher on average than left-leaning states in their dependency on federal government programs (Whitaker, 2014). At least in the United States, no one political party holds the moral high ground on entitlement.

The growth of entitlement payments over the past five decades has been staggering (Eberstadt, 2012). Nozick (1974) framed the entitlement dialogue between conservatives and progressives as a theory of justice in acquisition, justice in rectification, justice in holdings, and justice in transfer. The bipartisan 2010 Bowles Simpson Commission stated that the United States is now on an unsustainable fiscal path (Eberstadt, 2012), in large part because of the growth of entitlement payments.

Although America may be doing its part to achieve global dominance in excessive entitlements, in the Olympic spirit, other countries are also competing for entitlement gold. The governments of Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal have all recently struggled with expectations from their citizens that outstrip the government's capacity to provide (Staff, 2011).

### **Entitlement in Organizations**

One of the earliest mentions of entitlement in behavioral research appeared in 1916 when Freud wrote that certain of his patients, whom he called "The Exceptions," demonstrated that they had the right to "special privileges." Jacobson (1959) expanded on Freud's "exceptions" when he

wrote about a group of patients for whom feeling entitled was central to their disorder. Early researchers noticed that these “exceptions” or “entitleds” felt they had the right to do something and that they often had an accompanying feeling that others should not have a negative response to their behavior. If others did respond negatively, the entitled was likely to respond with resentment (Levin, 1970).

The term “entitlement” is often used in a negative connotation when a person is actually referring to “excessive” or “misguided entitlement.” However, entitlement in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. Entitlement can be normal, restricted, or excessive (Fisk, 2010; Levin, 1970). Levin (1970) and Fisk (2010) have indicated that individuals have different expectations as to the ratio of their inputs into the organization compared to the outputs they receive from the organization. A person with normative levels of entitlement tends to expect outputs from an exchange in proportion to the person’s inputs. This normative or legitimate level of entitlement has been defined as a “rational belief, which is based in reality, that one possesses the right to receive certain privileges, mode of treatment, and/or manner of designation” (Kerr, 1985, p. 8). Legitimate entitlement may be due an individual according to either procedural or distributive justice (Tomlinson, 2013). Psychological contracts on the part of the employee, such as some level of effort in work and expected citizenship behaviors, may result in expectations of entitlement for implied promises from the employer for compensation, promotion, and advancement opportunities (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Under normal circumstances, the employee’s expectations under the employment contract should be considered legitimate or normative entitlement. However, too often it is not.

Other research indicates that individuals can also be separated into three similar groups that correspond with Levin’s (1970) groupings. “Benevolents,” have a greater tolerance for imbalanced ratios with more inputs than outputs and correspond with Levin’s restricted entitlement (Huseman, Hatfield & Miles 1985, 1987). “Equity sensitives,” prefer a balance of



inputs to outputs, which corresponds with Levin's normative or legitimate entitlement (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987). Finally, entitleds prefer outputs with a greater focus on their outputs than inputs. The latter grouping, of course, corresponds with Levin's excessively entitled (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987).

All people generally have some expectations as to the outputs that they will receive from an exchange. When a person has contributed an appropriate amount or type of input into an exchange, she or he is legitimately entitled (Campbell et al., 2004; Fisk, 2010; Naumann et al., 2002). In an organizational setting, legitimate entitlements might include expectations for a safe working environment, freedom from harassment and bullying, equal opportunity, and a system of meritocracy.

People with restricted entitlement (Levin, 1970), that is, those considered benevolents (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987), tend to expect fewer outputs from an exchange than what they have contributed. An example of restricted entitlement might be when employees are so appreciative of just having jobs that they are unconcerned about their outputs being fewer than what they contributed. Often times, recent immigrants to the United States may fall into this category of restricted entitlement (Barrood, 2006). Because the opportunities for them in the United States may be so vastly superior to their home country, immigrants to America may sometimes be described as having restricted entitlement attitudes.

At the other end of the entitlement continuum from benevolents are those who are excessively entitled – those whom Huseman et al. (1985, 1987) referred to as entitleds. Excessive entitlement has been described as a trait that reflects unjustified beliefs of deservingness (Fisk, 2010). Kerr (1985) defined excessive entitlement as “an irrational belief which is based on a distorted perception of self, that one possesses a legitimate right to receive special privileges, mode of treatment, and/or designation when, in fact, one does not” (p. 10). Through the lens of

psychiatry, excessive entitlement has been defined as unreasonable expectations for favorable treatment or unquestioned compliance with a person's expectations (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013).

According to Huseman et al. (1985, 1987), excessively entitled people tend to expect a higher level of outputs from an exchange than what they have contributed to that exchange. Over time, some employees may become accustomed to an organization's systems of compensation and recognition. Employees may tend to expect certain outcomes like annual raises and bonuses to continue. These employee expectations may cause what were in the past meaningful occasions that may have been earned to become entitlements that employees feel they deserve regardless of what they may have contributed to the exchange (Connors, Smith, & Hickman, 2004). These excessively entitled individuals were the focus this project, and I have defined excessive entitlement as the employee's belief that he or she is due a disproportionately high ratio of outputs from an exchange compared to what the employee has contributed to the exchange.

Some researchers (Davison & Bing, 2008; King et al., 1993; Sauley & Bedian, 2000) have distinguished between individuals focused on receiving more outputs from an exchange than they contribute and those individuals solely focused on obtaining valued outputs from an exchange with no thought to the inputs. In the former description, the actor consciously focuses on obtaining unequal outcomes, wherein the latter, the actor is simply not conscious of the level of equity (Tomlinson, 2013). Excessively entitled employees who are focused on receiving more outputs from an exchange than they have contributed could be said to be seeking a "win/lose" arrangement, whereas those focused only on their outputs without any regard to the inputs could be said to be looking for a "win/who cares?" arrangement.

One problem in determining whether or not a person is legitimately or excessively entitled is that the judgment is in the eye of the beholder. It is unlikely that an individual will

recognize when he or she personally has an excessive entitlement attitude due to the inherent biases involved in personal assessment. Individuals' tendencies to fall victim to the fundamental attribution error and Dunning Kruger effect make self-diagnosis difficult. The Dunning Kruger effect says that it is difficult for people to recognize their own incompetencies. If one cannot recognize his or her own incompetency, it is probable that he or she will feel entitled to more than an objective observer might assess as fair (Kruger & Dunning, 1999, 2002). Previous research has indicated that many employees perceive that they are above average (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995). In fact, research has found that excessively entitled employees will predictably perceive that their entitlements should be more than the organization intends (Heath et al., 1993) and that they have been done an injustice (Giacalone, 1985). In this literature review, I now turn to a more specific examination of the nomological network for excessive entitlement. Naumann et al. (2002) recently pointed out that excessive entitlement has not received much theoretical analysis or study as a specific construct. In the following section, I provide a nomological overview.

### **Excessive Entitlement and Related Constructs**

Simply having high expectations for outputs from an exchange does not meet the definition of excessive entitlement. Many people labeled as ambitious have high expectations for the level of outputs that they will receive. The difference between the ambitious person and the excessively entitled person is that the ambitious person expects to contribute inputs or value to the exchange in proportion to his or her expected outputs, whereas the excessively entitled person's ratio is out of balance. Similarly, people who have only moderate expectations as to the outputs they will receive from an exchange can still be excessively entitled if they expect to contribute little or nothing to the exchange. In a capitalist society or environment of meritocracy, one would expect to receive rewards in proportion to what he or she provides; that is, a person will reap what he or she sows.

Entitlement has also been distinguished from deservingness. Although Feather (1999a) and Major (1994) suggested that the terms “entitlement” and “deservingness” are often used interchangeably, Tomlinson (2013) and Naumann et al. (2002) argued that deservingness and entitlement are separate constructs. Deservingness implies that an individual has done something for which the equitable response has been earned. Entitlement, conversely, is based more on social norms, rights, and rules (Tomlinson, 2013). Deservingness suggests the expectation that one “deserves” a reward in exchange for one’s own efforts and abilities (Feather, 1999b). The idea of deservingness would resemble the concepts of meritocracy or reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Gouldner said that anyone who gives you X should be able to expect X in return from you. Deservingness is not a second dimension of entitlement and neither should it be merged with entitlement (Tomlinson, 2013).

Entitlement has often been studied simultaneously as part of narcissism (Ackerman et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2004; Pryor et al., 2008; Raskin & Terry, 1988). However, Raskin and Terry (1988) found that entitlement was just one of seven lower-level components or facets (along with authority, exhibitionism, superiority, vanity, exploitiveness, and self-sufficiency) of narcissism. Previous research (Judge et al., 2013) has suggested that lower level traits such as entitlement may be a better predictor of job-related outcomes than higher level constructs like narcissism. This approach has been recommended by other advocates of measuring specific rather than more general traits (Ashton, 1998; Ashton, Jackson, Paunonen, Helms & Rothstein, 1995; Moon, 2001; Paunonen, 1998; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001; Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1996). Judge et al. (2013) found that relying on a broad, higher construct masked and substantially understated the criterion-related validity in predicting employee outcomes. Accordingly, for this project I examined the lower level facet, entitlement, rather than the higher order construct of narcissism to predict employee outcomes like performance and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB).

## **Consequences of Entitlement**

Extant research has demonstrated that excessive entitlement is related to negative outcomes in the workplace. Excessive entitlement attitudes have been positively associated with self-serving attribution styles (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Harvey and Martinko (2009) also found that higher levels of entitlement were associated with a diminished need for cognition and higher turnover intent. Excessive entitlement has also been linked to negative employee outcomes including perceived inequity (Naumann et al., 2002), job dissatisfaction (King & Miles, 1994), and corruption (Levine, 2005).

Campbell et al. (2004) found that entitlement was positively linked to “aggression following criticism” in a study of University of Iowa undergraduate students (p. 42). In a separate study those same authors found that individuals with higher levels of entitlement reported greater greed in a tragedy of commons experiment. Under the tragedy of commons theory, individuals otherwise acting independently and rationally according to each one’s self-interest will behave contrary to the whole group’s long-term best interest when depleting a common resource (Hardin, 1968). In a third study of university students, Campbell et al. (2004) found higher levels of entitlement were related to (a) valuing self but not others, (b) decreased accommodation of others, (c) lower empathy and perspective taking, and (d) selfishness. In yet a fourth study, students who ranked higher in entitlement had lower levels of self-esteem, personal control, need for cognition, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Chowning & Campbell, 2009).

In a series of six studies, Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, and Campbell (2004) found that higher levels of entitlement impeded forgiveness and were positively correlated with greater insistence of repayment for a past offense. Additionally, higher levels of entitlement predicted diminished increases in forgiveness over time. So not only were excessively entitled subjects in these studies less likely to forgive, but for them, time was less likely to heal all wounds.

When an employee is deprived of something that he or she feels entitled to, the employee may feel irritated, resentful and seek reparation (Bishop & Lane, 2002). According to Coen (1988), the anger and demandingness resulting from excessive entitlement may interfere with the ability to empathize with the needs and rights of others. In extreme cases of excessive entitlement, the person may even wish to humiliate or destroy those who frustrate their expectations (Grey, 1987). Fisk (2010) similarly proposed that excessively entitled employees will be at a greater risk for engaging in counterproductive work behaviors. However, at that time Fisk had not conducted empirical research to show whether that effect of entitlement might be mediated or moderated by other factors like accountability and fulfillment of the psychological contract.

It has been suggested that excessive entitlement may also negatively affect the judgment of leaders in organizations (Levine, 2005). In an experiment studying leader behaviors, De Cremer and Van Dijk (2005) found that leaders took more than followers from a common resource and deviated more from the equal division rule. Their analysis suggests that the leaders' tendency to make higher allocations to themselves was explained by feelings of entitlement. In that study students were assigned by chance to the role of leader or follower, and yet even the randomly chosen leaders tended to allocate themselves more of the common resource.

### **Antecedents of Entitlement**

The antecedents of excessive entitlement in the workplace are difficult to specify (Fisk, 2010). However, it has been suggested that a general increase in the standard of living, increases in technology, the expansion of social welfare (Samuelson, 1995) and the "trophy kid" effect, where every child deserves a trophy (Alsop, 2008), may have all contributed to increased levels of entitlement. Prior research has frequently linked unpleasant life experiences with a heightened sense of entitlement. Freud (1916) suggested that people who felt as if they had suffered through

a difficult childhood may display higher levels of entitlement. Bishop and Lane (2000) proposed that people who grew up in a one-parent household may demonstrate expectations for special treatment. In a study of disabled individuals, those least accepting of their disability were most likely to feel entitled to use drugs and alcohol (Li & Moore, 2001). Wallace and Leicht (2004) found that uncertainties in the labor market made workers more likely to experience job entitlement. Job entitlement is simply employees' rights to claim entitlement to their jobs in the face of economic downturn, technological change, and employers' desire for greater productivity (Wallace & Leicht, 2004).

Employees may develop excessive entitlement attitudes because organizations tend to communicate mostly positive information about the status of the employment relationship (Heath et al., 1993). Accordingly, employees are likely to see themselves as more valuable and thus more entitled than they should. Ross and Sicoly (1979) argued that if one adds up the individuals' perceived contributions to joint products or projects, the total often exceeds 100%. Because exchanges are inherently based on reciprocity, people's tendency to overestimate their contribution may lead them to expect more from the other party than an objective third party might expect (Heath et al., 1993). People also tend to have unrealistically optimistic beliefs about the future (Taylor & Brown, 1994), which may lead them to experience greater feelings of entitlement than are likely to come their way. Heath et al. (1993) suggested that belief formation by employees will lead them to believe that their entitlements will be more consistent than they are actually likely to be.

Tomlinson (2013) proposed that organizational justice, job status/demands, organizational culture, and the reward system of the organization might all be antecedents of an employee's entitlement beliefs and could have an impact on whether an employee is excessively entitled. Zitek, Jordan, Monin, and Leach (2010) found that when employees are treated unfairly, they may have increased levels of entitlement. An employee's job status or job demands may also

lead to his or her feelings of excessive entitlement. Because employees often consider themselves to be above average, they may believe that they are entitled to more than an objective observer might warrant (Alicke et al., 1995). Sometimes employees may make an extraordinary contribution to the organization and based on that sole situation decide that they are entitled to some amount of unchecked deviant behavior (Anand, Ashforth, & Joshi, 2004; Hollander 1964).

Organizational culture can be like a “management super power;” used for good or evil. In that way, the culture of an organization may have either a positive or a negative effect on levels of employee entitlement. Organizations with a strong positive culture are more likely to have clear boundaries and expectations for what employees are entitled to from an exchange (Tomlinson, 2013). This may be in part because organizations with strong positive cultures have a clearer shared vision regarding their norms and values (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1996). However, when companies have strong negative cultures, there is a stronger likelihood that they may embrace norms and values that are illegal or unethical (Anand et al. 2004; Treviño, 1986). Similarly reward systems may either reduce or increase excessive entitlement attitudes of employees. Early on, Vroom (1964) emphasized that it is important for organizations to base pay on performance and not on other factors that may not add value to the organization. Fisk (2010) and Spitzer (1996) suggested that poor human resource policies and practices may actually contribute to excessive entitlement attitudes of employees.

### **Mediators and Moderators of Entitlement**

Research on entitlement has also focused on mechanisms to explain why some people have higher entitlement expectations than others. Moeller, Crocker, and Bushman (2009) found that excessively entitled individuals adopt self-image goals that construct and defend a positive self-image, which then lead to interpersonal conflict and hostility. The authors found that self-image goals mediated the effect of entitlement on perceived hostility and conflict in relationships.



These results indicate that reducing self-image goals and adopting compassionate goals could provide one potential approach to reducing excessive entitlement attitudes of employees.

Harvey and Harris (2010) found that excessive entitlement was positively associated with political behavior and coworker abuse and that frustration on the part of the employee partially or fully mediated both relationships. That study also found that higher levels of supervisor communication reduced job frustration for less entitled employees. However, higher levels of supervisor communication were found to exacerbate the frustration of employees with higher levels of entitlement. That research indicates that certain supervisor interactions may moderate the effect of employee entitlement attitudes on certain employee outcomes. Hochwarter, Summers, Thompson, Perrwé, and Ferris. (2010) found that excessive entitlement was also positively associated with higher levels of job tension. Their research found that political skill was a significant moderator of the entitlement attitudes of others as it affects job tension.

### **Entitlement as a Moderator or Mediator**

De Cremer and Van Dijk (2005) conducted a study of undergraduate students and found that students randomly assigned a leadership role were more likely to engage in egocentric behavior, and the students' entitlement attitudes mediated the effect of the leadership role on students' egocentric behavior. The authors then conducted a second experiment in which students were told that they either had received a relatively high score or a relatively low score on managerial questions, with the higher scores indicating that the person in question was a "legitimate" leader. Those who were told they had received a higher score on the managerial questions (legitimate leaders) tended to allocate more to themselves from a common resource than those who were told they scored lower on the managerial questions (illegitimate leaders). This research found that entitlement mediated the likelihood of leaders to over allocate resources to themselves.

Wheeler, Halbesleben, and Whitman (2013) examined the moderating effect of entitlement on perceptions of abusive supervision and emotional exhaustion. These authors analyzed data from 132 working adults and their coworkers across multiple industries and across 5 working days and found support for their hypothesis that higher levels of employee entitlement moderates the abusive supervisor/emotional exhaustion relationship. Their results indicate that more entitled employees who perceive their supervisors as more abusive are more emotionally exhausted and more likely to abuse their coworkers.

In a study of 190 employees from nine firms, Byrne, Miller, and Pitts (2010) found that excessive entitlement moderated the effect of recruitment and selection practices on job satisfaction. Employees with excessive entitlement attitudes who favorably perceived recruitment and selection practices were positively associated with job satisfaction.

In a study of mentors and protégés, Allen et al. (2009) found that entitlement moderated the relationship between mentor commitment and relationship quality such that the relationship was stronger for protégés with higher levels of entitlement than for protégés lower in entitlement. This supports earlier research (Campbell, Bush, Brunell, & Shelton, 1999) that indicated employees with higher levels of entitlement believe they should receive special attention and when that attention is not received, those individuals feel the relationship is of lower quality.

Although not yet empirically tested, Tomlinson (2013) proposed that the level of trait entitlement will moderate the influence of situational factors on entitlement beliefs. Tomlinson offered a conceptualization of entitlement beliefs, which he distinguished from trait entitlement. Tomlinson defined entitlement beliefs as an actor's beliefs regarding his or her rightful claim of privileges and pointed out that those beliefs may or may not be similar to what an objective third party might assess. Tomlinson's definition aligns with prior researchers' discussion of entitlement as a trait, and he differentiates between trait entitlement and entitlement beliefs as a way of

explaining fluctuations in entitlement attitudes of individuals over time and based on circumstances. However, entitlement is generally considered a trait, and fluctuations in the level of entitlement are generally attributed to trait activation (Fisk, 2010).

In 2010, Zitek et al. published the results of three experiments in which entitlement was found to be a mediator. In these experiments the researchers manipulated participants to create feelings of unfairness. The results indicated that the manipulations of unfairness increased the participants' intentions to engage in a number of selfish behaviors and to request a more selfish money allocation for a future task. Those selfish behaviors included things like answering a cell phone in the library, failing to recycle, refusing to participate in blood drives, and refusing to perform volunteer work. These effects were mediated by the participants' self-reported levels of entitlement.

### **Measures of Entitlement**

One of the earliest measures of entitlement as a construct came from the Raskin and Terry (1988) Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Using principal-components analysis, Raskin and Terry (1988) analyzed the responses of 1,018 subjects and found evidence for the general construct of narcissism as well as seven first-order components or facets of narcissism, which they identified as authority, exhibitionism, superiority, vanity, exploitiveness, self-sufficiency, and entitlement. They then conducted two additional studies on samples of 57 and 128 subjects respectively and found further support for the construct validity of the overall construct of narcissism and the scales for its components or facets. In the Raskin and Terry (1988) study each of the components or facets had at least three marker items that clearly distinguished that component, and each component had sufficient variance to suggest that it summarized an appropriate facet or subcomponent of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Ackerman et al. (2011) later argued that the NPI was better represented by a three-factor solution comprised of Leadership/Authority, Grandiose/Exhibitionism, and Entitlement/Exploitativeness. However, Ackerman et al. (2011) expressed concern with the low alpha coefficient of the Entitlement/Exploitativeness scale. This may be due at least in part to the fact that the subscale consists of only four items, or that the measure may be better represented by entitlement and exploitativeness as individual facets. The average interitem correlation for the Entitlement/Exploitativeness scale was approximately .20 in the four studies conducted by Ackerman et al. (2011).

Campbell et al. (2004) conducted a series of nine studies to develop a self-report measure of entitlement. The result of those studies was the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES), which they found to be reliable and valid. That same research found the PES to be stable across time. In the first of the nine studies, the authors examined the construct validity by comparing it to conceptually related measures such as narcissism, vanity, exploitativeness, and exhibitionism using the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), and the Me Versus Other Scale (Campbell et al., 2004). The result was a nine-item scale for which all the correlations were significant at  $p < .01$ . Principal components factor analysis of that scale for one factor showed an eigenvalue of 4.10. The single unobserved factor accounted for 46% of the variance in the nine measures, and the alpha coefficient for the composite measure was .85. As an initial test of its validity, the authors then correlated the PES with the measures of the other scales (NPI, Self-Esteem Scale) and found the PES was most highly correlated with narcissism and especially the Entitlement subscale of the NPI (.54 at  $p < .01$ ).

In the second of the nine studies, Campbell et al. (2004) confirmed the factor analysis structure of PES using a larger sample than the first study. In this study, university undergraduate students completed the PES, the Entitlement subscale of the NPI, and the Balanced Inventory of the Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1991). The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding is a

measure of socially desirable responding that has been found to be a valid and reliable measure. The results of the second study were consistent with those of the first study in that a single factor provides the best fit for the PES. The authors also found that the PES and the NPI Entitlement subscale were better modeled as two related factors rather than a single factor.

Campbell et al. (2004) demonstrated that PES was internally reliable in studies 1 and 2. In the third study, the authors demonstrated that the PES scale was also stable across time. The authors sampled two groups of university students to examine the test-retest reliability over a 1-month period and a 2-month period. In both samples and time periods the PES scale was found to be reliable and continued to demonstrate internal consistency. In the remainder of the nine studies, Campbell et al. (2004) tested the PES scale in examining the willingness to take candy from children, deservingness of pay, a commons dilemma study, romantic relationships, and aggression.

Pryor et al. (2008) conducted a later study, which examined both the PES and the entitlement subscale of the NPI in relation to general personality traits and personality disorders. Their research indicates that the two scales may be used nearly interchangeably. However, the PES offers the advantage of being a more internally consistent, stand-alone measure that tends to correlate strongly with disagreeableness, whereas the entitlement subscale of the NPI seems to better assess more pathological variants.

Ackerman and Donnellan (2013) subsequently compared the NPI entitlement subscale and the PES in a series of three studies. They found that the PES measures a more grandiose measure of entitlement, whereas the NPI entitlement subscale measures a more vulnerable expression of entitlement. These studies indicated that the test-retest reliability of the NPI entitlement subscale was found to be not as high as the PES indicating that the PES is more dependable than the NPI entitlement subscale. Multiple studies have found that the PES shows

greater internal consistency than the NPI entitlement subscale. (Ackerman et al., 2011; Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013; Zeiglar-Hill & Wallace, 2011).

All said, one must decide between the trade-offs offered by the two entitlement scales. The NPI entitlement subscale better captures aspects of entitlement associated with vulnerability than does the PES. Alternatively, the PES tends to emphasize aspects of entitlement associated with grandiosity. One negative aspect of the NPI entitlement subscale is its relatively low internal consistency. Although an observer report measure of entitlement might prove to be superior, both of the currently existing scales are self-report measures. Because of the greater internal consistency of the PES, I have used that measure for this project.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the literature review indicates that excessive entitlement attitudes are an increasing problem for organizations and may negatively affect various employee outcomes. Practitioners (Eberstadt, 2012; Hudson, 2014; Stein, 2013) and researchers (Fisk, 2010; Naumann et al., 2002; Tomlinson, 2013) lament the challenges of the seeming growth in excessive entitlement attitudes of employees. The entitlement attitudes of individuals often manifest themselves at the organizational and even at the national level. When legitimate or normative, entitlement is not problematic. However, when employee entitlement attitudes become disproportionate, there may be a negative effect on employee outcomes such as performance or counterproductive work behaviors. For purposes of this project, I have defined excessive entitlement as the employee's belief that he or she is due a disproportionately high level of outputs from an exchange compared to what the employee has contributed to the exchange.

Entitlement has been studied concurrently with deservingness, ambition, and narcissism. However, previous research (Judge et al., 2013; Naumann et al., 2002; Tomlinson, 2013) supports studying entitlement as a separate construct. Prior research has shown that deservingness and

ambition are separate and different constructs and should not be confused with entitlement. Although narcissism and excessive entitlement are closely related, research (Raskin & Terry, 1988) has indicated that entitlement is one of seven subcomponents of narcissism. Later research (Ashton, 1998; Ashton et al., 1995; Judge et al., 2013; Moon, 2001; Paunonen, 1998; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001) indicated that studying lower level traits or facets more accurately predicts different employee outcomes. Accordingly, in this study I examined the effect of entitlement on counterproductive work behaviors and performance as moderated by accountability and mediated by fulfillment of the psychological contract. Despite the saliency of excessive entitlement for practitioners and researchers, and the strong support for studying entitlement separately from similar constructs, there is a dearth of empirical research in the management discipline that treats entitlement as a separate construct (Fisk, 2010; Naumann et al., 2002; Tomlinson, 2013). The research conducted for this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating conditions under which excessive employee entitlement may be effectively managed or conversely be even more dysfunctional and why the excessively entitled are inclined to behave in such ways.

### **Hypothesis Development**

Both researchers and practitioners have an inherent desire to better understand the motivational forces that could potentially explain important organizational outcomes. Practitioners especially need to understand how to best manage and motivate excessively entitled employees. If the reports from the business and popular press are true (Connors et al, 2004; Eberstadt, 2012; Hams, 2012; Stein, 2013) that employees are increasingly showing greater signs of being excessively entitled, then practitioners need to understand how to reengage these employees to help them be more productive and to produce better organizational outcomes. I believe that social exchange theory (SET) may help us better understand how managers and business leaders might mitigate the negative consequences of excessive entitlement for the organization.

The concept of SET is now almost 100 years old, having originated in the 1920s (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925). In the many years since its introduction as a theory, SET (Blau 1964) has helped to explain employee behaviors. The concept spans multiple disciplines; however, researchers generally agree that social exchange consists of some number of interactions that create obligations between two parties (Emerson, 1976). Theories of social exchange suggest that individuals enter into relationships with others, including organizations, to maximize their benefits (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974). The norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) creates an expectation that the inputs an employee contributes to an exchange under SET will be rewarded with commensurate outputs from the organization.

Lerner (1987) was one of the first researchers to reference the idea of a social exchange in a study of entitlement when he discussed the inference of human motives from the enactment of normative expectations. In their review of the concept of entitlement in management literature, Naumann et al. (2002) proposed that SET predicts higher levels of reciprocity. However, they stopped short of empirically testing their propositions. Exline et al. (2004) found that, consistent with SET, people with a high sense of entitlement were more sensitive to interpersonal transgressions and were less likely to forgive those transgressions. Hochwarter et al. (2010) suggested that excessive entitlement violates established norms of social exchange. In Fisk's (2010) review of the etiology of excessive entitlement, she suggested that social exchange is central to the idea that excessively entitled employees believe that they are more deserving of rewards. However, Fisk also stopped short of testing her proposed model of excessive entitlement. Models of job performance are often grounded in a framework of social exchange (Blau 1964; Tomlinson 2013), but there is little research in the management literature that empirically tests entitlement as a construct through the lens of SET. SET has been useful in explaining various constructs in the organizational sciences, including psychological contracts



(Rousseau, 1995). A psychological contract is defined as “an individual’s belief in the mutual obligations between that person and another party, such as an employer” (Rousseau, 2000, p. 2).

Social exchange theories propose that employees enter into relationships with employers to maximize their benefits (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974). Those benefits include both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and the extrinsic rewards can include more than just compensation and employee benefit programs. The extrinsic rewards can also include things like the prestige of being in a certain profession or industry and of holding a particular position. They can also include whatever positive outcomes may be derived from working with a particular supervisor or company (Blau, 1964). Researchers often consider employment as the “exchange of the employees’ effort and loyalty for the organization’s provision of material and socioemotional benefits” (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003, p. 491). Because some of the rewards provided by an employer under SET may be difficult to quantify and inherently subjective, they are uniquely unspecific (Blau, 1964). The difficulty in objectively quantifying the rewards under social exchange theory increases the odds that the employee may perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled. It is important for employers to understand the nature of these social exchanges in order to best motivate employees to produce positive organizational outcomes. One way for organizations to maximize the results of these social exchanges is by understanding psychological contracts.

Psychological contract theory proposes that employees develop opinions about the types of inputs they are obligated to provide to the organization and the types of outputs they are entitled to receive from the organization as part of the exchange (Aselage & Eisenberger 2003; Morrison & Robinson 1997; Rousseau, 1989, 1995). The focus of psychological contract theory generally concerns what happens when the employee perceives that the organization has failed to keep its implied promises. The employee’s perception that the organization has failed to fulfill the psychological contract may occur because the organization has in fact not fulfilled its obligation,

because the employee perceives a gap between the rewards provided by the organization and the expected outputs, or through some combination of fact and perception. Regardless, when the employee perceives that the organization has not fulfilled the psychological contract, the result may be poor employee performance and negative organizational outcomes.

Previous research has suggested that psychological contracts may vary in specificity and potency (Rousseau, 1990, 1995; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). Whereas transactional obligations tend to have more specific time frames and include the exchange of economic resources, relational obligations have less specific time frames and generally include the exchange of socioemotional resources (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Further, Rousseau (1995) has suggested that employees develop their perception of the terms of psychological contracts in three ways. Organizations, as they should, often communicate directly to the employees what they should expect from the organization. This communication can occur during the recruitment process before the employee is hired and continues on an ongoing basis after the individual becomes an employee. Another way that employees develop their perceptions about psychological contracts is simply by observing their coworkers and supervisors. These observations suggest and reinforce what the employee may expect from the organization. Finally, the organization provides more formal signals as to what the employees can expect through its compensation and benefits programs and the ways that it formally recognizes and admonishes employees.

Based on previous theories proposed regarding entitlement (Bardwick 1991; Fisk, 2010; Tomlinson 2013), excessively entitled employees may be more likely to perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled. When an employee believes that the organization has failed to fulfill the psychological contract, this discrepancy is sometimes referred to as a breach (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). As considered through the lens of SET, excessively entitled employees may have more difficulty accurately assessing their inputs to the exchange with the

organization compared to the outputs that they receive from the organization. Because excessively entitled employees perceive they have contributed more to the exchange than is perceived by either the organization or an objective third party, there is a greater likelihood that excessively entitled employees will perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled. Accordingly I proposed the following hypothesis for this study:

*H1: Excessive entitlement is negatively related to fulfillment of the psychological contract.*

### **Moderating Role of Accountability**

One way that managers might more effectively manage excessively entitled employees is by holding them accountable. Accountability has been described as implicit or explicit expectations that one may be called on to justify one's beliefs, feelings, and actions to others (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Semin & Manstead, 1983; Tetlock, 1992; Wallace, Johnson, Mathe, & Paul 2011). Frink and Ferris (1998) defined accountability as the perception that one has the potential to be evaluated by someone and to be answerable for decisions or actions. Prior research in accountability has proposed that perceptions about observers of employees and related rewards or punishments may affect employees' decisions and effort allocations (Tetlock et al., 1989). Frink and Klimoski (2004) called accountability an adhesive that binds social systems together. Accordingly, without accountability there is no structure for social order and common expectations in society (Tetlock, 1992).

There are different levels of accountability. Accountability can mean employees expect that their performance will be measured by an observer against some established standard with some expected consequences depending on their performance (Geen, 1991; Guerin, 1989; Harkins & Jackson, 1985; Innes & Young, 1975, Sanna, Turley, & Mark, 1996; Simonson & Nowlis, 1996). In a production environment, employees' productivity may be measured against a

goal or standard for productivity, quality, or accuracy. Yet the most specific level of accountability is one in which the employee or performer reasonably expects that he or she will give an explanation for his or her performance (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Simonson & Nowlis, 1998; Wilson & LaFleur, 1995).

Research shows that actors may change their views to fit those of an observer/evaluator when those views are known in advance (Sedikides, 1990; Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002; Tetlock et al., 1989). Further, actors are more likely to change their views in favor of the observer/evaluator when the observer/evaluator has some control over outcomes or rewards (Stenning, 1995). For accountability to be effective, there must be a reward or punishment associated that is salient to the employee (Mitchell, 1993). In an organizational setting, a supervisor who sets performance goals for his or her direct reports and has reward power over those employees should wield this type of influence over the employees. These results suggest that there could be greater alignment of the expectations of the employee and the organization through accountability.

Accountability may lead employees to have clearer expectations regarding what they owe the organization and what the organization owes them. Because accountability makes it clear that the excessively entitled employee will receive the desired rewards only with a specified level of output, the employee more accurately understands the mutual exchange between him or her and the organization. Accordingly, in designing this study, I anticipated that excessively entitled employees who are held accountable will experience higher levels of psychological contract fulfillment. When accountability is low, the excessively entitled employee's disproportionate expectations of the organization are not recalibrated to a more realistic level. An organization that does not hold employees accountable may make it so that the excessively entitled employee is more likely to perceive that the organization is not fulfilling the psychological contract. Accordingly, I predicted the following as this study's second hypothesis:

*H2: Accountability moderates the relationship between entitlement and fulfillment of the psychological contract, such that the negative relationship is weaker when accountability is high versus low.*

Both practitioners and researchers are concerned with managing organizational outcomes like employee performance and counterproductive work behaviors. Employees may perform at a lower level when they perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled (i.e., what is commonly referred to as psychological contract breach). Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, and Bravo, (2007) found that fulfillment of the psychological contract is positively related to in-role performance. Conversely, other research has found that when employees fail to receive something that they expected to receive, creating the perception that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled, there is a reduction in performance (Robinson 1996; Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). When the employees do not receive the outputs from the exchange that they expect, they perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled, and they may reduce their inputs to the exchange. When the employee believes that the psychological contract has been not fulfilled, he or she may lose confidence that the contributions made today will be reciprocated by the organization in the future (Robinson, 1996). In a study of 125 newly hired managers, when performance was regressed on psychological contract breach, that breach was found to be significant and negatively related to performance (Robinson, 1996). In another study of over 800 managers, Turnley and Feldman (1992) found that failure to fulfill the psychological contract is likely to result in poorer employee performance in both in-role and extra-role behaviors.

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) are generally thought to be actions, attitudes, or behaviors of employees that have a negative impact on the organization or its stakeholders. CWB may include a wide range of negative behaviors or attitudes including sexual harassment, sabotage, tardiness, excessive socializing, theft, gossiping, backstabbing, drug and alcohol abuse, destruction of company property, violence, purposely doing poor or incorrect work and surfing

the Internet for personal use (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2013). Although there has been a wide range of estimates of the cost to organizations of CWB, it is easily in the billions of dollars, if not hundreds of billions of dollars (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Bensimon, 1994; Buss, 1993; Camara & Schneider 1994; Murphy 1993). Surprisingly, there has been little research regarding the relationship between the psychological contract fulfillment and CWB (Jensen, Opland, & Ryan, 2010). In a recent meta-analysis (Zhao et al., 2007), there were too few empirical studies of CWB and psychological contract fulfillment for this relationship to be examined (Jensen et al., 2010).

When employees perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled, employees may exhibit CWB (Spector & Fox, 2002). Prior research has found that when the employee perceived that the psychological contract was not fulfilled, he or she exhibited greater job dissatisfaction and the intention to quit (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). When excessively entitled employees have their outcomes frustrated by a perceived violation of the psychological contract, the result may be increased CWB (Adams, 1965; Cropanzano, & Greenberg, 1997). Research has shown that if an employee attributes a disappointing outcome to factors that he or she perceives to be outside his or her control, as might be created when the psychological contract is not fulfilled, the employee is more likely to engage in CWB (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Murray, 1999; Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglass, 2002). A recent study found that when the employer failed to fulfill the psychological contract with regards to autonomy and control, employees responded with CWB (Sharkawi, Rahim, & Dahalan, 2013).

When employees perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled, they will be more likely to give back to the organization by engaging in desirable behaviors (i.e., higher performance) and to refrain from undesirable behavior (i.e., CWB). In this way, psychological contract fulfillment represents the employee's cognitive realization that the organization has satisfied expectations, and thus, the employee should reciprocate with equally desirable behaviors. Accordingly, in my third hypothesis for this study, I posited the following:

*H3: Fulfillment of the psychological contract is (a) positively related to performance and (b) negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors.*

To complete my theoretical model, I also predicted a pattern of moderated mediation, as shown in Figure 1 (see Appendix B). Consistent with my previously stated theorizing and hypotheses, I predicted that the interactive effect of employee entitlement and accountability on (4a) performance and (4b) counterproductive work behaviors is explained by fulfillment of the psychological contract. More specifically, when excessively entitled employees are held accountable, the employee is more likely to perceive psychological contract fulfillment, which in turn will capture the excessively entitled employee's desire to reciprocate favorable behaviors by increasing performance and reducing counterproductive work behaviors. Accordingly, I predicted the following as this study's final hypothesis:

*H4: Psychological contract fulfillment mediates the relationship between the interactive effect of employee entitlement and accountability onto (a) performance and (b) counterproductive work behaviors.*

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### **Field Study**

##### **Participants and Procedures**

In this chapter, I introduce my method for testing my theoretical model. For purposes of this study, I solicited 723 employees and their supervisors from six companies to participate in an online survey. I deployed two Qualtrics web-based survey instruments to each of the firms that participated in the field study. The first survey was sent to employees at each of the participating firms to obtain self-report data. This survey measured items being reported by the employees. The focal employees were asked to answer questions designed to measure entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004), the degree to which the organization has fulfilled the psychological contract (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994), and negative affectivity (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and ambition (Van Vianen, 1999) as control variables. To measure accountability (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hall, & Ferris, 2005), the focal employees were also asked questions about the organization's accountability practices.

The second survey was sent to front-line supervisors at each of the firms. The purpose of the second survey was to obtain observer-report data about the employees responding to the first survey. The supervisors were asked to evaluate the performance (Williams & Anderson, 1991) and counterproductive work behaviors (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) for each of their employees who participated in the project. The results of each survey were then mapped using an identifying



code that assured the participants' anonymity but allowed me to match data from the employee-supervisor dyad from the two surveys.

### **Antecedent, Moderating, and Mediating Measures**

**Excessive entitlement.** Focal employees self-reported their own level of entitlement using the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES; Campbell et al., 2004) discussed in Chapter II. Prior research (Campbell et al., 2004; Pryor et al., 2008) found that the PES accurately captures excessive entitlement. The PES uses a nine-item measure that uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strong disagreement*) to 7 (*strong agreement*). Sample items from the PES include "I honestly feel I am just more deserving than others," and "Great things should come to me." Campbell (2004) found that the alpha coefficient for the composite measure was .85.

**Accountability.** To measure the degree to which the employee is held accountable, I used the accountability measure developed by Hochwarter, Kacmar, and Ferris (2003). The measure is composed of eight items assessing the employee's felt accountability at work (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hall, & Ferris, 2005). This measure uses a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Example items include "I am held very accountable for my actions in my store," and "I often have to explain why I do certain things at work." Prior research has found the measure to be internally consistent with an alpha coefficient of .80 (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hall, & Ferris, 2005).

**Fulfillment of the psychological contract.** To measure the employee's perception that the psychological contract has been fulfilled, I used a six-item measure by Robinson, Kraatz, and Rousseau (1994) that uses a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very highly*). However, to ensure consistency, I utilized a 7-point Likert scale for this project. Responding employees were asked, "To what extent do you believe that your employer has fulfilled its obligation to provide you with:" followed by the six items. Example items include "rapid advancement" and

“long-term job security.” Accordingly, a high score represents a high degree of fulfillment of the psychological contract. To assess the reliability of the single-item measures for fulfillment of the psychological contract, Robinson et al. (1994) conducted test-retest analysis on the same group of individuals 2 weeks apart and found correlations ranging from .72 to .91 with a mean of .80.

### **Outcome Measures**

**Performance.** I asked front-line supervisors to complete a seven-item measure developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) to measure task performance of the employees participating in this project. This is a highly cited and commonly used scale for measuring performance. In Williams and Anderson’s (1991) analysis, the seven items showed loadings of between .52 and .88 with an average loading of .75. The measure uses a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include “adequately completes assigned duties,” and “fulfills responsibilities specified in job description.”

**Counterproductive work behavior.** Counterproductive work behavior was measured using a 9-item scale developed by Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998). Counterproductive work behavior is frequently conceptualized as antisocial behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly (1998) found the scale to be a valid and reliable measure. The employees’ supervisors were asked to indicate the frequency with which each employee had engaged in each of the behaviors over the past year. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*all of the time*). Example items include “damaged property belonging to my company” and “said or did something to purposely hurt someone at work.”

### **Control Variables**

**Ambition.** Because both ambitious employees and excessively entitled employees may have high expectations as to the outputs that they would receive from an exchange, I controlled

for ambition using a scale derived from Van Vianen (1999). The original scale used five items and a 5-point Likert scale to measure the respondents' ambition for a management position from 1 (*not at all applicable*) to 5 (*fully applicable*). However, I again used a 7-point Likert scale for this measure. Example items from the original scale include "If a management position will be offered to me in the near future, I will accept such a position," and "I told my relatives that I was hoping for a management position." For purposes of my study, I replaced "management position" with "promotion." In a similar adaptation of the scale by Judge, Van Vianen, and De Prater (2004), the reliability of the scale was found to be .77.

**Negative affectivity.** Because the PES has been shown to correlate with disagreeableness (Pryor et al., 2008), I controlled for negative affectivity using the Negative Affect Schedule Scale (NASS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The NASS includes 10 adjectives that describe negative moods. Examples of those items include distressed, upset, guilty, and scared. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they generally feel each mood on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Watson et al. (1988) demonstrated that this scale has good psychometric properties, and in a later study by Bond and Bunce (2003), the alpha coefficients ranged from .87 to .89.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

In this chapter I describe the results of my analyses. I first conducted confirmatory factor analysis to confirm that the respondents saw each of the factors as a distinct variable. I then tested each of the hypotheses of my research. Those results are described in more detail below.

#### **Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the variables are listed in Table 1 (see Appendix A). The surveys were sent to 723 employees and their supervisors at six organizations (see Table 2 in Appendix A). I received 443 responses (61%) to the employee survey and 502 responses (69%) to the supervisor survey. After eliminating records without enough meaningful responses and matching employee responses with the responses from their respective supervisor, I was left with 313 useful responses (43%) to the surveys.

Of the useful responses, 102 (33%) were completed by men, 207 (66%) were completed by women, and 5 (1%) respondents chose not to identify their gender. The average age of the employees who responded was 40 years old ( $SD = 12.4$ ), the youngest was 21, and the oldest was 73. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the employees who responded were Caucasian, 3% were Native American, 2% were African American, 2% were Asian, 2% were Hispanic, and 7% chose not to identify their ethnicity. Of the employees who responded, 96% were full-time employees, and 4% were part-time employees. On average the employees had been with their current organization for 6 years ( $SD = 7.5$ ) and had worked for their current supervisor for 3 years ( $SD = 2.7$ ).

Of the supervisors who responded to the survey, 47% were men, 51% were women, and 2% chose to not identify their gender. The average age of the supervisors was 44 years old ( $SD = 9.5$ ). The youngest supervisor was 27, and the oldest was 71. The average time the supervisors had worked for their current organization was 8 years ( $SD = 7.8$ ). Of the supervisors who responded to the survey, 88% were Caucasian, 3% were Native American, 1% were African American, 1% were Hispanic, and 4% chose not to identify their ethnicity.

### **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

I first performed confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood using LISREL on each of the measures in my study. This helped ensure that the participants in the study saw each construct as a distinct and separate factor. My measurement model consisted of five variables (entitlement, accountability, psychological contract fulfillment, performance, and counterproductive work behaviors) and two control variables (ambition and negative affect). In addition to those latent variables, the measurement model also included 53 observable items: nine for entitlement, eight for accountability, six for psychological contract fulfillment, seven for performance, nine for counterproductive work behaviors, five for ambition, and nine for negative affect. My confirmatory factor analyses produced the following results for the baseline five-factor model: 1,356  $df$ ,  $X^2 = 3,192.69$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = .88, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .069; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .075 (Bentler & Bonnett, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

I then reran the confirmatory factor analysis with seven alternative loading assumptions (see Table 3 in Appendix A). Because both highly entitled employees and ambitious employees tend to expect greater outputs from an exchange, I first loaded ambition and entitlement on the same factor. Because entitlement has been previously shown to correlate with disagreeableness, I next loaded entitlement and negative affect (as a proxy for disagreeableness) onto one factor. I

continued testing alternate loading scenarios under five other scenarios and did not discover an alternate model indicating a better fit (see Table 3 in Appendix A). Although the CFI of .88 for the base model is slightly lower than the general threshold of .90, the SRMR of .075 for the base model is below the cutoff of .08 that is generally recommended. Marsh and Hau (1996) concluded that those model fit targets are guidelines that, although useful, can lead to inappropriate decisions in some cases and should be considered only rules of thumb (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The baseline model appears to provide the best overall option of the alternatives considered. Further, all indicators loaded onto their intended factors, indicating no problem with cross-loading. All of the factors displayed Cronbach's  $\alpha$  measures greater than .70, indicating sufficient internal reliability (see Table 1 in Appendix A).

### **Hypotheses Tests**

To test my hypotheses, I ran Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro. This macro utilizes confidence intervals (CIs) with a 95% bias correction and uses bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations (with replacement). Using this model demonstrates the conditional indirect and direct effects at different levels of moderators (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Hypothesis 1 stated that entitlement is negatively related to fulfillment of the psychological contract. The PROCESS macro indicated a point estimate = -.1710, standard error = .0813, and 95% CI [-.3310, -.0110] (see Table 4 in Appendix A). Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that accountability moderates the relationship between entitlement and fulfillment of the psychological contract, such that the negative relationship is weaker when accountability is high versus low. The PROCESS macro mentioned above returned a point estimate = -.1663, standard error = .0993, and 95% CI [-.3617, .0291] (see Table 4 in Appendix A). Although these results do not reach the standard cutoff for statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ), I did find that the interaction is significant at  $p < .10$ . Because these results approach significance, I

conducted a simple slopes analysis to further explore the pattern of interaction. The plotted interaction reveals that the interaction effect is different than my original hypothesis (see Figure 2 in Appendix B for my hypothesized interaction and compare this with Figure 3, my actual interaction, in the same appendix). Contrary to my expectations, high accountability did not mitigate the negative relationship between entitlement and psychological contract fulfillment. Rather, high accountability strengthened the negative relationship between entitlement and psychological contract fulfillment. The negative relationship between entitlement and psychological contract fulfillment was stronger when accountability was high versus low. When my hypothesized results (shown in Figure 2 in Appendix B) were compared with the actual results (shown in Figure 3 in Appendix B), I found that Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that psychological contract fulfillment is positively related to performance (a) and negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors (b). The PROCESS macro indicated a point estimate = .1198, standard error = .0331, and 95% CI [.0547, .1850] for performance and a point estimate = -.0928, standard error = .0272, and 95% CI [-.1462, -.0393] for counterproductive work behavior (see Table 4 in Appendix A). Accordingly, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

I also examined the interactive effects of entitlement and accountability on performance (Hypothesis 4a) and counterproductive work behavior (Hypothesis 4b). I had hypothesized that psychological contract fulfillment would mediate the relationship between the interactive effect of employee entitlement and accountability on (a) performance and (b) counterproductive work behaviors. To demonstrate mediation, the independent variable (interactive effect of entitlement and accountability) should be related to the mediator (psychological contract fulfillment), and the mediator should be related to the dependent variables (performance and counterproductive work behavior; James, Mulaik, & Brett, 2006). Evidence of statistically significant indirect effects also needs to exist, as demonstrated using bootstrapping through PROCESS and the index of

moderated mediation. As noted above for Hypothesis 2 and 3, the interactive effect of entitlement and accountability on fulfillment of the psychological contract was not significant at the 95% confidence level, yet the mediator was related to the outcome variables. Although the indirect effect was significant at the mean and one standard deviation above the mean for both outcome variables, the PROCESS macro's index of moderated mediation indicated a point estimate = -.0199, standard error = .0130, and 95% CI [-.0502, .0008] for performance (*H4a*) and a point estimate = .0154, standard error = .0106, and 95% CI [-.0002, .0423] for counterproductive work behavior (see Table 4 in Appendix A). Accordingly, the moderated mediation results did not support Hypothesis 4 at the 95% confidence interval. Interestingly, however, I found statistically significant results for Hypothesis 4 at the 90% CI, as shown in Table 5 (see Appendix A). Nevertheless, as discussed for Hypothesis 2, the pattern of moderated-mediation effect did not align with my original prediction and thus does not provide support for Hypothesis 4 when  $p < .10$ .



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The topic of entitlement has received a great deal of attention from the business press (Baron & Lachenauer, 2014; Eberstadt, 2012; Stein 2013). Employees' excessive entitlement attitudes is an especially salient issue for practitioners and by many accounts is a growing problem for organizations (Tomlinson, 2013). There has been little research, however, regarding a clear framework related to the construct of excessive employee entitlement (Fisk 2010), which is surprising given its saliency for practitioners and the attention given to it by the popular press. This research considered the potential negative business outcomes that may occur when employees develop the belief that they are due a disproportionately high ratio of outputs from the exchange with their employer compared to what they have contributed to the exchange. I also examined what employers might do to help mitigate excessive entitlement attitudes of employees.

I framed my research model using social exchange theory (SET). SET has been characterized as a number of interactions that create obligations between two parties (Emerson, 1976). Consistent with SET, psychological contract theory suggests that employees develop opinions about what they are obligated to provide to their employer and what in return their employer is obligated to provide to them (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Rousseau 1989, 1995). In the following pages, I discuss the contributions this research

makes to both theory and practice as well as the limitations of this research and directions for potential future research on this topic.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research makes three primary theoretical contributions to the management literature. First, I provide a thorough overview of the nomological network for employee entitlement as a specific construct. Although there is broad discussion in the popular press of excessive entitlement and its potential antecedents and consequences, there has been little discussion of the issue in the management literature. This examination of the nomological network also allows the reader to see potential connections between employee entitlement at the micro or individual level and broader expressions of entitlement at the macro or organizational or even national level. A cursory comparison of the micro and macro expressions of entitlement may at first appear unrelated. However, there are consistent themes at both the micro and the macro levels, which allow researchers to draw inferences for potential future research.

This study is among the very few (Byrne et al., 2010; Harvey & Harris, 2010; Harvey & Martinko, 2009) in the management literature to provide an empirical examination of excessive employee entitlement as a specific construct. Other researchers (Fisk, 2010; Naumann, Minsky, & Sturman 2002; Tomlinson, 2013) have written excellent theory papers on the subject of excessive employee entitlement in organizations, but few have attempted to empirically test entitlement as a construct. This prior research of entitlement theory has both provided an examination of the scant extant mentions of excessive entitlement in the management literature and simultaneously called for empirical research of entitlement as a construct. My research helps in part to answer that call for long overdue empirical research of employee entitlement as a specific construct.

Much of the research of entitlement that has been conducted in other fields, such as psychology, has been conducted as part of a broader study of narcissism (Ackerman et al., 2011;

Campbell et al., 2004; Pryor et al., 2008; Raskin & Terry, 1988). This research peels back the onion and examines entitlement as a stand-alone construct. Wining away the other components of narcissism like exhibitionism and vanity provides a less impeded view of the uniqueness of entitlement as a construct. Following the lead of researchers who have argued for the study of lower level traits (Ashton, 1998; Ashton et al., 1995; Judge et al., 2013; Moon, 2001; Paunonen, 1998; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001; Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1996), I have applied that facet-level approach to my study of entitlement. I believe that this approach to studying entitlement and future research that follows this approach will provide greater understanding of entitlement as a unique construct.

The second theoretical contribution of this study to the management literature is its empirical support for the proposition that employees who exhibit higher levels of entitlement may be less likely to perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled (*H1*). This finding provides long-awaited confirmation that social exchange theory is an appropriate lens through which to examine entitlement. SET (Blau, 1964) and reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) are frequently used by management researchers to explain employee behavior (Rousseau 1989; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994). Social exchange theory is often operationalized through the psychological contract between the employee and the organization (Rousseau, 1995). These psychological contracts between employees and employer can have either a transactional or a relational aspect; that is, they can often be separated into economic and noneconomic categories (Foa & Foa, 1980).

Transactional or economic exchanges tend to be more easily quantifiable and less likely misunderstood (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003), resulting in an increased probability of the employee's perception that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. For example, if an employee is told that he/she will be paid a gross amount of \$2,000 every other Friday in their paycheck, that description leaves little room for misunderstanding. Conversely, relational or

noneconomic exchanges are more difficult to quantify and may result in the excessively entitled employee perceiving that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled. Relational exchanges under the psychological contract that the employee might expect include expectations for justice, opportunity, prestige, and mentoring. One can see how an employer and employee might define or quantify those attributes differently. Excessively entitled employees may be inherently more likely to value the outputs under the psychological contract differently, especially when those outputs involve relational or noneconomic attributes.

Researchers (Bardwick, 1991; Fisk, 2010; Tomlinson, 2013) have theorized, but not empirically tested, whether employees who exhibit excessive entitlement might be more likely to believe that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled. With their foundation, I set forth to empirically test whether employee entitlement is in fact negatively related to the fulfillment of the psychological contract (*H1*). The results of my research supported the hypothesis that employees who have higher levels of entitlement are less likely to perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. This finding is important because previous research has shown that fulfillment of the psychological contract is positively related to employee performance (Zhao et al., 2007), and when employees perceive that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled, they may be likely to reduce performance in the future (Robinson, 1996; Wanous et al., 1992). My research found a similar correlation between psychological contract fulfillment and performance. Similarly, previous research has shown that employees who perceive the psychological contract has been fulfilled are less likely to engage in counterproductive work behavior (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglass, 2002; Murray, 1999). I too found a negative correlation between fulfillment of the psychological contract and counterproductive work behavior.

Third, this research contributes to current understanding of accountability theory. Extant research (Sedikides, 1990; Sedikides et al., 2002; Stenning, 1995; Tetlock et al., 1989) suggested that there was probable cause to believe that accountability would mitigate the negative effect of

excessive entitlement in the employee's perception that the psychological contract had been fulfilled. Prior research had shown that employees may change their views to fit those of a supervisor when those views are known in advance (Sedikides, 1990; Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002; Tetlock et al., 1989). Further, prior research had shown that employees are more likely to change their views when their supervisor has control over outcomes or rewards (Stenning, 1995). I expected to find that the moderating effect of accountability would narrow the gap between the degree to which employees with high levels and those with low levels of entitlement perceived the psychological contract to be fulfilled. A visual representation that shows that expected interactive effect appears in Figure 2 (see Appendix B). However, as I demonstrated in Figure 3 (see Appendix B), employees who exhibit high levels of entitlement and are held to higher levels of accountability are less likely to perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. This current research counterintuitively demonstrates a stronger negative relationship between employee entitlement and psychological contract fulfillment when accountability is high versus low.

### **Practical Implications**

This research also makes a number of contributions to practice. First, this research demonstrates that employees who display higher levels of entitlement are less likely to perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. Multiple researchers (Bardwick, 1995; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) have suggested that excessive entitlement attitudes are increasing across the population. Because of the importance of psychological contract fulfillment in predicting important organizational outcomes like performance and counterproductive work behaviors, it is important for managers to understand the antecedents of psychological contract fulfillment like excessive entitlement. This awareness is especially important if entitlement attitudes are increasing across the population, as has been suggested previously by other researchers. If employees on the whole are displaying higher levels of entitlement, the issue may

become even more pressing for managers as time goes on. This research underscores that the topic of effectively managing the excessively entitled employee should be given a priority commensurate with the significance of the organizational outcomes potentially affected.

Second, this research indicates that when employees who demonstrate higher levels of entitlement are held to a higher level of accountability, they have stronger reactions in terms of the psychological contract not being fulfilled than if accountability were low. So although greater accountability may produce better outcomes for the organization overall, managers should be sensitive to the probability that the increased accountability may cause excessively entitled employees to have lower levels of psychological contract fulfillment. This may be counterintuitive and may require that this subset of excessively entitled employees in the organization be managed differently to mitigate the related negative effects.

However, the risks associated with not holding employees accountable appear to be greater than the risks associated with an adverse reaction from excessively entitled employees when all employees are held accountable. Accordingly, organizations that do not hold employees as accountable may find that those employees are less likely to experience the positive consequences of psychological contract fulfillment. The results of this research project have demonstrated support for better employee performance and lower levels of counterproductive work behaviors when employees perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. Better employee performance and lower counterproductive work behavior should have a positive impact on the overall performance of the organization.

Any number of practitioner books (Connors et al., 2004; Hams, 2012; Lencioni, 2002) has advocated holding employees to greater levels of accountability. However, those recommendations have been based largely on case analyses and anecdotal stories. These authors have intuitively suspected the value of accountability based on only their personal experiences.

There are certainly nuggets of truth to be gleaned from those authors; however, all that glitters is not gold. This research provides practitioners a filter to better identify the accountability strategies from those authors that may be empirically supported by research and also offers practitioners a caution not to blindly and broadly apply greater accountability without understanding the risks associated with employees who exhibit higher levels of entitlement.

Finally, one should not throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water. Although this research indicates that highly entitled employees who are held more accountable may be less likely to perceive that the psychological contract has been fulfilled, there are possible ways to reap the benefits of greater accountability while potentially mitigating the risks of excessively entitled employees. An organization may help minimize the negative effect of accountability on highly entitled employees by making a concentrated effort to attract and retain employees who are low in entitlement and who are more likely to respond favorably to higher levels of accountability. Schneider (1987) proposed that under the theory of attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) that people are attracted to a particular organization because of their personality traits, which include levels of entitlement. ASA further suggests that organizations select potential employees who share common personal attributes, like low levels of entitlement. Conversely, from the attraction component, ASA proposes that when people do not fit an environment, they tend to leave it; that is, employees who do not fit the organization are eliminated through attrition. Organizations who have documented and publicized programs of meritocracy and accountability should attract potential employees who are lower in entitlement (Attraction). Screening tools are available to help differentiate employees on the basis of attributes that are likely to make them more successful in the organization, like lower levels of entitlement (Selection). When employees who are higher in entitlement do slip through the screening process, they may frequently self-eliminate when they become aware of the culture of accountability in the organization (Attrition). Certainly there is a cost associated with turnover, but that cost may be lower than that of carrying

excessively entitled employees. Also, like most management techniques, accountability will be more effective when executed effectively rather than haphazardly. When best practices for accountability are applied, they can result in a better experience for both the organization and the employee (Joplin, 2014).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This research is not without limitations. First, this study included only six organizations. Two of them were professional services firms at which one might expect high levels of accountability because employees' time in such firms is tracked and billed to clients. All six companies were located in four contiguous states. All companies were selected out of convenience because of the author's relationship with the organizations. Also, the great majority of the employees were office workers and/or professional workers. It is possible that slightly different results might be obtained by expanding the sample to include more companies, companies in more geographically diverse locations, and employees in a wider variety of positions.

Another potential limitation could be the presence of disinterested participants (Whitley, 2002). Disinterested participants are those who are apathetic and/or unmotivated to complete the survey instrument accurately and to the best of their ability. Even though employees were incentivized by being eligible for one of five \$100 gift cards, it is possible that the incentive was not enough to motivate them to contribute reasonable effort. However, I did remove any responses to the two surveys in which respondents clearly did not follow instructions and did not complete a sufficient number of the questions.

My model relied on self-reported data from employees for the Psychological Entitlement Scale. It is possible that due to the previously mentioned challenges created by self-reported data, an observer report measure for entitlement might show different results (Haefffel & Howard,



2010; Oh, Wang, & Mount, 2011). Future research using an observer report measure for entitlement could provide new insights into the antecedents and consequences of excessive entitlement and also may provide additional perspective on the differences in how employees perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

As noted previously, there are alternate measures for entitlement. I believe that the PES provides the most reliability of the measures currently available for entitlement. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) subscale has been reported to better measure aspects of entitlement associated with vulnerability (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013), while the PES has been found to better measure aspects of entitlement associated with grandiosity (Ackerman & Donnellan, 2013). To the degree that specific consequences of entitlement are affected by the vulnerability facet of entitlement, the NPI might provide a different and possibly clearer picture of the effect of entitlement.

Half of the hypotheses made in this study, and arguably the most important hypothesis, were not supported. Accordingly, there is still much to learn about the organizational responses that might mitigate the negative consequences of excessive entitlement. Much of the waters researchers must navigate between entitlement and desired organizational outcomes are consequently still unknown and uncharted. The lack of extant research on employee entitlement in the management literature means that researchers of entitlement are frequently plowing new ground. This lack of a theoretical framework for entitlement in the management domain presents both a limitation and a potential future research opportunity.

Various authors (Bardwick, 1995; Eberstadt, 2012; Samuelson, 1995; Sykes, 2011; Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) have indicated that entitlement attitudes are increasing. These authors and others lament the increased entitlement attitudes of “this generation,” but this complaint does not appear to be new. According to Plato, Socrates once said,

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in the place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households” (as cited in Patty & Johnson, 1953, p. 277). This raises the question: Are there actually higher levels of entitlement among millennials as reported by several authors (Bardwick, 1995; Eberstadt, 2012; Sykes, 2011; Twenge 2006; Twenge & Campbell 2009), or do people all generally have higher levels of entitlement when we are younger and simply grow out of it as they mature? A longitudinal study that follows a group of the same people over an extended period of years might provide additional insights into whether excessive entitlement is an affliction of this generation or simply an attribute of the youth of every generation.

The lack of support for my *H2* in itself may be a signpost directing researchers to other explanations for why accountability did not moderate the effect of entitlement on the employee’s perception that the psychological contract has not been fulfilled. One potential explanation is that excessively entitled employees may tend to have an external locus of control, which may prevent accountability from being a more effective tool for helping those employees. Researchers (Cain, Romanelli, & Smith, 2012) studied the topic more narrowly and found that academic entitlement on the part of pharmaceutical students was positively correlated with an external locus of control. It is possible that a study of both excessive employee entitlement and locus of control might provide part of the explanation for why accountability does not work more effectively with excessively entitled employees.

The current era provides additional research opportunities for entitlement attitudes. Twenty years ago employees were generally content to sit and listen for a minute or two to the alternating tones of a dial-up modem while waiting for a rudimentary website to load on their desktop computers. Today, many people may abandon trying to connect to a webpage from their cell phone in mere seconds if it is not instantly displayed. It is not unusual for people to be insulted if they post a “selfie” to social media and do not receive multiple “likes” within minutes.

This second example raises the question of the role that social media plays in people developing higher levels of entitlement. Although this is a research opportunity unfathomable 10 years ago, it may provide important insights for managers in the future.

Finally, there is still much to be understood about the moderators and the mediators of entitlement on important organizational outcomes. Higher levels of entitlement have been associated with self-serving attribution styles (Harvey & Martkinko, 2009), perceived inequity (Naumann et al., 2002), job dissatisfaction (King & Miles, 1994), corruption (Levine, 2005), aggression following criticism (Campbell et al., 2004), and other negative organizational outcomes. And yet much of what happens between entitlement and organizational outcomes such as these is still somewhat of a “black box” for both researchers and practitioners. Moreover, much of this previous research of entitlement has been performed in domains outside of management. There is a significant opportunity to replicate and extend that research from other domains in the field of management.

## **Conclusion**

Excessive entitlement attitudes of employees appear to be an increasing problem for organizations (Eberstadt, 2012; Stein, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013). However, there has been little research regarding a clear framework related to the construct of excessive employee entitlement, and articles in top-tier management journals are almost nonexistent (Fisk, 2010). This paper has presented a thorough overview of the nomological network for entitlement and has taken the unique approach of studying entitlement as a separate lower-level facet instead of as a part of narcissism. This study’s findings support the previously suggested hypothesis that excessive entitlement attitudes of employees may have a negative effect on their perceptions that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. Because of the positive organizational outcomes previously found to be associated with psychological contact fulfillment, understanding the

antecedents of psychological contract fulfillment is important for both researchers and practitioners. This research further found support for the idea that greater accountability may often be better for the organization overall, but it may actually exacerbate the problems associated with employees who exhibit excessive entitlement attitudes. This research both extends current understanding of entitlement attitudes of employees and underscores the need for additional research. The fields for entitlement research are ripe for harvest, but the workers are few. My desire is that this study will both underscore the importance of the research of excessive entitlement attitudes of employees and kindle an interest for this topic in other management researchers.

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APPENDIX A

TABLES

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Entitlement	3.10	.98	(.87)						
2. Accountability	4.75	.87	.147*	(.74)					
3. Psychological Contract Fulfillment	4.40	1.40	-.098	.132*	(.88)				
4. Ambition	4.68	1.43	.154**	.165**	.087	(.82)			
5. Negative Affectivity	2.17	1.05	.078	.108	-.138*	.132*	(.90)		
6. Performance	5.88	.83	.002	-.082	.226**	-.031	-.238**	(.89)	
7. Counterproductive Work Behavior	1.50	.66	.029	.110	-.199**	.060	.104	-.281**	(.86)

*Note.*  $N = 304$ . Numbers in parentheses are coefficient alphas.

\*  $p < .05$  level.

\*\*  $p < .01$  level.

Table 2

*Participating Organizations*

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b># Invited</b>	<b># Responded*</b>	<b>%</b>
A	Web-based Technology Company	16	4	25%
B	State Governmental Agency	250	44	18%
C	Charitable Foundation	9	9	100%
D	Professional Services Organization	116	83	72%
E	Professional Services Organization	160	82	51%
F	Insurance Claims Processor	172	91	53%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>723</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>43%</b>

*Note.* \* 313 employee responses were matched with the respective supervisor responses. However, only 309 of the combined responses included responses for all of the seven variables shown in Table 1. All organizations were located in four contiguous Midwestern/southwestern states.

Table 3

*Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

Model	$X^2$	$df$	$\Delta X^2$	$\Delta df$	CFI	SRMR
Baseline model	3,192.69*	1,356	--	--	.88	.075
6-Factor model <sup>1</sup>	3,957.29*	1,362	764.60	6	.84	.086
6-Factor model <sup>2</sup>	5,927.33*	1,362	2,734.64	6	.80	.12
6-Factor model <sup>3</sup>	3,716.49*	1,362	523.80	6	.86	.086
6-Factor model <sup>4</sup>	4,757.66*	1,362	1,564.97	6	.83	.098
6-Factor model <sup>5</sup>	5,032.23*	1,362	1,839.54	6	.82	.096
2-Factor model <sup>6</sup>	10,465.30*	1,376	7,272.61	20	.62	.15
1-Factor model	12,141.32*	1,377	8,948.63	21	.56	.16

<sup>1</sup> Combining Entitlement & Ambition

<sup>2</sup> Combining Entitlement & Negative Affect

<sup>3</sup> Combining Entitlement & Accountability

<sup>4</sup> Combining Entitlement & Psychological Contact Fulfillment

<sup>5</sup> Combining Performance & Counterproductive Work Behavior

<sup>6</sup> Combining Subordinate-rated variables & Supervisor-rated Variables

CFI = Comparative Fit Index; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual;  $p < .001$ .

Table 4

*Bootstrap Analyses of the Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects – 95% CI*

Hypothesis		Effect	SE	LL	UL	
1	Entitlement > Psychological Contract Fulfillment	-.1710	.0813	-.3310	-.0110	
2	Entitlement x Accountability > Psychological Contract Fulfillment	-.1663	.0993	-.3617	.0291	
3a	Psychological Contract Fulfillment > Performance	.1198	.0331	.0547	.1850	
3b	Psychological Contract Fulfillment > CWB	-.0928	.0272	-.1462	-.0393	
4a	Entitlement x	-1 SD	-.0032	.0145	-.0344	.0243
	Accountability >	Mean	-.0205	.0122	-.0502	-.0015
	Psychological Contract	+1 SD	-.0377	.0184	-.0813	-.0089
	Fulfillment > Performance	Index	-.0199	.0130	-.0502	.0008
4b	Entitlement x	-1 SD	.0025	.0117	-.0206	.0264
	Accountability >	Mean	.0159	.0097	.0013	.0415
	Psychological Contract	+1 SD	.0292	.0147	.0081	.0681
	Fulfillment > CWB	Index	.0154	.0106	-.0002	.0423

*Note.*  $N = 304$ . Bias corrected confidence intervals (CIs) are set at 95% from the bootstrap analyses with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. *LL* = lower confidence interval, *UL* = upper confidence level.

Table 5

*Bootstrap Analyses of the Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects – 90% CI*

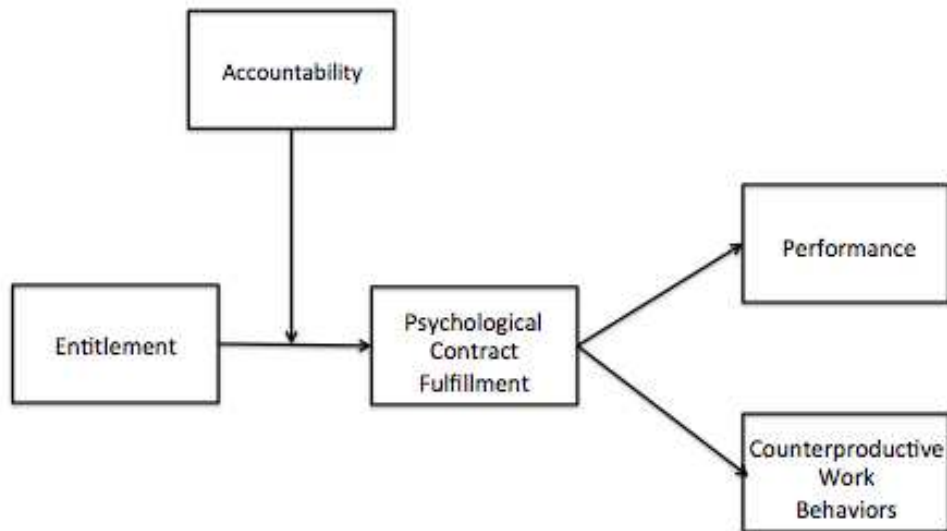
Hypothesis		Effect	SE	LL	UL	
1	Entitlement > Psychological Contract Fulfillment	-.1710	.0813	-.3051	-.0368	
2	Entitlement x Accountability > Psychological Contract Fulfillment	-.1663	.0993	-.3302	-.0025	
3a	Psychological Contract Fulfillment > Performance	.1198	.0331	.0652	.1744	
3b	Psychological Contract Fulfillment > CWB	-.0928	.0272	-.1376	-.0479	
4a	Entitlement x Accountability > Psychological Contract Fulfillment > Performance	-1 SD	-.0032	.0148	-.0280	.0203
		Mean	-.0205	.0125	-.0467	-.0045
		+1 SD	-.0377	.0187	-.0747	-.0126
		Index	-.0199	.0131	-.0465	-.0028
4b	Entitlement x Accountability > Psychological Contract Fulfillment > CWB	-1 SD	.0025	.0116	-.0165	.0222
		Mean	.0159	.0096	.0036	.0362
		+1 SD	.0292	.0148	.0093	.0591
		Index	.0154	.0106	.0093	.0591

*Note.*  $N = 304$ . Bias corrected confidence intervals (CIs) are set at 90% from the bootstrap analyses with 5,000 bootstrap resamples.



APPENDIX B

FIGURES



*Figure 1.* Theoretical model

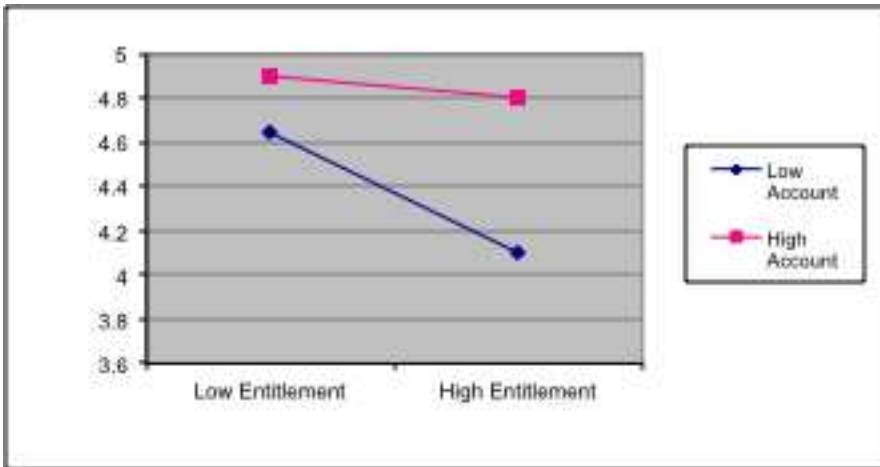


Figure 2. Hypothesized interaction effect. Entitlement x Accountability (DV Psychological Contract Fulfillment)

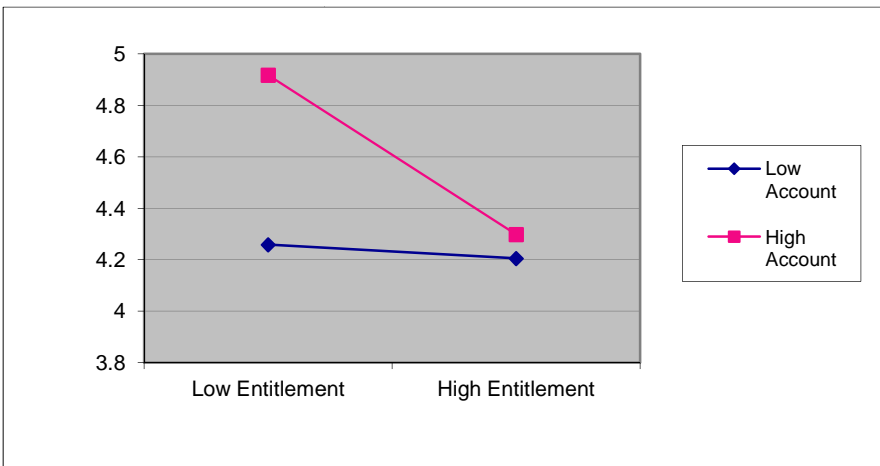


Figure 3. Actual interaction effect. Entitlement x Accountability (DV Psychological Contract Fulfillment)

## APPENDIX C

### FIELD STUDY MEASURES

#### **Antecedent, Moderating, and Mediating Measures**

##### **Entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman 2004)**

*Participant ratings about self*

Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements. (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree)

1. I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others.
2. Great things should come to me.
3. If I were on the Titanic, I would deserve to be on the first lifeboat!
4. I demand the best because I am worth it.
5. I do not necessarily deserve special treatment. (reverse scored)
6. I deserve more things in my life.
7. People like me deserve an extra break now and then.
8. Things should go my way.
9. I am entitled to more of everything.

##### **Fulfillment of the Psychological Contract (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994)**

*Participant ratings about organization*

Please indicate the extent to which you believe that your employer has fulfilled its obligation to provide you with: 1 = not at all. 5 = very highly

1. Rapid advancement
2. High pay
3. Pay based on current level of performance
4. Training
5. Long-term job security
6. Career development

##### **Accountability (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hall & Ferris 2005)**

*Participant rating of direct supervisor*

Please rate your direct supervisor on each of the items below where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

1. I am held very accountable for my actions at work.
2. I often have to explain why I do certain things at work.
3. Management holds me accountable for all my decisions.
4. If things at work do not go the way they should, I will hear about it from management.
5. To a great extent, the success of my immediate work group rests on my shoulders.
6. The jobs of many people at work depend on my success or failures.
7. In the grand scheme of things, my efforts at work are very important.
8. Coworkers, subordinates, and bosses closely scrutinize my efforts at work.

## **Outcome Measures**

### **Performance (Williams & Anderson 1991)**

*Supervisor's rating of direct report*

For each employee reporting to you who is participating in this research project, please rate them on each question below. (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) All responses will be kept completely confidential. All information that identifies specific employees will be removed once the data is aggregated. Nobody other than the researchers performing statistical analysis on the collective responses will have access to the results.

This employee:

1. Adequately completes assigned duties.
2. Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description.
3. Performs tasks that are expected of him/her.
4. Meets formal performance requirements of the job.
5. Engages in activities that will directly affect his/her performance evaluations.
6. Neglects aspects of the job s/he is obligated to perform (reverse scored)
7. Fails to perform essential duties (reverse scored)

### **Counterproductive Work Behaviors (Robinson & O'Leary 1998)**

*Supervisor's rating of direct report.*

Please indicate how often during the last year this employee has engaged in each of the activities below. (1 = never and 7 = all of the time)

1. Damaged property belonging to the company.
2. Said or did something to purposely hurt someone at work.
3. Did work badly, incorrectly, or slowly on purpose.
4. Griped with coworkers.
5. Deliberately broke or bent rules.
6. Criticized people at work.
7. Did something that harmed his/her supervisors or the organization.
8. Started an argument with someone at work.
9. Said rude things about his/her supervisor or the organization.

## **Control Variables**

### **Ambition (Van Vianen 1999)**

*Participant ratings about self*

Please indicate the degree to which each of the statements below applies to you. (1 = not at all applicable and 5 = fully applicable)

1. If a job promotion is offered to me in near future, I will accept such a position.
2. Getting a promotion to another job is a special challenge to me.
3. I prefer to leave getting promotions to other employees. (reverse scored)
4. I would like to move into a higher position/job in the near future.
5. I told my relatives that I was hoping for a promotion to another position/job.

### **Negative Affectivity (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen 1988)**

*Participant ratings about self*

For each item listed below, please indicate the degree to which you generally feel these emotions. (1 = very slightly or not at all and 5 = extremely)

1. Distressed
2. Upset
3. Guilty
4. Scared
5. Hostile
6. Irritable
7. Ashamed
8. Nervous
9. Jittery
10. Afraid

VITA

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