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Love-Bombing: A Narcissistic Approach to Relationship Formation

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Abstract

The current study examined the relationship between attachment style, self-esteem, and narcissism as they pertain to behavioral tendencies termed Love-Bombing behaviors among a sample of young adult Millennials. Love-Bombing was identified as the presence of excessive communication at the beginning of a relationship in order to passively obtain power and control over another's life as a means of narcissistic self-enhancement. The sample consisted of 484 college students from a large southern university who ranged in age 18-30. The results indicated that Love-Bombing was positively correlated with narcissistic tendencies, avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, and negatively correlated with self-esteem. Love-Bombing was also associated with more text and media usage within romantic relationships. In conclusion, Love-Bombing was found to be a logical and potentially necessary strategy for romantic relationships among individuals with high displays of narcissism and low levels of self-esteem. This is the first study to empirically examine Love-Bombing behaviors, thus future research needs to address the impact that these behaviors have on young adult relationships.

Introduction

According to Greek Mythology, the story of Narcissus tells the tale of a sixteen-year-old boy who had never loved anyone as much as he loved his own reflection upon seeing his face staring back at him in a pond. Meanwhile, Echo, a young mountain girl had been cursed by the Goddess Hera and could only speak the words that she last heard. Echo saw Narcissus and was entranced by his beauty, but because she could not speak, she was incapable of communicating her love for him. She followed him until he saw his face reflected in the water, and finally, she heard him speak. Narcissus, infatuated with his reflection, said, "You are the picture of perfection." Hearing his words, Echo repeated, "You are the picture of perfection." Narcissus, now even more enthralled by the affirmation he received from what he presumed to be his reflection speaking back to him, carried on, "I've never said this to anyone, but I believe I love you." Echo again repeated him, "I love you." The returned admiration only increasingly fed Narcissus' affection for himself. As he continued to praise his reflection, and "his reflection" (Echo) continued to reciprocate the praise, Narcissus was completely overcome by the addictive feeling this pseudo-love is provided. In the end, Narcissus was so infatuated by himself that he drowned in the pond attempting to kiss his own reflection, and Echo was left, heartbroken and alone, to wander the hills and caves of the valley, never to love again (Atsma, N.D.).

Much like Narcissus was unintentionally praising himself by expressing praise and adoration for (what he thought was) another person, the rise in narcissism among college students of the millennial generation (Twenge et al., 2008a; Twenge et al., 2008b) has resulted in a trend that has been termed "Love-Bombing" by internet users. Anecdotal bloggers have coined the term as a means of describing narcissistic individual's tendency to "bomb" their significant

other with constant communication throughout the day via texts, emails, phone calls, and social media sites. The praise of the narcissist may be flattering at first, but over time, becomes overwhelming and sometimes debilitating. It is assumed that whether consciously or not, the narcissist is making an effort to secure their place as the most important person in their significant other's life. They hope that the admiration they express will be reciprocated, because what narcissists truly desire is the affirmation that *they* are loved, beautiful, and desired, more so than they honestly want to acknowledge such qualities in their partner. As in the story of Narcissus, narcissists ultimately praise themselves by way of praising their significant other in hopes that they, like Echo, will return the favor. Unfortunately, these narcissists face the same fate as that of the Greek legend. In the end, the excessive flattery and need for affirmation will result in the death of a relationship when it becomes apparent that the misplaced affection reaches no further than the narcissist's affection for him/herself.

It is apparent that narcissistic tendencies are almost always rooted in this desire to enhance self-esteem (Campbell et al., 2002). So, is Love-Bombing just a narcissistic attempt to gain a more positive view of self by manipulating the response of others? As Narcissus' death drove Echo mad, the narcissists of the millennial generation have the potential to leave behind a trail of heartbroken, emotionally scarred individuals, who struggle to form healthy romantic bonds because of the fears instilled by past Love-Bombers. The current study asserts that there will be a connection between low self-esteem, narcissism, and love-bombing tendencies, along with a correlation between these characteristics and attachment styles.

Millennials

The population in question encompasses individuals born between 1980 and 2000 titled the "Millennials" because of their coming of age in the new millennium (Howe, 2007).

Millennials have been described as optimistic, team oriented, and high-achieving rule-followers in many of the studies conducted by generational specialists (Brodido, 2004), yet Millennials simultaneously show a higher likelihood of mental health problems than any generation prior (Watkins et al., 2012). In fact, a study conducted by the American College Health Association in 2008 concluded that more than one in three undergraduate students reported feeling "so depressed it was difficult to function" (pp. 14) and nearly one in ten students admitted that they had "seriously contemplated committing suicide" (pp. 14) in the previous year. Depression, coupled with low self-esteem often leads individuals to engage in reassurance-seeking behaviors; a need for affirmation that coincides with the definition of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2002). According to one study, analyses of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory taken by college students in the 1980s as compared to those taken by millennial students in 2008 shows a gradual yet significant increase in generational narcissism (Twenge et al., 2008a). This increase in narcissism, along with other mental health disorders could, as Bennett (2006) suggests, be the result of the influence of attachment patterns on the internal working model of the individual, which lead to the display of more severe personality disorders later in life. For this reason, it is important that we develop a means of recognizing these maladaptive behaviors early on, in order to prevent such issues from escalating to a place of severity in interpersonal relationships.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory, first proposed in 1958 by John Bowlby, is a widely held view in the field of Human Development that suggests the security of an individual throughout the lifespan stems from the interactions between a child and their caregiver (Bowlby, 1980). The child's expectations of others develop based on their understanding of how the world operates, and is the basis of an internal working model that will determine the individual's view of self and of others

not only in infancy, but throughout adolescence and adulthood as well (Bowlby, 1980; Lee & Hankin, 2009). It answers the question, "what do I mean to those who love me?" Insecurely attached individuals develop an internal working model of themselves as unworthy and of others as unreliable (Thompson & Zuroff, 1999). Insecure attachment can be subcategorized as being either avoidant or anxious. Avoidant attachment is characterized by a tendency to view others as unreliable and holding a high resistance to emotional attachment (Bowlby, 1980). Anxious attachment, on the other hand, is characterized by a strong desire for emotional attachment, while simultaneously doubting the reliability of others to reciprocate this affection (Bowlby, 1980).

The result of an insecure attachment in childhood is a higher level of personal questioning in adulthood. Roberts et al. (1996) found that individuals with insecure attachment view their self-worth according to an "if…then" contingency, basing self-esteem on accomplishment or success/failure. For instance, an individual with insecure attachment may think, "If my partner doesn't respond to my text message, they must not love me" or "If they cared, then they would call." However, when these contingencies affirm the insecurity the individual already feels, the result is a significant decline in self-esteem (Roberts et al., 1996). The current study seeks to explore the relationship between insecure attachment, text message usage, and affirmation seeking behaviors through Love-Bombing.

Self-Esteem

Self-discrepancy theory, developed by E. T. Higgins (1987) and expanded by Ogilvie (1987), suggests that there are four domains of "self": actual-self, ideal-self, should-self, and undesired/feared-self. Self-discrepancy theory postulates that the "self" we portray to others is based on not only our self-concept, but also our interpretation of what others expect of us. The "actual" self represents the attributes one actually possesses (Higgins, 1987). The discrepancy

lies in the differences between the attributes we *actually* possess, the attributes we wish we could display (ideal-self), the things that we feel as though we ought to display (should-self) and the attributes we fear displaying (feared-self) (Carver, 1999; Higgins, 1987). These different views of self are the standard to which we compare our actual-self, and represent the valence in which we hold our view of self.

When an individual experiences a discrepancy between their actual self and a perceived idea of the self (ideal, should, or feared), they will experience some type of psychological discomfort which will lead to either positive or negative outcomes (Higgins, 1987). The should self is often times driven out of a place of guilt and shame over the actual self, and the desire to change is far more political or social than it is purely motivational. For instance, in an actual-should discrepancy, the individual holds a negative view of the actual-self by feeling as though the person they are is not the person they ought to be. In this type of discrepancy, rather than reaching for traits they desire, they are avoiding the traits they naturally possess in order to attain a socially defined standard of who they *should* be (Carver, 1999). The ideal self, on the other hand, often times includes positive motivators for change. Having strong desires to become someone or accomplish something may spur an individual on to preform well and drive them towards excellence. When the discrepancy lies between the actual-self and the ideal-self, it is obvious that the individual holds a high view of self, and is positively motivated to attain their idealized goals (Carver, 1999). Failure to reach these goals, however, often times becomes a point of negative psychological affect. The feared self, however, appears to be the exact reciprocal of the ideal self. In fact, it is likely that an individual's ideal self is not truly based on the goals one strives to embody, but much rather the very attributes they wish to avoid; in other words, the ideal-self is the exact reciprocal of the feared-self (Ogilvie, 1987). The feared self

isn't so much about the person one desires *to* become, but the very things one is *fearful* of becoming. A significant negative correlation was found between self-esteem and the actual-feared discrepancy (Carver et al., 1999). This would indicate that individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to resist attributes they fear possessing, rather than striving to attain attributes they desire to display. Essentially, their ideal self is defined by "I want not to be (undesired)" rather than the belief "I am desirable".

A study addressing the self-discrepancy theory conducted by Barnett and Womack (2015) explored the correlation between self-esteem and narcissism. Researcher's examined whether narcissism was the result of a discrepancy between the ideal self and the actual self, or a discrepancy between the actual self and the feared self. The results of this study indicated that "Pathological narcissism is a duality; a deep insecurity shrouded by grandiosity … Narcissism does not flow from excessive self-love as much as it does from fear of being an undesired self" (Barnett & Womack, 2015; pp. 280, 283). This shows that narcissism is more strongly correlated with low self-esteem, or the fear of being undesired, than self-confidence.

Out of the urgency to resist an undesirable representation of self, individuals with low-self esteem will engage in reassurance seeking behaviors (Higgins, 1987). This reassurance may be sought in the form of seeking excessive feedback that affirms others' care, or by expressing high needs of dependency in relationships (Katz et al., 1998), such as by engaging in Love-Bombing behaviors.

Narcissism

Narcissism is defined by the American Psychological Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.) as holding beliefs about being special or unique and the assumption of only being understood by special or high-status people or institutions, as

well as requiring excessive admiration, experiencing frequent envy, and displaying arrogant or haughty attitudes and behaviors (2013).

Narcissism has commonly been broken down into two different categories; overt and covert. In a recent study regarding the "faces of narcissism," Rogoza et al. (2016) defined a narcissist as "one who aims to enhance ego, pursues success, acts autonomously and chooses short-term goals that will result in admiration from others" (pp. 88). Covert narcissism is described as being characterized by entitlement in relationships, self-indulgence, self-assuredness, and disrespect for the needs of others, which leads to both aggressive behaviors and the generalized devaluation of others (Brown et al., 2009; Paulhus, 1998; Rogoza et al., 2016).

Additionally, there are attributes of narcissists that make them attractive to those whom they may victimize with Love-Bombing behaviors. Narcissists are generally perceived as exciting (Foster et al., 2003), socially confident (Brunell et al., 2004), and likeable in initial interactions (Oltmans et al., 2004). Additionally, narcissism is positively associated with one's ability to obtain sexual partners (Foster et al., 2006). Though these attributes are attractive in the beginning, they fade throughout the course of the relationship, revealing the tendency of narcissists to use relationships as a means of self-enhancement (Campbell, 1999). In turn, the "victims" of relationships with these initially likable narcissists find themselves stuck with psychologically controlling (Campbell & Foster, 2002), non-committal partners (Campbell & Foster, 2002), often characterized by "game-playing" or infidelity in relationships (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

The narcissist's ideal mate is someone who is highly positive, admires them, and enhances their self-worth either directly through praise, or indirectly by association as in that of a "trophy spouse" (Campbell et al., 2002). Narcissists often see relationships as a "forum for self-

enhancement" (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008, pp. 1304). Because of this desire for self-enhancement, it has been asserted by Buffardi and Campbell (2008) that social networking sites such as Facebook act as a low-risk, high-reward resource for narcissists to self-regulate through social connectivity. Social networking sites such as these allow individuals to feel highly connected by promoting high numbers of "friendships," while simultaneously protecting themselves from the necessity of emotional disclosure (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Social networking sites give the individual complete control over the way they are presented and the information others can obtain about them through their profiles. For the narcissistic individual, social networking sites provide a means to boast about their successes, hide their failures, and obtain public attention without the risk of public social rejection. Though romantic relationships are generally approached much less publicly than through social networking sites, in the current study, we predict that narcissistic tendencies in romantic relationships will reflect a high usage of mediated communication, primarily via text messaging, in order to maintain the same level of self-presentation control.

In the field of personality and social psychology, researchers have identified that narcissists consistently use social relationships for three main purposes: to regulate their personal self-esteem, to create a positive self-concept, and to produce a self-gratifying personal construct (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Campbell, 1999; Campbell et al., 2006; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin et al., 1991). Essentially, narcissists rely on their interactions with others to determine how they feel about themselves. For that reason, specifically low-self-esteem individuals will engage in reassurance-seeking behaviors in romantic relationships, especially when they are depressed (Campbell, et al., 2002). This desire for reassurance sought through romantic

relationships is more than likely to involve “Love-Bombing” behaviors, because of the narcissist’s desire for affirmation by means of association.

Current Study

The research gathered about narcissist’s low levels of self-esteem, coupled with their tendencies to seek assurance in the context of romantic relationships creates an argument that the concept of Love-Bombing may be the narcissist’s most logical approach to relationship formation. Though there have been anecdotal assertions made regarding the existence of “Love-Bombing” tendencies among Millennials, no empirical data has been collected regarding this form of narcissism within the context of romantic relationships. In the current study, we collected empirical data in order to create a measureable construct of narcissism in romantic relationships by defining and measuring “Love-Bombing” behaviors.

The current study has three main goals: 1) identify and write items that identify Love-Bombing behaviors among millennial young adults, 2) to correlate Love-Bombing items with other similar construct scales, such as attachment, self-esteem, and narcissism, and 3) to identify characteristics of Love-Bombers in order to better understand their behaviors within romantic relationships concerning texting and social media usage. The current study’s hypotheses are that (2a) Love-Bombing behaviors will be positively associated with insecure attachment styles (i.e., avoidant, anxious) and negatively associated with secure attachment styles, (2b) Love-Bombing behaviors will be negatively correlated with self-esteem, (2c) Love-Bombing behaviors will be positively associated with narcissistic tendencies, and (3a) Love-Bombers will be more likely to use texting and social media to communicate with their romantic partners as compared to non-Love-Bombers.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

A survey was constructed to measure attachment, self esteem, narcissism, Love-Bombing, and text message use in young adult romantic relationships. The survey was then distributed online to graduate and undergraduate students recruited from predominately social sicence classrooms at the University of Arkansas. Participants were given the chance to enter their name for a drawing of a $50 gift card, and some participants were offered extra credit by their professors for their participation. Of 499 total participants, those who failed to complete the questionnaire, or did not take adequate time to thoughtfully answer each question (total duration 2 minutes or less) were dismissed from the analysis (n=15), resulting in a final sample of 484. The final sample had a mean age of 20.36 (SD = 1.38), with an overall range of 18-30. There were 13% who identified as male, 86% who identified as female, one participant who identified as transgender, and one participant who chose not to identify with a gender. In the sample, 84% of the participants identified as Caucasian, 5% as Hispanic/Latino, 4% as African American, while 9% identified as other.

Measures

Attachment. Participants completed the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990). The AAS contains 18 statements which measured participants' level of agreement on a five-point likert-type scale ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree." After reverse coding five items, responses were summed and grouped according to a subscale as a secure (6 items, M = 17.95, SD = 2.67), anxious (6 items, M = 17.98, SD = 5.06), or avoidant (6

items, $M = 17.20$, $SD = 4.18$), and responses were summed for each. Higher scores indicated higher secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles, respectively.

Self-Esteem. In order to measure individual's insecurity, participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES is a 10-item scale that has been widely used to measure self-esteem since its creation in 1965. Each of the ten items were measured on a five-item likert-type scale based on the degree to which the participant agreed with the statement. Responses were ranked from "1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree." After recoding 5 items, all items were summed, and higher scores indicated higher self-esteem ($M = 36.93$, $SD = 6.56$).

Narcissism. Participants completed the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 2013). The HSNS is a 10-item scale to measure an individual's tendency towards narcissism. Participants were asked to answer to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a five-point likert-type scale ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree." Level of agreement was summed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of narcissism ($M = 28.67$, $SD = 5.66$).

Love-Bombing. In order to measure Love-Bombing tendencies, a set of 8 items regarding specific Love-Bombing behaviors was created, based on previous literature regarding the tendencies of narcissists in romantic relationships (Campbell, 1999; Campbell et al., 2002; Campbell & Foster, 2002; Foster et al., 2006; Oltmans et al., 2004) as well as assertions made by anecdotal accounts published to internet blogs. Items included subjects addressing the individual's view of romantic relationships, such as *"I view relationships as a means to feel better about myself,*" and *"When I feel insecure, I like to turn to another person to assure me of my worth."* These items were measured on a five-point likert-type scale ranging from

"1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree." Items were summed, with higher scores indicating increased display of Love-Bombing behaviors (M = 22.26, SD = 4.75; α = 0.74*;* see Table 1 for scale items).

Texting. In order to examine the relationship between Love-Bombing and text message use, we adapted a 21-item scale that examined text message usage between *friends* (Hall & Baym, 2011) was changed in order to reflect text message usage between *romantic partners*. The adapted scale measured an individual's expectations for the role texting plays in romantic relationships. Participants were asked to answer to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a five-point likert-type scale ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "5=strongly agree." One item was reverse coded (item 21), and then the items were summed, with higher scores indicating higher levels of text usage between romantic partners (M = 66.17, SD = 11.41; α = 0.89; see Table 2 for scale items).

Results

The first goal of the current study sought to identify and write items characteristic of Love-Bombing behaviors in millennial young adults. The items created consisted of eight statements which were comprised of a combination of narcissistic tendencies for social media use, based on previous literature relating the tendencies of narcissists in romantic relationships (Campbell, 1999; Campbell et al., 2002; Campbell & Foster, 2002; Foster et al., 2006; Oltmans et al., 2004) as well as assertions made by anecdotal accounts published to internet blogs. The items demonstrated to be to be a reliable scale (α = 0.74). Sums of responses ranged from 8-37 (M = 22.26, SD = 4.75; see Table 1).

The second goal of the current study was to correlate Love-Bombing with measures of attachment, self-esteem, and narcissism scales. Table 3 displays the connection between each of these construct scales. Results indicated that there were significant correlations in most of the predicted directions, indicating partial support for hypothesis 2a: Love-Bombing tendencies were not only positively associated with insecure attachment styles (i.e., avoid, anxious), but also *positively* (not negatively, as predicted) associated with secure attachment style ($r = .17$, $p < .001$). However, attachment is more commonly identified as a classification system than as a running scale. The data analyzed initially examined the total correlation between all three of the subscales of attachment for each individual's response.

Individual responses were examined and classified according to the highest level of response between the three sub-scales of attachment (secure, avoidant, anxious). Data were divided into these three categories, and the average Love-Bombing scores for each sub-category were found and then compared to the overall mean for Love-Bombing (M = 22.26). This analysis showed that individuals categorized as displaying a secure attachment (n=173) had a mean Love-Bombing score of 20.88, well below the overall mean. Insecure-avoidant individuals (n=82) displayed a mean Love-Bombing score of 21.24; slightly below the overall mean. Insecure-anxious individuals (n=154), on the other hand, had a group mean of 24.02, putting them at a significantly higher likelihood of displaying Love-Bombing behaviors. This analysis of data leads to a complete support of hypothesis 2a; individuals of insecure attachment styles are more likely to engage in Love-Bombing behaviors than those of a secure attachment style.

In support of hypothesis 2b, self-esteem was negatively correlated with Love-Bombing behaviors, and support of hypothesis 2c, narcissistic tendencies were positively associated with Love-Bombing behaviors.

The third goal of the current study was to identify the characteristics of Love-Bombing, particularly in regard to Millennials' use of texting in romantic relationships. First, we correlated the Love-Bombing measure (higher scores indicating higher Love-Bombing behaviors) with the total summed response of texting habits measured, which resulted in a significant positive correlation, $r = 0.32$, $p < .001$. This correlation supports hypothesis 3a in that Love-Bombing behaviors are correlated with higher text message expectations within romantic relationships. Additionally, we examined the difference between "Love-Bombers" and "Non-Love-Bombers" by placing participants with scores from the 8-item Love-Bombing scale greater than the mean (22.26) into the group "Love-Bombers," and those participants with scores less than the mean in the group "Non-Love-Bombers". Next, we ran an ANOVA to examine whether the two groups differed significantly on text message usage within romantic partnerships, indicating a significant group difference ($F(1,462) = 25.81$, $p < .001$) whereby Love-Bombers reported significantly higher reports of utilizing text and media within their romantic partnerships ($M = 68.95$, $SD = 10.75$) as compared to Non-Love-Bombers ($M = 63.69$, $SD = 11.43$).

Discussion

The current study has shown that Love-Bombing is not only prevalent among young adult Millennials, but that it is a symptom of a much more complicated reality. By identifying items to describe Love-Bombing behaviors, it was found that individuals who display Love-Bombing behaviors are likely to act from an insecure attachment (Hypothesis 2a), perhaps leading them to rely on the affirmation of another person to determine their self-worth and value within society; however, future research should address this issue. However, we also found that Love-Bombing was positively correlated with higher secure attachment, contrary to hypothesis.

While attachment as a scale may not be a clear indicator of Love-Bombing tendencies, it is likely that further research would display categorical attachment styles having a direct correlation to the presence of Love-Bombing behaviors in romantic relationships. Further research is needed to identify what developmental processes lead individuals to engage in Love-Bombing behaviors. Perhaps the use of qualitative methods could provide further insight as to the establishment of attachment, and disentangle the presence of secure attachment in these individuals.

Self-esteem showed a significant negative correlation to the display of Love-Bombing behaviors. The contingency of self-esteem placed on another individual is inevitably going to cause one's view of self to waiver. When an individual's self-esteem is high, there is no need to look for affirmation in another individual. However, when an individual's self-esteem is low, it is likely, as suggested by the current study, that they will engage in Love-Bombing behaviors in order to increase the feeling of being valued in a relationship and reduce the potential of becoming an undesired self. This fear of becoming an undesired self is often what pushes individuals to pursue behaviors in which they are displayed as their *ideal* self (Barnett & Womack, 2015). So if it is assumed that individuals with low self-esteem partake in Love-Bombing behaviors as a means of confirming the fact that they are not, actually, undesirable, then it could be assumed that they are simultaneously seeking to become the ideal form of themselves by engaging in narcissistic behaviors which aim to increase their self-esteem, thereby producing a positive self-concept and a satisfactory personal construct (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Campbell, 1999; Campbell et al., 2006; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin et al., 1991). The current study supports these assumptions by indicating a strong correlation between narcissism and the likelihood that an individual would partake in Love-Bombing behaviors.

Love-Bombing was also positively associated with excessive expectations for communication through texting in romantic relationships. This correlation, though not surprising, indicates a need for self-regulative protection and a desire for control in a relationship. The root of this need for security and power is not easily identifiable to those affected by the Love-Bomber's attacks, but is an obvious consequence of a psychological need for affirmation. It could be assumed that narcissistic individuals not only require more control in a relationship, but simultaneously increased affirmation. Because there is a strong correlation between self-esteem and narcissism (Barnett & Womack, 2015), we see that narcissists, by engaging in Love-Bombing behaviors, seek reassurance in their romantic relationships. This may involve a lack of trust in their partner's fidelity as expressed by the expectation that they would know their partner's whereabouts at all times (Table 2, items 9-16), as is implied by an insecure-anxious attachment style. Additionally, narcissistic individuals of an insecure-anxious attachment style may doubt their partner's feelings for them are truly as strong as their own (Table 2, items 19-20, 21 reversed). In the case of a narcissist with low self-esteem, Love-Bombing is a necessary means of survival for a romantic relationship, especially within the early stages. These feelings are only increased when the individual holds an insecure attachment, specifically anxious patterns. For that reason, Love-Bombing will continue to present itself in the romantic relationships of individuals who display higher than average levels of narcissism, and low levels of self-esteem.

Limitations

The current study was limited because of the population sample collected. The sample was collected from college students on campus at a public university. Specifically, the range of

ages sampled was 18-30. However, the study aims to look at the entire population of "Millennials," who would range from ages 16-36 at present. Thus, there are large portions of the population that were not sampled. Additionally, the population was primarily (86%) female. In order to obtain a generalizable sample of the population, more males would need to be surveyed. Perhaps, with an equal balance of gender surveyed, future analyses could identify whether Love-Bombing behaviors differ between males and females within romantic relationships.

Additionally, the Harter Self Esteem scale is a measure of self-esteem that examines different domains of esteem as a means of examining the maturation of self-esteem throughout the lifespan. Harter identifies self-esteem as being very much intertwined with the developmental process, suggesting that self-esteem is rooted in different domains of the self at different times in the individual's lifespan (Harter, 1999). The use of the Harter Self-Esteem Scale in place of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale may produce results that indicate the domains of self-esteem that are affected by Love-Bombing behaviors.

Implications and Future Research

There is an increasing rate of mental health problems in young adults today (Watkins et al., 2012). Narcissism has increased from the previous generation of students to the present population of universities today (Twenge et al., 2008a), and it is likely that this trend will continue in similar fashion if problems such as Love-Bombing continue to go unaddressed. The current study has identified that Love-Bombing is the natural and sometimes psychologically necessary means by which relationships are formed for the narcissistic individual; however, we have not examined any data regarding the characteristics of those affected, or the long term affect of Love-Bombers' narcissistic displays on their victims. Future research should examine

the characteristics of those prone to experiencing Love-Bombing attacks in romantic relationships, and the impact of these failed relationships on the individual's mental health.

Additionally, looking at relational aggression as a continuum, could Love-Bombing be a gateway into more serious behaviors such as psychological abuse/control or intimate partner violence? Are individuals who are likely to engage in Love-Bombing behaviors also likely to stalk relational partners? Further research could examine Love-Bombing as a threshold of aggression and relational dysfunction.

The current study suggests that narcissists, driven by their low self-esteem, are likely to engage in Love-Bombing behaviors by use of excessive text messaging in romantic relationships. While this correlation holds statistical significance, the cause of the behavior at its root has not yet been identified. From the time of the ancient Greeks, narcissism has been identified as a self-destructive construct with negative impacts on all involved. Just as Narcissus drowned in his assurance seeking behaviors, narcissists of the Millennial generation are facing relational problems that are ultimately leaving them to postpone marriage, and engage in less meaningful relationships with more romantic partners than generations prior (Kaya, 2010, Twenge, 2015). However, narcissus wasn't the sole party affected; Echo was driven mad by her encounter with Narcissus. Love-Bombing, if it continues, will only continue to mar victim after victim, leaving Millennials, like Echo, alone to wander the caves and the valleys, searching but never satisfied; longing to love, but fearful of encountering yet another Love-Bomber.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Love-Bombing Scale

	M	SD	N	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	α if Item Deleted
1. When past relationships have ended, I have realized that I was more invested in the relationship than my partner was.	3.19	1.054	477	19.06	19.591	.195	.063	.757
2. I desire praise/appreciation/ affirmation to be communicated by my partner.	3.90	.798	477	18.36	20.482	.194	.139	.747
3. I feel as though the presence of my partner increases my social standing.	2.97	.953	477	19.29	17.642	.496	.297	.698
4. I feel more confident and secure when I am in a relationship.	3.04	1.070	477	19.22	16.713	.533	.349	.688
5. I am insecure with the idea of being single.	2.38	1.044	477	19.87	17.005	.514	.327	.693
6. I am only content in a relationship until I find another, better option of a partner.	1.93	.910	477	20.33	18.637	.389	.335	.718
7. I view relationships as a means to feel better about myself.	2.16	.989	477	20.10	16.936	.566	.436	.683
8. When I feel insecure, I like to turn to another person to assure me of my worth	2.69	1.140	477	19.57	16.128	.557	.341	.682

Table 2. Text Usage Scale

	M	SD	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	α if Item Deleted
1. Texting plays an important role in my dating life	3.5129	.93171	62.6595	116.575	.633	.473	.473	.880
2. I usually ask someone out through the use of text/phone, rather than in person	2.4720	1.00284	63.7004	122.936	.280	.262	.262	.890
3. Texting is a good way to flirt or get to know someone	3.4612	.96740	62.7112	119.510	.460	.341	.341	.885
4. I enjoy texting my partner	3.8858	.76215	62.2866	122.291	.433	.417	.417	.886
5. Texting is my partner and I's primary form of communication	2.9504	1.14014	63.2220	115.754	.535	.453	.453	.883
6. I would like it if my romantic partner used texting more to communicate	2.6013	.93555	63.5711	120.319	.438	.307	.307	.885
7. I share many of my day-to-day activities through texting with my partner	3.4763	.98776	62.6961	118.160	.514	.559	.559	.883
8. Texting is an ongoing conversation that I usually have with a dating partner	3.5884	.92759	62.5841	118.161	.553	.589	.589	.882
9. I expect my dating partner to call/text throughout the day to keep me posted on how their day is going	3.3470	.99798	62.8254	115.872	.619	.547	.547	.880
10. I like it when my partner keeps me informed as to what they are doing and who they are with throughout the day through texting	3.4159	.99537	62.7565	116.560	.587	.539	.539	.881
11. I feel disconnected from my dating partner when I have not heard from them via text	3.1013	1.02689	63.0711	114.477	.667	.540	.540	.879
12. When my partner does not text me throughout the day, I often question how important I am in their life	2.5884	1.08432	63.5841	116.533	.533	.614	.614	.883

13. When my partner takes longer than usual to respond, I often feel forgotten about or insignificant to them	2.5841	1.04821	63.5884	118.083	.483	.595	.595	.884
14. I respond to texts immediately when I receive them from my partner	2.9784	.93387	63.1940	118.528	.530	.354	.354	.883
15. When my partner or significant other texts me first, I feel as though I have a level of significance/importance in their lives	3.4483	.89486	62.7241	118.835	.540	.373	.373	.883
16. I immediately text my partner when I want to tell them something, rather than waiting until we could talk about it in person	3.3987	.89060	62.7737	119.463	.510	.334	.334	.883
17. I prefer to communicate with my dating partner mainly through text/social media	2.1228	.89394	64.0496	121.935	.377	.396	.396	.887
18. I get upset when I can't get ahold of someone I'm dating/seeing	3.2845	.97090	62.8879	119.197	.473	.328	.328	.884
19. I often send my partner texts to express my affection for him/her	3.3276	.96394	62.8448	117.596	.557	.428	.428	.882
20. When I express my feelings for my partner via text or social media, I expect my partner to reciprocate by expressing their feelings for me	3.1810	.99761	62.9914	117.330	.548	.397	.397	.882
21. I find it annoying when a romantic partner texts me multiple times an hour, multiple times throughout the day	3.4461	1.06855	62.7263	125.249	.158	.151	.151	.894

Table 3. Correlations of Love-Bombing Behaviors

		LBOMB	SECURE	AVOID	ANXIETY	SELFEST	NARCISSISM
LBOMB	Pearson Correlation		.167**	.126**	.357**	-.279**	.482**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.006	.000	.000	.000
	N		475	473	476	476	472
SECURE	Pearson Correlation	.167**		.129**	.217**	-.062	.244**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.005	.000	.174	.000
	N	475		478	480	481	477
AVOID	Pearson Correlation	.126**	.129**		.580**	-.430**	.351**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.005		.000	.000	.000
	N	473	478		478	479	475
ANXIETY	Pearson Correlation	.357**	.217**	.580**		-.514**	.527**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	476	480	478		481	477
SELFEST	Pearson Correlation	-.279**	-.062	-.430**	-.514**		-.458**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.174	.000	.000		.000
	N	476	481	479	481		478
NARCISSISM	Pearson Correlation	.482**	.244**	.351**	.527**	-.458**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	472	477	475	477	478	

Note: LBOMB = Love-Bombing behaviors; SECURE = secure attachment; AVOID = avoidant attachment; ANXIETY = anxious attachment; SELFEST = self-esteem; NARCISSISM = narcissist behaviors. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Appendix A

Understanding College Students' Romantic Relationships

DEMOGRAPHICS

In this section of the survey we would like to ask some general background information about you.

1. What year are you in college?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student Non-degree Student Other/ Not enrolled

2. What gender do you identify with? Male Female Transsexual/Transgender

3. How do you describe your sexual orientation:

____ Straight/Heterosexual
____ Bisexual
____ Not sure/Questioning
____ Gay/Lesbian
____ Other

4. How old are you? _____years old

5. While at school, where do you live?

____ College Residence Hall
____ Home of relatives
____ Sorority/Fraternity
____ Other
____ Off Campus room, apartment, or house
____ Own Home
____ Your parents' home

6. While at school, with whom do you currently live (check all that apply)

____ Alone
____ Spouse/domestic partner
____ Roommate(s)/Friend(s) of the same gender
____ Roommate(s)/Friend(s) of a different gender
____ Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
____ Children
____ Intimate partner (other than a spouse)
____ Other relatives
____ Other

7. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? (check all that apply)

____ Black or African American
____ American Indian or Native American
____ Asian or Pacific Islander
____ Other (please list)_____
____ Hispanic or Latino
____ White or Caucasian
____ Arab American

8. Please mark ALL the organizations you belong to:

____ Band or musical group
____ Student Government
____ Member of a student group
____ Student Athlete
____ Member recreational sports club/groups
____ Social Service or Special Interest club

____	School Newspaper	____	Theatre
____	Fraternity/ Sorority	____	Resident Assistant/Peer Educator
____	NPHC Fraternity/Sorority	____	Intramural Sports
____	Campus Ministry	____	Local Church/Religious Organization
			Other, please specify; _____

9. What is your current relationship status? (circle the most appropriate)
    1. Single, not actively dating
    2. Single and dating, but not in an exclusive relationship
    3. Single and hooking up with acquaintances/friends
    4. In a committed relationship
    5. Engaged
    6. Living together
    7. Married
    8. Divorced/Separated
    9. Other: _____

9a. Number of romantic partners in the past 3 years _____

9b. Number of physical/sexual relationships in the past 3 years _____

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10. I often read books and magazines about my faith. ____
11. I make financial contributions to my religious organization. ____
12. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith. ____
13. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life. ____
14. My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life. ____
15. I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation. ____
16. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life. ____
17. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection. ____
18. I enjoy working in the activities of my religious affiliation. ___
19. 19. I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions._
20. 20. With what religion do you identify? _____

The following questions concern how you ***generally*** feel in ***important close relationships in your life***. Think about your past and present relationships with people who have been especially important to you, such as family members, romantic partners, and close friends. Respond to each statement in terms of how you ***generally*** feel in these relationships.

Please use the scale below by circling the number between 1 and 5 in the space provided to the right of each statement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. I find it relatively easy to get close to people. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I often worry that other people don't really love me. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I am comfortable depending on others. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I don't worry about people getting too close to me. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I find that people are never there when you need them. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I often worry that other people won't want to stay with me. 1 2 3 4 5

10. When I show my feelings for others, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.
    a. 2 3 4 5

11. I often wonder whether other people really care about me. 1 2 3 4 5

12. I am comfortable developing close relationships with others. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I am uncomfortable when anyone gets too emotionally close to me.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I know that people will be there when I need them. 1 2 3 4 5

15. I want to get close to people, but I worry about being hurt. 1 2 3 4 5

16. I find it difficult to trust others completely. 1 2 3 4 5

17. People often want me to be emotionally closer than I feel comfortable being.
1 2 3 4 5

18. I am not sure that I can always depend on people to be there when I need them.
1 2 3 4 5

For each of the following statements, please circle the number to what extent you feel the statement describes you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1.	I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I certainly feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	At times I think I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4	5

For each of the following statements and adjectives, please rate to what extent you feel the statement describes you:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. I can become entirely absorbed in thinking about my personal affairs, my health, my cares or my relations to others. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
2. My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or the slighting remarks of others 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
3. When I enter a room I often become self-conscious and feel that the eyes of others are upon me. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
4. I dislike sharing the credit of an achievement with others. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
5. I feel that I have enough on my hands without worrying about other people's troubles. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
6. I feel that I am temperamentally different from most people. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
6. I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
7. I easily become wrapped up in my own interests and forget the existence of others. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
8. I dislike being with a group unless I know that I am appreciated by at least one of those present 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
9. I am secretly "put out" or annoyed when other people come to me with their troubles, asking me for my time and sympathy. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
10. When past relationships have ended, I have realized that I was more invested in the relationship than my partner was. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A

11. I desire praise/appreciation/affirmation to be communicated by my partner.
1 2 3 4 5 N/A

12. I feel as though the presence of my partner increases my social standing.
1 2 3 4 5 N/A

13. I feel more confident and secure when I am in a relationship.
1 2 3 4 5 N/A

14. I am insecure with the idea of being single.
1 2 3 4 5 N/A

15. I am only content in a relationship until I find another, better option of a partner.
1 2 3 4 5 N/A

16. I view relationships as a means to feel better about myself.
1 2 3 4 5 N/A

17. When I feel insecure, I like to turn to another person to assure me of my worth

1 2 3 4 5 N/A

For each of the following statements, think of your most recent dating partner (either someone you are seeing now, or someone you have dated/seen previously). If you have never dated or talked to a potential romantic partner, then select not applicable. Please answer to the best of your knowledge:

1. When first dating someone, how often do you see them (in person)?
   a. Every day or nearly every day
   b. 3 - 4 times a week
   c. 1 - 2 times a week.
   d. 2 - 3 times a month
   e. About once a month
   f. A few times this whole semester
   g. Never
   h. Not applicable, never dated anyone

2. Are you (or were you) in a long-distance relationship with your most recent romantic partner?
   YES NO Not Applicable

3. On a typical day, what is the combined number of <u>voice calls</u> you made and received on your mobile phone with your most recent dating partner? _____

4. On a typical day, what is the combined number of text messages you sent and received on your mobile phone with your most recent dating partner? _____

5. How quickly do you typically reply back to a text from a romantic partner?

   ____ 10 minutes or less
   ____ 1 hour or less
   ____ 24 hours or less
   ____ I've never noticed
   ____ 30 minutes or less
   ____ 2-3 hours or less

6. What is the longest acceptable response time to reply back to a text from a dating partner before you become concerned or annoyed?

   ____ 10 minutes or less
   ____ 1 hour or less
   ____ 24 hours or less
   ____ I've never noticed
   ____ 30 minutes or less
   ____ 2-3 hours or less
   ____ There should be no limit/it doesn't bother me

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Again, think about the person you are dating now, or have previously dated. If you have never dated or seen anyone romantically, answer the questions about your expectations for a romantic partner.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

22. I have ended a relationship because my partner was too "clingy" or dependent on me. _____
23. I have broken up with a dating partner, or they have broken up with me, because of texting _____
24. I have ended a relationship because my partner acted or communicated differently via text or social media than they did in person. _____
25. My feelings about a partner have changed because of the way they communicated via texting or social media. _____
26. When significant others express their affection via text or social media, I feel smothered, embarrassed, or obligated to return the affection, even though it may not be true to the extent that they have expressed. _____
27. I have rejected someone who was romantically interested in me because I felt as though they cared for me more than I cared for them. _____
28. In a current or past relationship, I have felt as though my partner enjoyed the status associated with being with me more so than they truly liked me for me. _____
29. In a current or past relationship, I have felt as though a partner has needed me more than I have needed them._____
30. In the early stages of a romantic relationship, a partner has expressed love and affection that I did not feel our relationship justified. _____
31. In the early stages of a relationship, a partner has vocalized plans for our futures together (i.e., living together, marriage, children, etc.) that I did not feel were justified by our relationship. ____
32. I have felt overwhelmed or awkward because of the level of affection a romantic partner has expressed in the beginning of a relationship. _____
33. In a current or past relationship, I have appreciated excessive expression of affection up until a certain point, at which it became overwhelming, annoying, or awkward. _____
34. I have appreciated a partner's expression of affection in personal messages, or private conversations, but have been embarrassed by the same expressions of affection in the presence/view of others either online or in person. _____

SKIP LOGIC: If responses are high for questions 1-13 above:

In the previous set of questions, you responded in a way that indicates that you have been in a relationship in which you felt that another person's feelings were overwhelming, excessive, or not aligned with your own personal feelings. Please answer the following questions about **the past romantic relationship that you thought of while answering those questions.**

Your age at the time of the relationship _____

Your partner's age at the time of the relationship____

Partner's Gender ____Male _____Female _____Transsexual/Transgender

Partner's Ethnicity:

____ Black or African ____ Hispanic or Latino

American
___ American Indian or Native American
___ Asian or Pacific Islander
___ Other (please list)_____
___ White or Caucasian
___ Arab American

Duration of the relationship ____

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Again, think about the person you are dating now, or have previously dated. If you have never dated or seen anyone romantically, answer the questions about your expectations for a romantic partner.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. Texting plays an important role in my dating life _____
2. I usually ask someone out through the use of text/phone, rather than in person _____
3. Texting is a good way to flirt or get to know someone _____
4. I enjoy texting my partner _____
5. Texting is my partner and I's primary form of communication. _____
6. I would like it if my romantic partner used texting more to communicate _____
7. I share many of my day-to-day activities through texting with my partner
8. Texting is an ongoing conversation that I usually have with a dating partner _____
9. I expect my dating partner to call/text throughout the day to keep me posted on how their day is going _____
10. I like it when my partner keeps me informed as to what they are doing and who they are with throughout the day through texting. _____
11. I feel disconnected from my dating partner when I have not heard from them via text _____
12. When my partner does not text me throughout the day, I often question how important I am in their life. _____
13. When my partner takes longer than usual to respond, I often feel forgotten about or insignificant to them. _____
14. I respond to texts immediately when I receive them from my partner _____
15. When my partner or significant other texts me first, I feel as though I have a level of significance/importance in their lives. _____
16. I immediately text my partner when I want to tell them something, rather than waiting until we could talk about it in person. _____
17. I prefer to communicate with my dating partner mainly through text/social media _____
18. I get upset when I can't get ahold of someone I'm dating/seeing _____
19. I often send my partner texts to express my affection for him/her _____
20. When I express my feelings for my partner via text or social media, I expect my partner to reciprocate by expressing their feelings for me. _____
21. I find it annoying when a romantic partner texts me multiple times an hour, multiple times throughout the day. _____

Open Ended Question: Thank you for taking time to complete this survey! Your responses will be used to inform a report on romantic relationships. Please record a few sentences below of an

experience in which you felt overwhelmed by a partner's expression of feelings for you, whether it was a matter of "too much, too soon" or as though they were smothering you with a need for attention, and how you responded to your partner. If you have not experienced a situation such as this, please respond with N/A.

_____

_____