



Study: College Students More Narcissistic Than Ever

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NEW YORK —

Today's college students are more narcissistic and self-centered than their predecessors, according to a comprehensive new study by five psychologists who worry that the trend could be harmful to personal relationships and American society.

"We need to stop endlessly repeating 'You're special' and having children repeat that back," said the study's lead author, Professor Jean Twenge of [San Diego State University](#). "Kids are self-centered enough already."

Twenge and her colleagues, in findings to be presented at a workshop Tuesday in [San Diego](#) on the generation gap, examined the responses of 16,475 college students nationwide who completed an evaluation called the [Narcissistic Personality Inventory](#) between 1982 and 2006.

The standardized inventory, known as the NPI, asks for responses to such statements as "If I ruled the world, it would be a better place," "I think I am a special person" and "I can live my life any way I want to."

The researchers describe their study as the largest ever of its type and say students' NPI scores have risen steadily since the current test was introduced in 1982. By 2006, they said, two-thirds of the students had above-average scores, 30 percent more than in 1982.

Narcissism can have benefits, said study co-author W. Keith Campbell of the University of Georgia, suggesting it could be useful in meeting new people "or auditioning on 'American Idol.'"

"Unfortunately, narcissism can also have very negative consequences for society, including the breakdown of close relationships with others," he said.

The study asserts that narcissists "are more likely to have romantic relationships that are short-lived, at risk for infidelity, lack emotional warmth, and to exhibit game-playing, dishonesty, and over-controlling and violent behaviors."

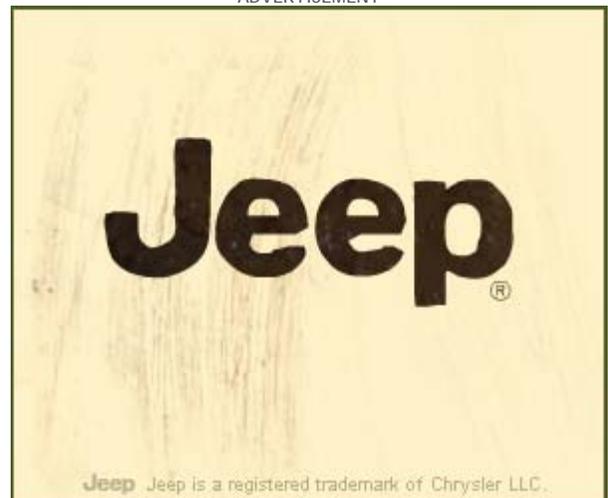
Twenge, the author of "Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable Than Ever Before," said narcissists tend to lack empathy, react aggressively to criticism and favor self-promotion over helping others.

The researchers traced the phenomenon back to what they called the "self-esteem movement" that emerged in the 1980s, asserting that the effort to build self-confidence had gone too far.

As an example, Twenge cited a song commonly sung to the tune of "Frere Jacques" in preschool: "I am special, I am special. Look at me."

"Current technology fuels the increase in narcissism," Twenge said. "By its very name, MySpace encourages attention-seeking, as does YouTube."

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Some analysts have commended today's young people for increased commitment to volunteer work. But Twenge viewed even this phenomenon skeptically, noting that many high schools require community service and many youths feel pressure to list such endeavors on college applications.

Campbell said the narcissism upsurge seemed so pronounced that he was unsure if there were obvious remedies.

"Permissiveness seems to be a component," he said. "A potential antidote would be more authoritative parenting. Less indulgence might be called for."

The new report follows a study released by UCLA last month which found that nearly three-quarters of the freshmen it surveyed thought it was important to be "very well-off financially." That compared with 62.5 percent who said the same in 1980 and 42 percent in 1966.

Yet students, while acknowledging some legitimacy to such findings, don't necessarily accept negative generalizations about their generation.

Hanady Kader, a University of Washington senior, said she worked unpaid last summer helping resettle refugees and considers many of her peers to be civic-minded. But she is dismayed by the competitiveness of some students who seem prematurely focused on career status.

"We're encouraged a lot to be individuals and go out there and do what you want, and nobody should stand in your way," Kader said. "I can see goals and ambitions getting in the way of other things like relationships."

Kari Dalane, a University of Vermont sophomore, says most of her contemporaries are politically active and not overly self-centered.

"People are worried about themselves — but in the sense of where are they're going to find a place in the world," she said. "People want to look their best, have a good time, but it doesn't mean they're not concerned about the rest of the world."

Besides, some of the responses on the narcissism test might not be worrisome, Dalane said. "It would be more depressing if people answered, 'No, I'm not special.'"

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