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The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement

By Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell



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Narcissism -- a very positive and inflated view of the self -- is everywhere. It's what you have if you're a politician and you've strayed from your wife, and it's why five times as many Americans undergo plastic surgery and cosmetic procedures today than did just ten years ago. It's the value that parents teach their children with song lyrics like "I am special. Look at me," the skill teenagers and young adults obsessively hone on Facebook and MySpace, and the reason high school students physically beat classmates and then broadcast their violence on YouTube for all to see. It's the message preached by prosperity gospel and the vacuous ethos spread by celebrity newsmakers. And it's what's making people depressed, lonely, and buried under piles of debt.

Jean M. Twenge's influential and controversial first book, *Generation Me*, generated a national debate with its trenchant depiction of the challenges twenty- and thirtysomethings face emotionally and professionally in today's world -- and the fallout these issues create for older generations as well as employers. Now, Dr. Twenge is on to a new incendiary topic that has repercussions for every age-group and class: the pernicious spread of narcissism in today's culture and its catastrophic effects. Dr. Twenge joins forces with W. Keith Campbell, Ph.D., a nationally recognized expert on narcissism, for *The Narcissism Epidemic*, their eye-opening exposition of the alarming rise of narcissism -- and they show how to stop it.

Every day, you encounter the real costs of narcissism: in your relationships and family, in the workplace and the economy at large, in schools that fail to teach necessary skills, in culture, and in politics. Even the world economy has been damaged by risky, unrealistic overconfidence. Filled with arresting anecdotes that illustrate the hold narcissism has on us today -- from people hiring fake paparazzi in order to experience feeling famous to college students who won't leave a professor's office until their B+ becomes an A -- *The Narcissism Epidemic* is at once a riveting window into the consequences of narcissism, a probing analysis of the culture at large, and a prescription to combat the widespread problems caused by narcissism. As a society, we have a chance to slow the epidemic of narcissism once we learn to identify it, minimize the forces that sustain and transmit it, and treat it where we find it. Drawing on their own extensive research as well as decades of other experts' studies, Drs. Twenge and Campbell show us how.

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Editorial Review

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Twenge and Campbell, psychologists and authors of previous books on self-admiration, team up for a thorough look at a troubling trend that has broad cultural implications. They begin by chronicling changes in American culture that have brought us Botox, fake paparazzi, and MySpace. The authors distinguish between self-esteem and narcissism, drawing on scientific research, but focus on narcissistic personality traits “among the normal population” and cultural narcissism that goes deep into social values. The authors debunk myths about narcissism—that it is necessary in order to be competitive and that narcissists are actually overcompensating for low self-esteem. Although young girls have been hit hardest by the narcissism epidemic, with unrealistic notions of physical beauty, the scourge has affected us all—witness Wall Street greed and the mortgage crisis with its overblown sense of materialism and entitlement. The authors argue that the nation needs to recognize the epidemic and its negative consequences, and take corrective action. Individuals can start by practicing gratitude, and parents can teach their children friendship skills, with the emphasis on others rather than self. --Vanessa Bush

Review

"The other night, when I was reading Twenge and Campbell's excellent and timely new book, my husband was busy framing a fake *Sports Illustrated* cover, with a picture of our 7-year old over the caption, "Player of the Year." *The Narcissism Epidemic* will hew close to the bone, rouse, and provoke many readers as it shines a spotlight on an important -- and highly costly -- trend in our lives. Rooted in hard data and illuminated with revealing anecdotes, stories, and solutions, *The Narcissism Epidemic* is both a pleasure and an education. But enough about this book. Let's talk about me." -- Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D., author of *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*

"An important and illuminating book. Drs. Twenge and Campbell expertly analyze many strands of American culture and reveal an alarming tapestry of psychocultural narcissism. They also offer sound strategies for slowing this epidemic." -- Jean Kilbourne, Ed.D., author of *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* and *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids*

"Filled with important, disturbing research detailing the alarming cultural spread of narcissism today -- a serious social problem to which many people are unwittingly contributing without realizing the disastrous consequences. The authors give sound advice and provide an important resource for anyone who cares about compassion, empathy, and emotional connection rather than ME, ME, ME!" -- Karyl McBride, Ph.D., author of *Will I Ever Be Good Enough? Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers*

"*The Narcissism Epidemic* is a must read, an essential antidote to a culture spinning out of control. Filled with facts, fascinating examples, and written in a highly readable style, Twenge and Campbell's outstanding book shows how narcissism has been on the rise and has taken over almost every part of our lives and how we can rescue our culture from ourselves. An outstanding accomplishment by two people who truly care about the debacle of self-worship. It should be read by anyone interested in the future of our country" -- Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D., author of *Anxiety Free: Unravel Your Fears Before They Unravel You*

"Phenomenal...*The Narcissism Epidemic* clearly and succinctly identifies the dangerous disease and the catastrophic ways it threatens our society and future, and reveals urgently needed solutions at every level.

The chapter on parenting alone makes this book priceless and should be compulsory reading." -- Patrick Wanis PhD, Celebrity Life Coach, Human Behavior & Relationship Expert, author of *How to Find Happiness*

"A must-read for anyone who is a parent, a relationship partner, in the workforce, in school, or on the job market. Twenge and Campbell not only define narcissism but detail its antecedents, consequences, and underlying processes in a way that brings together so much of what one sees in modern western culture. Grounded in research and peppered with media and anecdotal stories, *The Narcissism Epidemic* offers practical, much-needed solutions to coping in the age of entitlement." -- Kathleen Vohs, Ph.D., University of Minnesota McKnight Land-Grant Professor, Editor of *Self and Relationships: Connecting Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Processes*

"This insightful book shows us how the epidemic of narcissism touches almost all aspects of our lives. Twenge and Campbell's astute analysis and salient anecdotes powerfully map the problem and the high price we all pay. They expertly show us the kinds of actions we can take to free ourselves of the epidemic's ruthless grip and how the future wellbeing of humane society depends on our doing so." -- Diane E. Levin, Ph.D., Professor of Education at Wheelock College and co-author of *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids*

"The evidence Twenge and Campbell have compiled is compelling and appalling.... Twenge and Campbell marshal statistics, polls, charts, studies and anecdotes to assemble a complete picture of the epidemic's current state of contagion, brought on by the Internet, reality television, a booming economy, easy credit and other developments over the past decade. The authors dismantle the prevailing myths that have made us inclined to tolerate and even encourage narcissism: that it's a function of high self-esteem, that it's a function of low self-esteem, that a little narcissism is healthy, that narcissists are in fact superior, that you have to love yourself to be able to love someone else." -- *New York Times Style Magazine*

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