**Narcissism Epidemic: Prevalence, Contributing Factors, and Effects on Society**

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**Abstract**

An emerging body of evidence reports an alarming rise in narcissism and narcissistic traits among the younger generation in western societies, a trend that is described as the narcissism epidemic. Narcissism is a personality trait that is characterized by self-love, grandeur, high self-esteem, entitlement, and superiority. These studies maintain that millennials, a generation born between 1980 and 1996, are becoming more narcissistic than previously thought. Such claims are supported by evidence that shows that millennials have higher NPD scores on the NPI scale compared to adults older than 65 years. The rise in narcissism has been attributed to various factors including age, cultural environment, parenting behaviours, and economic conditions. Narcissism has both negative and positive impacts on society, including relationships, school, work, and financial affairs. Narcissistic individuals tend to have shallow values, are extremely aggressive, have less value on hard work, and have less intellectual interests. Nevertheless, narcissism has been linked to a lack of empathy, love, and value for others.

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Millennials are perceived in the current society as the laziest, most selfish, and narcissistic group of individuals that are poorly socialized than any other generation before them. They are described as self-centred and entitled individuals that are driven by fame, power, and admiration (Gallup, 2013). Additionally, millennials are known to cause problems in every social setting. They are known to cause problems in schools, from college to university where teachers often find themselves straining to instil the spirit of hard work on self-centred individuals who feel entitled to high marks they do not want to work for. In the workplace, millennials are known for demanding promotions with no merit, refusing to work for what they feel is less, and not welcoming criticism. Millennials are seen to overemphasize their prowess, and ability to tackle challenging tasks. Moreover, they are seen to have an inflated sense of self. Due to these observations, a growing body of evidence suggests that there is an emerging narcissism epidemic in western societies.

This essay seeks to establish the literature evidence regarding the narcissism epidemic among the younger generations. Studies supporting the prevalence of narcissistic behaviours among millennials will be critically assessed. Factors leading to the occurrence of the narcissism epidemic will also be evaluated with a specific focus on how they influence the lifestyles and behaviours of younger generations. Finally, the impact of narcissistic behaviours on individual well-being and society will be analysed.

Body

Narcissism is a personality trait that is characterized by self-love, grandeur, high self-esteem, entitlement, and superiority. It is an inflated view of oneself, associated with high social extraversion, where individuals seek social recognition through gathering and participation (Twenge et al., 2008). Individuals who have narcissistic behaviours and attitudes are described as narcissists. Despite their social interaction, narcissistic individuals have little or no interest in forming emotional connections with others. And their main aim is to enhance themselves through various self-regulation efforts that range from seeking recognition, attention, and credit from other people (Twenge et al., 2008).

The millennial generation is a term used to describe individuals born between the 1980s to 1996. They are individuals who entered the job market from 2000 onwards. Compared to previous generations, millennials are much more educated, technologically competent, and active social media users than the preceding generation, the baby boomers (Pyöriä et al., 2017). A growing body of evidence suggests that the millennial generation is becoming more narcissistic than the older generation, a phenomenon that has been described as a narcissism epidemic (Vater et al., 2018). Millennials have been described as narcissist individuals who dream about power and fame, perceive themselves as the centre of the universe and are more intelligent than others. They are constantly seeking superiority and admiration (Mathieu, 2013).

Studies show that younger individuals are more self-centred and obsessed with power and fame than older adults. Thus, younger adults are seen as more narcissistic than older adults. Studies show that the younger generation report higher narcissistic traits in NPD compared to older adults. A recent study by Wilson and Sibley showed that 9.4% of younger adults in their twenties reported higher symptoms of NPD as opposed to 3.2% of the older adults who are 65 years and above (Wilson & Sibley, 2011). Further empirical studies show that recently published books use self-centred phrases such as personal pronouns, including me and I than earlier publications. Such books, which are published by and for the younger generation, seem to be polarized by narcissism, further demonstrating the rise of narcissism. Moreover, recent studies show that the use of narcissistic phrases that are self-centred has increased in recent years than ever before. And the millennials are likely to describe themselves as 'greater' and 'smart' than others (Twenge et al., 2012). Self-centred song lyrics and desire for fame portrayed by the TV shows further reflect the rise of narcissistic character among the millennial generation (Twenge et al., 2012).

Studies focused on self-reported grandiose narcissism through NPI have significantly increased. Such studies report an increase in grandiose narcissism among the younger generation. In a meta-analysis study to evaluate the prevalence of narcissistic traits among American youths, Twenge and Campbell reported a lower score of NPI in American college students between 19997 and 2006, compared to the years between 2002 and 2007 (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Such studies indicate that narcissism is on the rise and younger generations are more narcissistic than older generations.

Despite evidence in most studies demonstrating the increased prevalence of narcissism in the younger generation in western societies, other studies, however, contradict such findings. These studies maintain that NPI is not an effective tool for measuring narcissism: and the increased prevalence of narcissism in western society is not a true reflection of the current millennials. NPI has been criticized for not including the grandiose aspect of narcissism. Additionally, it has been pointed to lack validity. A number of studies have established the shortcomings of NPI, proving that it is not effective in measuring narcissism. For example, a study by Raskin and Terry concluded that NPI fails to capture crucial aspects of the behavioural and psychological dimension of narcissism and thus, it is not an effective way of measuring and proving the prevalence of narcissism among the millennial generation (Pincus et al., 2009).

Average millennials display narcissistic traits more than their predecessors did in the early 80s, with research showing a 30% increase of narcissistic characteristics between the millennials and generation X (Twenge et al., 2008). These narcissistic traits include the desire for power and fame, an inflated view of physical attractiveness, self-centeredness, and desire for admiration. Different factors have been cited to contribute to the prevalence of narcissistic traits among millennials. Age difference has been cited as one of the factors that lead to the increased prevalence of narcissistic traits among millennials. And younger individuals are suggested to have higher narcissistic traits than older adults. The higher prevalence of narcissistic behaviour in the younger generation is supported by studies. For example, a study by Wilson and Sibley (2011) demonstrated that 9.4% of younger adults in their twenties show higher symptoms of NPD in the NPI scale compared to 3.2% of the older adults of more than 65 years. Self-esteem is suggested to be dependent on time, and it increases or decreases with age. Studies show that self-esteem increases with age and peaks at 60 years, and thereafter decreases with increases in age. Therefore, millennials are suggested to have higher narcissistic traits because they are younger and in the age bracket where self-esteem is at an all-time high.

Empirical studies further suggest that individuals who entered adulthood during the recession period are less likely to have narcissistic traits (Greenfield, 2009). In contrast, those who entered adulthood during prosperous times are more likely to have narcissistic behaviours. These claims suggest that economic conditions play a significant role in the development of narcissistic traits. It is suggested that economic conditions shape how people interact with others. Additionally, economic conditions shape future attitudes and values and the way people will correlate with each other in the future (Greenfield, 2009). Individuals who grew up during tumultuous economic times relied on each other, and currently still value the spirit of togetherness. However, those who entered adulthood in prosperous economic times are self-focused and independent of each other when it comes to satisfying their needs. Such independence fosters narcissistic culture and attitudes.

Parenting behaviours and early childhood experiences have been suggested to contribute to the development of narcissism. Parenting behaviours such as over evaluation, overprotection, and cold parenting such as maltreatment have been suggested to increase the likelihood of narcissistic traits. Studies suggest that a range of parenting behaviour may hinder the adaptive self-view, negatively influencing the development process. Cold parenting is suggested to contribute to the failure of the child to acquire and develop a basic developmental process that gives the child a more realistic self-view (Winner & Nicholson, 2018). Cold parenting however gives the child false grandiose self-views where they see themselves as more important than anybody else. Parenting behaviour such as overprotection and overinvolvement in a child's development process where parents strive to protect their children from harm while encouraging them to achieve certain goals have been shown to increase narcissism and a sense of self-entitlement (Winner & Nicholson, 2018). Therefore, Individuals raised by overprotective parents tend to be more narcissistic and self-centred. Millennials have been raised in an era where personal achievement is encouraged in every societal setting. Millennials have been raised with the notion that they are the best and can be whatever they want. Such ideologies have contributed to narcissistic behaviour and attitude witnessed among younger generations.

A large body of evidence shows that social media use has significantly contributed to the rise of narcissism. As mentioned, millennials are competent technologically. Social media is the primary means of communication among this generation. As such, social media often defines behaviour, attitude and traits displayed by the millennials. Social media usage among the younger generation has been cited to negatively affect self-esteem. Thus, younger generations are more likely to display conscientiousness and extraversion, traits that have been associated with social media usage (Wilson et al., 2010). The correlation between social media and narcissism is well established in the literature. It has been established that narcissism is the major predictor of social media activity. And individuals with higher levels of narcissistic traits are shown to be more active on social media than those with low narcissistic traits (Mehdizadeh, 2010). These studies demonstrate that social media activities increase character and traits that are associated with narcissism (Gentile et al., 2012)

The cultural environment has been cited as the major factor that influences the development of personality traits. The same applies to the development of narcissism and narcissistic traits. The cultural environment is subdivided into two categories, collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Individualistic cultures are believed to encourage a focus on personal achievements. Collective cultures on the other hand encourage togetherness and social values (Gentile et al., 2012). Individualistic cultures are predominant in western societies where narcissism has been cited to be on epidemic levels. Individualistic cultures encourage narcissism, which is characterized by self-focus, desire for fame, and need for admiration. This is evident as empirical studies show that grandiose narcissism is well established in the United States where individualistic cultures are predominant (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). The opposite is true in Asian countries and the middle east where the cultural environment is more collectivistic centred.

The impacts of narcissism on individuals and society is a debatable topic that is not yet conclusive. The available studies mention both positive and negative effects of narcissism on all aspects of society, including relationships, school, work, and financial affairs. However, the majority of these studies tend to focus on the negative impacts of narcissism on society rather than the negative impacts. Extreme narcissism threatens and erodes fundamentals that hold a strong society together. Narcissistic individuals have shallow values, are extremely aggressive, have less value on hard work, and have less intellectual interests. Nevertheless, narcissism has been linked to a lack of empathy, love, and value for others.

In work and organizational settings, narcissism has been mentioned to cause fluctuation in organizational performance. Such suggestions are supported by research findings that have consistently associated narcissism in organizational CEOs with grandiosity and systematic dynamism (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007). Narcissism has been mentioned to exacerbate incivility in organizational settings, where individuals with higher levels of narcissistic behaviour have been observed to engage in counterproductive work personalities. Narcissistic leaders who believe they are superior, entitled, and self-absorbed display aggressive behaviour that makes their followers view them as abusive leaders. As a result, followers of narcissistic leaders have low self-esteem, are confident and often feel insecure.

Narcissistic behaviours have been linked to a variety of risk-taking behaviours. Such risk-taking behaviours among narcissistic individuals have been associated with problems in stress response systems, leading to substantial physical health problems risks. A growing number of millennials have been shown to have a higher tendency of risky behaviours that often results in social problems such as gambling addiction. Narcissism has been suggested to be closely correlated with aggression and violence. And recent studies suggest that the narcissism epidemic could help explain the surge in aggression and violence witnessed in the current society. A study from sampled students shows that narcissism and aggression are associated and aggression often arises as a result of ego threat.

Conclusion

 The current studies suggest that there is an increase in narcissism behaviour among millennials. Studies show that younger individuals are more self-centred and obsessed with power and fame than older adults. This is evident in research studies that show that younger adults in their twenties report higher symptoms of NPD as opposed to older adults who are 65 years and above. The prevalence of narcissistic behaviour has been highlighted by recently published books that use self-centred phrases such as personal pronouns. Such books, which are published by and for the younger generation, seem to be polarized by narcissism, further demonstrating the rise of narcissism. Moreover, recent studies show that the use of narcissistic phrases that are self-centred has increased in recent years than ever before. Self-centred song lyrics and desire for fame portrayed by the TV shows have been shown to further reflect the rise of narcissistic character among the millennial generation. Studies show that the recent rise in narcissism behaviours are due to various factors such as; Cultural environment, which has been cited as the major factor that influences the development of narcissism and narcissistic traits. Individualistic cultures are believed to encourage a focus on personal achievements, resulting in narcissism in societies where individualism is encouraged. It has been established that extreme narcissism threatens and erodes fundamentals that hold a strong society together. Narcissistic individuals have shallow values, are extremely aggressive, have less value on hard work, and have less intellectual interests.

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