

We Are Raising a Generation of Deluded Narcissists

Keith Ablow, FoxNews.com

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- ¹ A new analysis of the American Freshman Survey, which has accumulated data for the past 47 years from 9 million young adults, reveals that college students are more likely than ever to call themselves gifted and driven to succeed, even though their test scores and time spent studying are decreasing.
- ² Psychologist Jean Twenge, the lead author of the analysis, is also the author of a study showing that the tendency toward narcissism in students is up 30 percent in the last thirty-odd years.
- ³ These data are not unexpected. I have been writing a great deal over the past few years about the toxic psychological impact of media and technology on children, adolescents and young adults, particularly as it regards turning them into faux celebrities—the equivalent of lead actors in their own fictionalized life stories.
- ⁴ On Facebook, young people can fool themselves into thinking they have hundreds or thousands of “friends.” They can delete unflattering comments. They can block anyone who disagrees with them or pokes holes in their inflated self-esteem. They can choose to show the world only flattering, sexy or funny photographs of themselves (dozens of albums full, by the way), “speak” in pithy short posts and publicly connect to movie stars and professional athletes and musicians they “like.”
- ⁵ Using Twitter, young people can pretend they are worth “following,” as though they have real-life fans, when all that is really happening is the mutual fanning of false love and false fame.
- ⁶ Using computer games, our sons and daughters can pretend they are Olympians, Formula 1 drivers, rock stars or sharpshooters. And while they can turn off their Wii and Xbox machines and remember they are really in dens and playrooms on side streets and in triple deckers around America, that is after their hearts have raced and heads have swelled with false pride for “being” something they are not.
- ⁷ On MTV and other networks, young people can see lives just like theirs portrayed on reality TV shows fueled by such incredible self-involvement and self-love that any of the “real-life” characters should really be in psychotherapy to have any chance at anything like a normal life.
- ⁸ These are the psychological drugs of the 21st Century and they are getting our sons and daughters very sick, indeed.
- ⁹ As if to keep up with the unreality of media and technology, in a dizzying paroxysm of self-aggrandizing hype, town sports leagues across the country hand out ribbons and trophies to losing teams, schools inflate grades, energy drinks in giant, colorful cans take over the soft drink market, and psychiatrists hand out Adderall like candy.
- ¹⁰ All the while, these adolescents, teens and young adults are watching a Congress that can’t control its manic, euphoric, narcissistic spending, a president that can’t see his way through to applauding genuine and extraordinary achievements in business, a society that blames mass killings on guns, not the psychotic people who wield them, and—here no surprise—a stock market that keeps rising and falling like a roller coaster as bubbles inflate and then, inevitably, burst.
- ¹¹ That’s really the unavoidable end, by the way. False pride can never be sustained. The bubble of narcissism is always at risk of bursting. That’s why young people are higher on drugs than ever, drunker than ever, smoking more, tattooed more, pierced more and having more and more and more sex, earlier and earlier and earlier, raising babies before they can do it well, because it makes them feel special, for a while. They’re doing anything to distract themselves from the fact that they feel empty inside and unworthy.
- ¹² Distractions, however, are temporary, and the truth is eternal. Watch for an epidemic of depression and suicidality, not to mention homicidality, as the real self-loathing and hatred of others that lies

beneath all this narcissism rises to the surface. I see it happening and, no doubt, many of you do, too.

- ¹³ We had better get a plan together to combat this greatest epidemic as it takes shape. Because it will dwarf the toll of any epidemic we have ever known. And it will be the hardest to defeat. Because, by the time we see the scope and destructiveness of this enemy clearly, we will also realize, as the saying goes, that it is us.

We Are All Narcissists Now, and That's a Good Thing

Sarita Bhatt, Salon.com

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- ¹ You open up your Facebook newsfeed to a deluge of engagement ring photos, political slap-fights, and — horror — your little cousin's selfies from the Justin Bieber concert.
- ² But your attempt to escape to Twitter is quickly thwarted by a litany of "Just woke up!" and "having breakfast #allaboutme" and "Got in the wrong line at the grocery store again!" tweets.
- ³ These "public displays of life"— the posts, likes, and tweets that clutter your newsfeed and irritate you even as they stoke your fears of missing out — are part of our current zeitgeist. Some experts have pointed to this apparently self-indulgent stream of twaddle as proof positive that we're becoming a generation of narcissists.
- ⁴ So it might surprise you to find out that the cyber-citizens of today genuinely care about their fellow human beings. In fact, the same tools that make us appear more narcissistic — and sometimes in fact do undeniably make us act in more narcissistic ways — also amplify some of our best traits, most notably having a point of view on the world and wanting to give back. ...
- ⁵ To be sure, the critics' basic point stands: Yes, as a culture, we seem to believe that it is vital to not only track, but post our personal actions on every possible social network. The world must know how many miles we ran, the scenic views that accompanied the run, and what we did afterwards to celebrate the run.
- ⁶ We owe this in part to the quantified self movement, which has brought us endless innovations that enable us to track, measure, and analyze every single thing we say and do (from eating to sleeping, to sexing, to listening, to talking, to sitting, to dreaming, to running, to sweating, to teeth-brushing, to chewing).
- ⁷ The quantified self movement can be, and has been, exploited for profit. Once the quantified self became marketable, smart marketers and developers sprang into the vacuum, coming up with more ways to monitor more behaviors. Our quantified selves get us hooked on the products, platforms and services that promise to make us better versions of ourselves.
- ⁸ Since nearly every person is now a digitally connected consumer, getting people to believe in what a brand stands for, what it's about, and why it's better than the competition requires marketers and makers to connect products/services to very calculated and personalized consumer needs.
- ⁹ To do that, marketers quantify us too, and we let them. We want content that's customized to our interests and served to us at the right time, in the right format, on the right platform, when we demand it. In essence, we want information and communication technologies know us better than we know ourselves. ... We express vague fears about it, but we are no longer willing to live without it.
- ¹⁰ All of this has conspired to create, according to Dr. Jean M. Twenge, a Facebook-based generational "narcissism epidemic," spawning research backed books like "The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement" and "Generation Me."
- ¹¹ But to focus exclusively on these very real drawbacks risks overlooking some undeniably positive developments. A seismic shift is underway, invisibly, beneath the generational scolding. And, the

evidence of this shift is plentiful.

- ¹² As we use technology to learn more about ourselves, we are beginning to create our own personal value systems, publicly posting, liking, commenting, and sharing our views on the world, be it social, political, cultural or personal. Our digital narcissistic bragging coupled with the ability to share and connect with our peers' equally narcissistic digital behaviors gives us more access to more information in the form of digital–social sharing. This vastly broadens our ability to find things we care about.
- ¹³ All the self–analyzing and, in turn, self-promotions, that we interact with through digital and social technologies has actually created a caring economy based on shared values. There's an abundance of digital places that allow us to learn about, connect with and support the causes and people we actually want to care about.
- ¹⁴ Prior to the growth of the caring economy, people with money to give supported large-scale organizations and established foundations. ... Today, anyone with a few dollars can make an immediate impact on very specific projects they care about. Crowdfunding volume is expected to reach \$5.1 billion on 2013. More than 4.2 million people have pledged over \$643 million dollars for more than 42,000 creative projects on Kickstarter.
- ¹⁵ It's not that the Internet is creating better people with better souls. It's that technology is redirecting people's behavior by making it easier to find things you care about, and then removing the roadblocks to giving. That means people are giving more.
- ¹⁶ So, for all the narcissism that we are culturally suffering from as a result of digital and social technologies, we're also collectively fueling a more caring networked culture that is doing something to help make our communities better. With the privilege of quantifying ourselves comes the social benefit of qualifying ourselves. We are using technology to actively care. Unlike generations before us, we can now seek out new interests that weren't at our fingertips before. Maybe all this digital narcissism is actually giving us the ability to figure out what we care about and why. ...
- ¹⁷ So the next time you roll your eyes at every update you see posted by your friends on Facebook, just remember that the same lens is allowing your social peers to channel their skills, talents, experience and energy into something they value and feel productively passionate about.