

Loretelli

AVID

Week 2

Critical reading assignment #2

Student Question | Is Social Media Making Us More Narcissistic?

Do you spend too much time trying to be attractive and interesting to others? Are you just a little too in love with your own Instagram?

As the generation who grew up with social media, a reflection on narcissism is of critical importance to teenagers. What are the psychological and ethical implications of constant engagement with or obsession over social media? How does it change our relationship with others and how we see ourselves?

My teenage son recently informed me that there is an Internet quiz to test oneself for narcissism. His friend had just taken it. "How did it turn out?" I asked. "He says he did great!" my son responded. "He got the maximum score!"

When I was a child, no one outside the mental health profession talked about narcissism; people were more concerned with inadequate self-esteem, which at the time was believed to lurk behind nearly every difficulty. Like so many excesses of the 1970s, the self-love cult spun out of control and is now rampaging through our culture like Godzilla through Tokyo.

A 2010 study in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* found that the percentage of college students exhibiting narcissistic personality traits, based on their scores on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, a widely used diagnostic test, has increased by more than half since the early 1980s, to 30 percent. In their book "Narcissism Epidemic," the psychology professors Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell show that narcissism has increased as quickly as obesity has since the 1980s. Even our egos are getting fat.

It has even infected our political debate. Donald Trump? "Remarkably narcissistic," the developmental psychologist Howard Gardner told *Vanity Fair* magazine. I can't say whether Mr. Trump is or isn't a narcissist. But I do dispute the assertion that if he is, it is somehow remarkable.

This is a costly problem. While full-blown narcissists often report high levels of personal satisfaction, they create havoc and misery around them. There is overwhelming evidence linking narcissism with lower honesty and raised aggression. It's notable for Valentine's Day that narcissists struggle to stay committed to romantic partners, in no small part because they consider themselves superior.

The full-blown narcissist might reply, “So what?” But narcissism isn’t an either-or characteristic. It’s more of a set of progressive symptoms (like alcoholism) than an identifiable state (like diabetes). Millions of Americans exhibit symptoms, but still have a conscience and a hunger for moral improvement. At the very least, they really don’t want to be terrible people.

Students: Read the entire article, then tell us ...

– Do you recognize yourself or your friends or family in any of the descriptions in this article? Are you sometimes too fixated on collecting “likes” and thinking about how others see you?

– What’s the line between “healthy self-love” that “requires being fully alive at this moment, as opposed to being virtually alive while wondering what others think,” and unhealthy narcissism? How can you stay on the healthy side of the line?

– What about Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and other social media feeds makes them so hard to put down?

– Do you think this writer’s proposal of a “social media fast” is a viable way to combat narcissism?

– For those who aren’t as attached to social media, do challenges from an overinflated sense of self still arise? If so, from where?

– If everyone is becoming more narcissistic, does that make narcissism necessarily a bad thing?