

Millennials annoyed by 'narcissist' label

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So-called millennials consider their generation the most narcissistic ever.

Older generations agree—but think the [narcissism](#) goes even beyond what [millennials](#) admit.

For millennials (adults born between 1980 and 1994, and also known as "Generation Y"), this assessment by their parents' and grandparents' generations does not sit well, according to new research based on a series of studies led by Joshua Grubbs, a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Case Western Reserve University.

"Millennials and older generations agree that millennials are the most narcissistic," Grubbs said. "They just disagree to the extent of the narcissism."

In the last decade, popular writings have portrayed millennials as exceptionally self-centered, creating a prevailing narrative that has become accepted as fact, to a degree, due to its repetition, Grubbs said.

"This is the first generation where there's such a prevalent exposure to the message (that) they're narcissistic, mainly through the Internet," said Grubbs. "We'd like to know, over time, what effect that has. This is the first step."

Hence, Grubbs set out to measure this phenomenon, which, until now, had been mostly based on anecdotal evidence: for example, the self-centered behavior of some young people on social media and the

ubiquity of "selfies."

Emojis, fake personality tests—and other experiments

In one experiment, [study participants](#) were asked to choose between emojis—cartoon faces often used in texting and social media—that best matched their feelings after being called "narcissistic." The saddest emoji face was chosen most often, while the participants who picked indifferent or happy emoji faces tended to be the most narcissistic, as measured by self-surveys.

In another experiment, millennials were given fake personality tests that told them they were narcissistic, while researchers recorded their reactions.

"Millennials generally object when the 'narcissistic' label is applied to them—it feels like a putdown," said Grubbs, noting that study participants associated the term with arrogance, self-centeredness and a penchant for vanity. "The only people that found the label acceptable were people who are actually narcissistic—and research shows there are very few of them."

"Still, millennials experience more anger, frustration and sadness over the label than other generations," Grubbs said. "Even if they agree with it to some extent, it still bothers them."

Another key distinction emerged in the research: What may seem like signs of "narcissism" or self-obsession to one person may be evidence of "individualism"—a trait valued by millennials—to someone else.

"This research doesn't mean every single millennial is narcissistic," said

Grubbs, a millennial himself. "But on the whole, people of my generation probably are more narcissistic than in past [generations](#)."

Grubbs recently presented the research—which will be published later this year—at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology in San Diego.

"Over time, the 'narcissistic' label could impact how millennials feel, their mental health (and) their attitudes about themselves and general generation," said Grubbs, also a pre-doctoral intern in professional psychology at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center. "This provides us with a broad picture we can use in further research."

Grubbs also researches the psychology of religion and spirituality, as well as the [psychology](#) of addiction, narcissism and entitlement.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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