

Me, me, me! How narcissism changes throughout life

December 10 2019



The longest study on narcissism shows how it changes over time. Credit: Taylor Smith on Unsplash

For parents worried that their teenager's narcissism is out of control, there's hope. New research from Michigan State University conducted the longest study on narcissism to date, revealing how it changes over time.

"There's a narrative in our culture that generations are getting more and more narcissistic, but no one has ever looked at it throughout generations or how it varies with age at the same time," said William Chopik, associate professor of psychology at MSU and lead author.

The research, published in *Psychology and Aging*, assessed a sample of nearly 750 people to see how [narcissism](#) changed from age 13 to 70. The findings showed that qualities associated with narcissism—being full of yourself, sensitive to criticism and imposing your opinion on others—decline over time and with age. Some character traits—like having high aspirations for yourself—increased with age.

"There are things that happen in life that can shake people a little bit and force them to adapt their narcissistic qualities," Chopik said. "As you age, you form [new relationships](#), have new experiences, start a family and so on. All of these factors make someone realize that it's not 'all about them.' And, the older you get, the more you think about the world that you may leave behind."

The greatest impetus for declining narcissism, Chopik said, was landing a first job.

"One thing about narcissists is that they're not open to criticism. When life happens and you're forced to accept feedback, break up with someone or have tragedy strike, you might need to adjust to understanding that you're not as awesome as you once thought," Chopik said. "There's a sense in which narcissists start to realize that being the way they are isn't smart if they want to have friends or meaningful relationships."

Chopik found that the fastest-changing age group was young adults. He also found that, contrary to popular belief, changes in the levels of narcissism are lifelong and changes don't stop at any certain age or stage

in life.

"One of the most surprising findings was that—also contrary to what many people think—individuals who were born earlier in the century started off with higher levels of hyper-sensitivity, or the type of narcissism where people are full of themselves, as well as willfulness, which is the tendency to impose opinions on others," Chopik said.

"There isn't much data on older generations, but now that Baby Boomers are aging into that phase of life, it's a huge part of the population that we need to be looking at."

With these his findings, the researchers hope that the public gains a greater understanding about the different types of narcissism as well as new insight to the understudied older populations. Also, if you're worried that someone is truly a narcissist, there's hope they will change for the better as they get older, Chopik added.

Provided by Michigan State University

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