People tend to become less narcissistic as they age from childhood through older adulthood, according to a study published in *Psychological Bulletin*. However, differences among individuals remain stable over time—people who are more narcissistic than their peers as children tend to remain that way as adults, the study found.
"These findings have important implications given that high levels of narcissism influence people's lives in many ways—both the lives of the narcissistic individuals themselves and, maybe even more, the lives of their families and friends," said lead author Ulrich Orth, Ph.D., of the University of Bern in Switzerland.

Orth and his colleagues analyzed data from 51 longitudinal studies, all of which measured how participants' levels of narcissism changed over time. The studies comprised 37,247 participants (52% female and 48% male) ranging in age from 8 to 77. Some of the studies followed participants for decades. Most were conducted in the U.S., Canada and Western Europe, with one in China and one in New Zealand.

The researchers coded whether each study measured one or more of three different types of narcissism: agentic, antagonistic and neurotic. Agentic narcissism includes feelings of grandiosity or superiority and a strong need for admiration; antagonistic narcissism includes arrogance, entitlement, callousness and low empathy; and neurotic narcissism involves emotional dysregulation and hypersensitivity.

Overall, the researchers found that all three types of narcissism declined from childhood through old age, with a small decline for agentic narcissism and a moderate decline for antagonistic and neurotic narcissism.

The researchers also found, however, that people's narcissism relative to that of their peers did not change significantly over time. In other words, people who were more narcissistic than average as children remained more narcissistic than average as adults.

"This was true even across very long periods of time, which suggests that narcissism is a stable personality trait," Orth said.
Most of the data analyzed in the study were from the United States and Western Europe, so future research should examine narcissism across a broader range of countries and cultures, Orth said.

Future research should also aim to explore the reasons that narcissism declines with age, according to Orth.

"One theory suggests that the social roles we take on in adulthood, for example as a partner, a parent, an employee and so on, lead to the development of more mature personality characteristics, including lower levels of narcissism," he said.


Provided by American Psychological Association