GENERATION ME:
WORKING WITH TODAY’S YOUNG PEOPLE
Revised edition
(Fall 2014)
Living in the Age of Entitlement

The Narcissism Epidemic

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Generations = culture

- Growing up in the 1950s vs. now: Almost as different as growing up in the U.S. vs. China
- **Culture** = parents, teachers, media
- It’s no one’s “fault”
- Average differences
- Trends similar across demographic groups
How do we measure culture?

- And what parts are important?
- Models from cross-cultural psychology
- **Individualism**: A cultural system placing more emphasis on the self and less on others and social rules
- American culture has become increasingly **individualistic**. Explains many cultural changes.
- Effects on:
  - Views of the **self**
  - Views of **equality**
  - Views of **work and work/life balance**
Trend 1: Views of the self
Preservation of self-esteem

- Everybody gets a trophy
- Or everyone gets the same size trophy no matter who wins or loses
- Not keeping score
- Not correcting mistakes
Popular advice for young people

- Believe in **yourself** and anything is possible
- You must love **yourself** before you can love someone else
- Just be **yourself**
- **You** can be anything you want to be
- Never give up on **your** dreams
- **You** are special
Self-admiration phrases

- Love Yourself
- I am Special
- Just be Yourself
Mentions of “I love me”

Year


Appearance in books

0 20 40 60 80 100 120
Are you above average?

- \( N = 9 \text{ million} \)
- People of the same age but different years. Must be cultural change, not age.
- “Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.”
  - Highest 10%
  - Above Average
  - Average
  - Below Average
  - Lowest 10%
Are you above average?

SAT scores and college selectivity down (not up)
Changes in grades and study time

Nationally representative sample of 12th graders
Self-esteem

- Commonly believed that self-esteem is very important, especially for children
- **Self-esteem does not cause good grades or good behavior**
- Which U.S. ethnic group has the lowest self-esteem?
  - Asian-Americans, who have the *best* academic performance
- **Self-esteem may cause problems if not based in reality**
Popular advice for young people

- Believe in yourself and anything is possible
- You must love yourself before you can love someone else
- Just be yourself
- You can be anything you want to be
- Never give up on your dreams
- You are special
Expectations

Nationally representative sample of high school seniors
Narcissism

- Self-centered, self-important. Inflated sense of self. Not necessarily at clinical level.
- Entitlement: Believing you are special and deserve special treatment.
- Self-esteem is confidence. Narcissism is overconfidence.
- Are narcissists insecure “deep down inside”? 
  - No. Have high self-esteem
  - But only in individual areas, not in caring traits
- Lack empathy and have poor relationship skills.
Narcissism over time

- 104 samples: 24,468 college students
- Completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory between 1982 and 2009
- Comparing Boomers, GenX, Millennials (no iGen yet)
- Items:
  - If I ruled the world it would be a better place.
  - I can live my life any way I want to.
  - I think I am a special person.
  - I like to be the center of attention.
  - I have a natural talent for influencing people.
Change in narcissism, 1982-2009

30% answered majority of items in narcissistic direction by 2009
The myth of narcissistic success

Isn’t narcissism necessary in a competitive world?
No. It does NOT predict success, IQ, beauty. Narcissists think they are better than everyone else, but are not.
Narcissistic college students more likely to drop out
Humble business leaders more successful
Academic entitlement

- “Trying hard” a valid reason for a professor to increase a grade:
  - 66% (2 out of 3)
- “If I have attended most classes for a course, I deserve at least a B”:
  - 34% (1 out of 3)
- Professors who won’t let me schedule the final exam around my vacation are too strict:
  - 30% (almost 1 out of 3)

Greenberger et al., 2008
The GenMe personality: The good news

- Up over the generations:
  - Extraversion (outgoing, comfortable meeting strangers)
  - “Agentic” traits (assertive, dominant, competitive)
  - Self-esteem
- Positive traits … until they cross over into narcissism.
- Why there are both positive and negative views of Millennials
- Majority are not narcissistic. But there are 2 to 3 times as many who are.
Trend 2: Equality
More good news

- Most tolerant, least prejudiced generation in history
- Take diversity and gender equality almost for granted
- More opportunities
- More personal freedom
- Upside of individualism
Attitudes toward women’s roles

- General Social Survey, 1977-2014
- U.S. adults, ages 18 to 96
- “Working mothers can develop just as warm a relationship with their children”
- “A preschool child is likely to suffer if the mother works”
- “It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the family and the woman takes care of the home and family.”

Higher = More progressive/ more equality
Attitudes toward women’s roles

-0.6
-0.5
-0.4
-0.3
-0.2
-0.1
0
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
0.5
0.6

- Working mom
- Preschool child suffer (reverse)
- Best if woman home (reverse)
Attitudes toward women’s roles: Sex differences
Pronoun use in U.S. books, 1960-2008

- he, him, his, himself
- she, her, hers, herself

Graph showingpronoun use trends from 1960 to 2008.
Trend 3: Attitudes toward work and work/life balance
Generations and work attitudes

- Many studies of work attitudes = one-time surveys
- Cannot separate age and generation
- Time-lag: Compare people of same age at different times
- Differences must be due to generation or time period
- High school seniors 1976-2012 (Boomers, GenX, Millennials) $n = 100,000$
- As they are entering the job market or will after college
Generations and work attitudes

Nationally representative sample of U.S. high school seniors
Generations and work

- Largest generational difference: Growth of work-life balance
  - Fewer Millennials say “I expect work to be a central part of my life”
  - More say that “not wanting to work hard” might prevent them from getting a job they want
- Long before they have children
  - Time off for leisure, not just kids. Increasingly relevant as birth rate declines. (Likely that fewer Millennials will have children)
- Potential for generational conflict: GenX’ers say, “This is what we’ve been asking for for years! Why do the Millennials get this when we didn’t?”
Myth-busting about Millennials

- NO greater interest in jobs to help people
- NOT more into “interesting” jobs (intrinsic, meaning)
- Actually LESS interested in making friends at work
- Actually MORE interested in keeping the same job
What do we do?
Recruiting

- Describe options for flexibility and time off
- **Personal impact** (“making a difference”)
- Recognition for **individual** work and success
- Potential for promotion and career building
- Opportunity for mentoring and guidance
- Use their language (Google Books analysis)
  - **Individualistic words**: unique, personalize, identity, you
Managing

- Generation Why? Must explain why it matters and why they matter
- Need for structure and clear directions
  - “Spell it out” for them
- Want a manager who cares about them and their goals (“I want you to be successful”)
- Smaller promotions after less time (less waiting for reward)
Retaining

- Work/life balance and flexibility
  - Freedom to work where they want
  - And when they want
  - Emphasis on results, not time in office (“BIC”)
  - Want a life outside of work even if they don’t have children

- One authentic, individual self
  - Casual dress, blend between work and home
  - Manager who treats them as an individual, cares about them
The big question

- Does the world change for this generation, or does this generation change?
- More praise, more flexibility, less top-down authority
- Only works when profitable (for learning or $$)
Thank you for listening!

Any questions?