



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on March 11, 2015

American Narcissist: Raising With Praising Makes Jack a Proud Boy

If Barack Obama is the narcissist [some claim](#) he is, he just may be, to paraphrase French philosopher Joseph de Maistre, the president we deserve. Because according to a new university study, Westerners are raising generations of narcissists — and it's the result of modern parents' habit of lavishing continual, often underserved praise upon their children. Writes [TimmonsPress.com](#):



Parents who overvalue their kids aren't doing them any favours, a new study suggests.

Researchers from Ohio State University and the University of Amsterdam sought to determine the origins of narcissism and found children scored higher on narcissism tests later on if their parents described them in surveys as “more special than other children” or deserving of “something extra in life.”

“Children believe it when their parents tell them that they are more special than others. That may not be good for them or for society,” co-author Brad Bushman said in a press release.

Elaborating, *Forbes'* Alice Walton [writes](#) that the research vindicates the “social learning theory,” which “suggests that kids become narcissists when their parents overvalue them — that is, when parents treat their kids as fundamentally more deserving than others, or as Freud put it, when they ‘are under a compulsion to ascribe every perfection to the child — which sober observation would find no occasion to do.’”

ABC News' Liz Neporent [provides](#) more detail on the study, which

evaluated 565 Dutch children ages 7 through 12 for narcissist tendencies such as feelings of superiority and self-satisfaction. The investigators also questioned the children's parents about how, when and how often they offered praise and other feedback.

The kids whose parents consistently told them they were superior to other children, no matter what, scored higher on measurements for narcissism compared to kids who were given a more realistic view of themselves, the investigators found. That's because over-praising children can lead them to believe they are special people who deserve special treatment all the time, explained Brad Bushman, a professor of communication and psychology at Ohio State University and one of the study's authors.

Reading the above, many could conclude that psychology is the study of the obvious by the oblivious. Yet just as a tadpole spawned in a polluted pond knows nothing but toxicity, it is often difficult to discern the error of a mistake with which one is raised. And then viewing the matter through a different lens can be instructive.

Imagine you heard a story about a late Renaissance-era prince given a silk-and-satin upbringing,



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fawned over, pampered, praised, genuflected before, and made to think the world revolves around him. It would be reflexive to roll your eyes and say, “I know where this is going. The little snowflake will become a supercilious, insufferable brat with his chin angled toward the stratosphere!” Yes, likely.

But how is his case much different from the upbringing many American children receive today?

Wealth? By historical standards, most Westerners are outrageously wealthy. Renaissance royalty certainly didn’t eat better than most of us; they couldn’t walk into a supermarket and find thousands of products from the world over at their fingertips. And modern technology has given us luxuries and a lifestyle of which the little prince couldn’t even dream.

So the analogy is quite apt. Given this, why is it we can see so clearly the moral danger in the prince’s upbringing but not our little princes’ and princesses’ upbringings? Answer: We’re too close to the situation.

And that moral danger is profound. As *Forbes*’ Walton warns:

“Narcissistic children feel superior to others, believe they are entitled to privileges, and crave for constant admiration from others,” study author Eddie Brummelman tells me. “When they fail to obtain the admiration they want, they may lash out aggressively. Narcissistic individuals are also at increased risk to develop addiction. Subgroups of narcissists, especially those with low self-esteem, are at increased risk to develop anxiety and depression.”

And is there a connection between feeling entitled and demanding government “entitlements”? It seems logical to assume that people raised to believe they’re special and “deserve” all life’s finer things — and given them on a silver platter as children — will be resentful and feel shortchanged when life proves not to be that pampering parent. And might they not then be easy prey for nanny-state demagogues who vow to become paternalistic provider? Might big egos not beget big government?

As for those who do value self-esteem, the study has another important message: “Parental overvaluation was the largest predictor of a child’s narcissism over time, but interestingly, it did *not* predict self-esteem. In other words, telling kids how exceptional they are doesn’t produce kids with good healthy self-esteem — it just makes them more narcissistic,” wrote Walton.

Even so, the self-esteem movement itself is suspect, especially since it often involves the lavishing of excessive praise — and the encouragement of gratuitous self-praise. As to this, I remember hearing about an exercise in which students were to stand before their class and tell their schoolmates how “great” they were. Great? It sounded like a recipe for creating brats who grate on everybody. And where did this notion of buttressing “self-esteem” come from, anyway?

The self-esteem movement truly gained traction in the 1980s, when social engineers sought to explain why girls didn’t perform as well as boys on standardized tests (such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test). They then conjured up the thesis that perhaps a female lack of self-esteem was the culprit and developed tests that supposedly measured the quality. And, sure enough, girls scored lower than did boys and exhibited declining self-esteem as they proceeded through adolescence.

What few know, however, is that the self-esteem thesis was based on cherry-picked data. First, girls by the 1980s had already surpassed boys academically, getting better grades on average and attending college at higher rates. Just as significantly, though, the group scoring highest on the self-esteem exams was black males.

The same group, mind you, that performed the worst academically.



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Explanation? Perhaps “self-esteem” is not actually a positive thing. It just could be that the term has become a euphemism for something else: pride — one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

And what else do you call it when you’re trying to make kids believe they’re “great”?

This is why the self-esteem movement contradicts Christian revelation and millennia of accumulated wisdom, which tell us that pridefulness — which man tends toward naturally — should be purged and humility developed. Only a humble person can acknowledge his faults, a prerequisite for correcting them; thus, only a humble person can truly come to flower intellectually, emotionally, morally, and spiritually.

And while Professor Bushman may be studying the obvious, he’s certainly not oblivious to the consequences of modern parenting. In fact, his research has changed the way he treats his own three kids. Says [he](#), “I used to think my children should be treated like they were extra-special. I’m careful not to do that now.” “It is important to express warmth to your children,” he says, “but overvaluing them may promote higher narcissism.”

So does “pride goeth before a fall”? With today’s parenting status quo, our civilization appears sure to find out.



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