



ARE YOU TOO IN LOVE WITH YOURSELF?

We investigate the deadly Gen Y epidemic that's spreading faster than swine flu.



Picture courtesy of White Stuff

There's a dangerous disease sweeping across the world and this time it has nothing to do with E. coli, the flu virus or dodgy bean sprouts (back to your salad, so).

According to Dr Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, narcissistic personality disorder is a problem that affects over a quarter of the population – and it's growing.

Dr Twenge's research reveals that Generation Y (people born between 1978 and 1997) are more obsessed with themselves than ever before. She surveyed 16,000 college students across the US and, through psychological tests, found a staggering 30% to be confirmed narcissists, a problem she describes as "an epidemic".

"As a result of Baby Boomers wanting what's best for their children, they've created a generation that believes they deserve unreserved success," explains Dr Sam Lopez de Victoria, a psychotherapist who specialises in Family Psychology (www.dr.sam.tv). "Extreme narcissists are also created by being born to narcissistic parents who are inattentive to their kids' needs. As a result, the children soon find they can only get attention by acting and manipulating. They become selfish and unfeeling. Their egos know no bounds."

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

So what's the difference between loving yourself (good) and being too in love with yourself (bad)? Where is the line that divides self-belief and narcissism?

Dr Lopez de Victoria explains that narcissists have a hugely inflated sense of superiority, crave praise and approval and, while the average person can feel sympathy for others, a narcissist genuinely believes they're the only person in the world who really matters.

"Traits that reveal extreme narcissism are incessant talk of self, exaggerating personal accomplishments, lack of empathy for others and displays of grandiosity, like bragging," he says.

ME, ME, ME!

Kate, 27, has been friends with a narcissist since college – and has no idea how to cut her out of her life.

"Amy is the most demanding person I know," she explains. "She's always in control of nights out, changes plans at the last minute, and puts you down to make herself look good. She's even more insufferable on Facebook, updating her status every hour and posting albums of ridiculous self-portraits. Being in her company is exhausting. It's like a job I don't get paid for."

IN THE WEB

In extreme cases of narcissistic personality disorder, professional help or group therapy may be required. However, for a *mé fêiner* like Amy, avoiding her (and defriending her on FB) is the easiest way out. In reality, unless you've been useful to a narcissist in some way, you probably won't be missed (no offence). And if you're in a romantic relationship with one, Dr Lopez de Victoria advises getting out before it's too late.

"Narcissists are like spiders," he explains. "They suck all the goodwill out of relationships and then ignore the carcass when they have no more use for it. They're extremely toxic."

And if you're worried that you might be a narcissist, don't. That ounce of self-doubt means that while you might be a little too into yourself at times, you're not suffering from the full-blown personality disorder.

"For an extreme narcissist to want treatment, they must be willing to admit they're unhealthy," Dr Lopez de Victoria explains. "A narcissist that can be cured is a broken one."

10 SIGNS THAT YOU MIGHT BE A NARCISSIST

If any of these statements sound familiar, you need to give yourself a reality check – before someone else does.

1 *Your boyfriend has never seen you without make-up.* And you've lived together for two years.

2 *Your mum thinks you're Junior Vice President at work.* In reality you're a customer service agent with a certificate in first aid.

3 *You don't bother learning anyone's name.* Why would you when "hun" and "chicken" will do?

4 *You change your Facebook profile twice a week,* always making sure to crop any of your hot friends out of the shot.

5 *You stamp your foot* if your mother hasn't got your special lasagne ready and on the table when you go home.

6 *You could have been a professional tennis player* if you hadn't quit lessons at eight, and you make sure everyone knows it.

7 *You find it hard to make friends* because girls always seem to be jealous of you.

8 *You call your cousin* who works in a radio station asking for concert tickets about once a week. At Christmas dinner you usually blank him.

9 *Your phone wallpaper* is a picture of yourself.

10 *Your mantra is* "But enough about me. What do YOU think of me?" It just cracks people up at parties! **S**