

Title: Addiction and “Generation Me”: Comparison of narcissistic behaviors amongst American youth with and without substance disorders.

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Summary:

The purpose of this study is to determine whether narcissistic behaviors, theorized as the root cause of addiction, are elevated in substance dependent youth in comparison to a normative sample of adolescents. This study examines narcissistic behaviors in 115 substance dependent (SD) youth admitted into residential treatment. Inclusion criteria includes stable contact information, specified age range (14–18), ability to provide written consent, have met diagnostic criteria for at least one substance use disorder, and be medically detoxified. Participants with a major chronic health problem or evaluated as suicidal or homicidal were excluded. Narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. The NPI contains 7 subscales: Authority, Exhibitionism, Superiority, Entitlement, Exploitativeness, Self Sufficiency, and Vanity. SD youth were matched by age and gender to 115 college youths. Narcissistic behaviors were hypothesized to be significantly higher amongst SD youth in comparison to a normality sample of adolescents. We examined 7 NPI subscale scores between 2 samples using random effect regression analyses. Pair cluster was included as a fixed effect in the model to absorb pair-specific effects, and demographic factors were included as covariates. Approximately half were female (48%), from a single-parent household (46%), and 30% were from a minority background. The majority of the study sample were marijuana dependent (91%) and smokers (76%). When compared to a normative sample of 133 youths matched by age and gender, SD youth reported significantly higher NPI scores in 4 domains: entitlement ($F = 3.88, p < .05$), exhibitionism ($F = 34.19, p < .0001$), exploitativeness ($F = 15.68, p < .0001$), and vanity ($F = 10.87, p < .001$). Our hypothesis was confirmed for 4 out of 6 NPI subscale scores. Findings support narcissism as a multi-faceted construct. In the current study, overt narcissistic behaviors were more elevated among substance dependent adolescents. The lack of difference in self-sufficiency levels between the samples could be attributed to the substance dependent youth’s recognition of the uncontrollable nature of their illness. This study is the first to provide empirical support of Alcoholic Anonymous’ theory of addiction, which points to narcissism as fundamental to the disease.

Citation: Pagano, M. E., Carter, R. R., Johnson, S. M., & Exline, J. J. (2010, June). Addiction and "Generation Me": Comparison of narcissistic behaviors amongst American youth with and without substance disorders. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, 34*(s2), 220A. (No. 839)