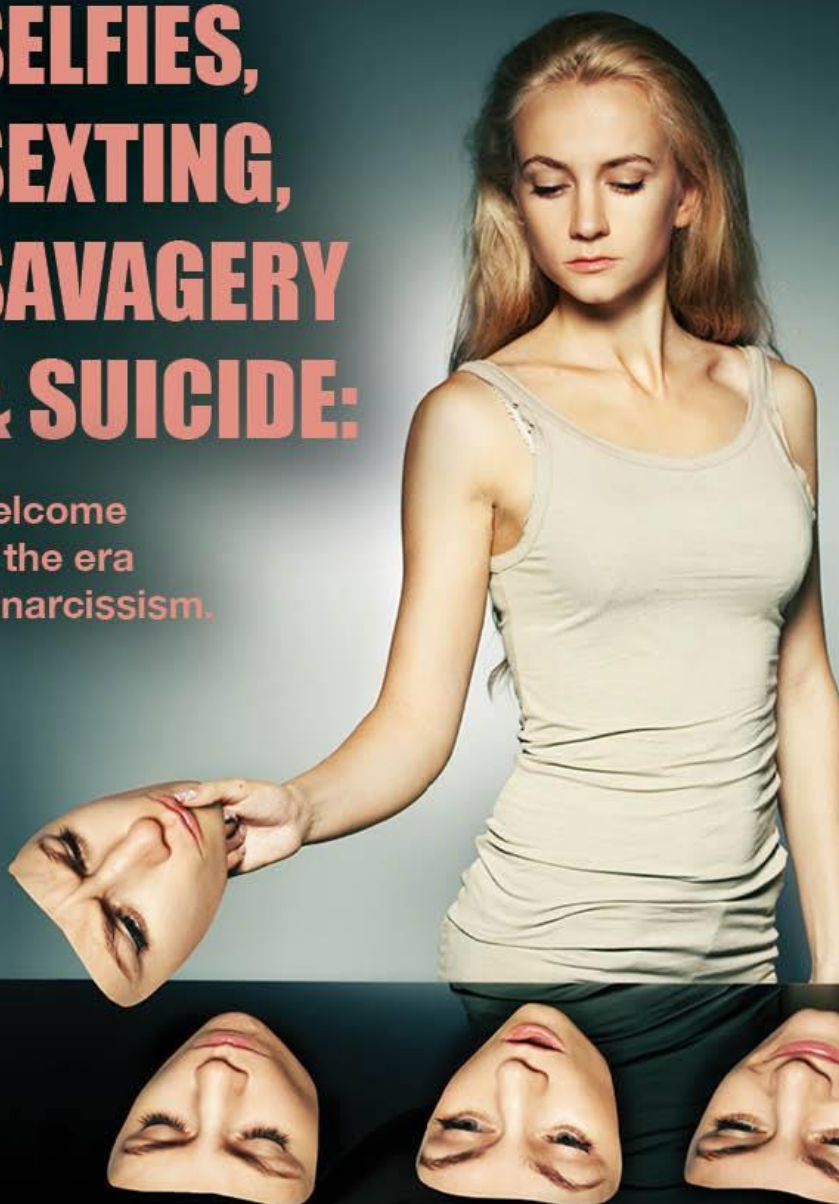


SELFIES, SEXTING, SAVAGERY AND SUICIDE: WELCOME TO THE AGE OF NARCISSISM

SELFIES, SEXTING, SAVAGERY & SUICIDE:

Welcome
to the era
of narcissism.



Lynette Maguire

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Introduction

Being a parent is arguably one of the most difficult jobs you'll ever do, but it can also be the most rewarding. The first thing I'd like you to do is think about the social pressures you had as a teen. Yes, there was bullying, but by and large it stopped at the school gate—now it's 24/7 and often anonymous and relentless. Yes, you wanted to know about sex, but back then all that was available was Playboy or Penthouse magazines—now porn is only a few clicks away which means often today's teens are getting their sexual education from violent porn. Yes, you wanted to look your best, but back then that meant buying the big brand names that could afford to advertise on television and in magazines—now we're getting fashion, hair, makeup and even medical advice over the internet, and body dysmorphia along with eating disorders are hitting an all-time high. So is cyberbullying and suicide. The pressure that technology is having on our young people is exacerbating an already difficult stage of life—a time where young people are trying to figure out how to 'adult'. The problem is, today's teens have more social pressures than ever before and this is resulting in a rise in narcissism, violence, cyberbullying, suicide, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, porn, cosmetic surgeries and household debt. You name it—this monster has many tentacles! Being a teen today is harder in many respects than it was when we were teens. The real kicker is, as parents, we're making it worse.

One of the challenges parents and caregivers face is the enormity and importance of some of our decisions. Will giving in to our little angel create a spoilt, tantrum throwing adult? Are we producing emotional baggage our children will cart around for the rest of their days? What sort of memories are we creating for them? Are we growing and raising nice humans?

The answer of course is, it depends. It depends on the parents, the environment, and not least of all, the child. Basically, when we take on this task we begin the making of a 'cake'. What I mean by this is that the cake is the end result of what happens when different ingredients are added and mixed and then baked. It's not just one ingredient that goes into a perfect cake and

similarly, there's not just one factor that makes the perfect person. Each one of us is the result of our histories and our choices.

The purpose of this book is to look at some of the things that are impacting the growth and happiness of our children, and in turn our society. What my hope is that I'll gift you the eggs which will bind your parenting ingredients in the hope of making at least an edible cake: a nice kid, who in turn will be a nice adult who will raise more 'nice kids'. You get the picture.

Sadly, I see the opposite—we're raising entitled children who lack empathy and compassion, who will grow to be adults who lack empathy and compassion who in turn will raise their children the same way. What's wrong with that? In a world where our cultural core values have shifted away from family and community to a core value of individuality, what we need is more connection, compassion and love—not less.

It doesn't necessarily bother me to see a child throw a tantrum, to me I see that the child is testing his boundaries, and I think that's pretty natural. What is disturbing to me is when I see adults throwing tantrums—that's not pretty! But sadly, it's pretty common. Because we grow to learn and adapt to societal expectations, adult tantrums often manifest in emotional manipulation, bullying and domestic violence. Violence in our culture, on our streets and in our homes, is on the rise and one of the ingredients that goes into that cake, is an entitlement mentality.

My message to you is based around a few principles. Firstly, that we are raising a generation of narcissists—humans who think about themselves before others – humans who think that they are more important, prettier, smarter and better than anyone else. Secondly, that as a society, we're becoming desensitised to violence and violent behaviours—that's why we see people filming fights and rapes, rather than trying to stop them. There's more bullying now and the type of bullying is a lot more insidious and evil than when you and I were in the playground. These maladaptive behaviours are basically being normalised and are driven by the internet and social media. Finally, that teen sexual health is being compromised by a terrifying porn

culture which normalises violence and degradation in sex. Porn is hijacking our children's sexual health and distorting their perception of intimacy, thus negatively impacting their relationships.

How do we raise nice kids? There's no one answer, but I do believe if you use even one of the suggestions in this book, you'll be more likely to be able to give young people some healthy ingredients in order to make a nice cake.

Have a read and tell me what you think: info@lynettemaguire.com.au.

Regards

Dr Lynette

CHAPTER ONE

NARCISSISM

How is narcissism becoming a ‘norm’ in teens?

When we think about the Greek myth of narcissus, we can see how the idea of narcissism is raising its ugly head today. There’s a few versions of this myth, but here’s my condensed version:

A young man was so beautiful he attracted many suitors (depending on what version you read, the admirers were either male or female), all of whom he rejected. When walking one day beside a lake, the beautiful young man glimpsed his own reflection and fell in love with his own image. He died lonely and forlorn beside the lake, knowing this love was impossible. The narcissus flower grew where he lay and is a warning to all others of the danger of self-love, or narcissism.

When considering the implications of this myth and how it fits within a contemporary society, I feel that it challenges what we know about reality and illusion. What is real? The reality of the myth is that Narcissus was a beautiful young man who, one would imagine, had flaws like the rest of us. Let’s face it, there’s no such thing as perfect.

The illusion however, is how he saw himself—absolutely perfect in all ways—he was the only person good enough and beautiful enough to deserve his love, thus creating an impossible love.

Next, I look at what the myth says about identity? Who was he? How did he distinguish between self and other? The problem is, he didn't.

I hear you ask, 'How does this relate my child?'

Let me explain it you.

The teenage years are called a 'liminal' time—your child is in a space in time where he/she is not yet an adult and not quite a child—he/she is somewhere in between. At this age, teens are trying to figure out who they are, how they fit into this world and how to 'be'. This is their reality.

Other examples of 'liminality' include standing in a doorway—you're not in any particular room but halfway—not in the kitchen or the dining area—not outside or inside. You're in between. Pregnancy too fits this 'not quite' and 'in between' premise—not quite a mother, but not 'not a mother'. Try and think of other examples of liminality or in between-ness.

The adolescent, caught between childhood and adulthood, occupies a liminal, or in-between space and their struggle for identity can bring about a disorientation which can shape personality and possibly pave the way to new perceptions—traditional thoughts, self-evaluations and behaviours are undone. The imitative, or mimetic characteristic of human behaviour is an important aspect of liminality and those trapped in a liminal state are unable to act rationally, because the basis on which 'objective' rationality was grounded has disappeared. The stressful, emotive character of a liminal crisis prevents clear thinking, and this stress can lead to mimetic behaviour where people will look at others they admire for guidance. Without stability, which is also diminished in a liminal period, established boundaries are eliminated. Often imitative processes contribute to a person's behaviour and that is what

they tend to copy—we can see how this works with trends like ‘duckface’ selfies. Therefore, adolescence, a time where reality and identity is easily manipulated, is now lived through social media sites where teens experiment many times with the design and content of their profiles and their behaviour, as they deal with their liminal status, importantly, away from the control of adults.

One of the reasons this age group is so challenging is because of this liminal ‘in between-ness’. The teen only identifies as the child when there’s something in it for them or they have a meltdown and revert to their known and learned childlike behaviours. As adults, we see this childlike behaviour and realise our teen is not yet ready to ‘adult’. The teen challenges our decision-making processes—they don’t want adults making decisions for them, they want to make their own choices. However, because the decision-making processes of teens is precarious at best, the adults continue to make decisions for their children. And teens rebel.

TIP: Ever wonder why your young person doesn’t ask you for advice? It’s because your teen won’t rely on you for things like fashion and sex, they’ll rely on their peers and the internet for that. Your teen will come to you if they’re sick, but other than that, generally they really aren’t keen on any input from you at all. Your teen wants you to fund their life but stay out of it. It’s all fairly normal. Challenging, but normal!

Teens care about how their peers perceive them—it’s important that they be seen as the cool kid, the popular kid, the hot girl or the sporty guy. They try on lots of personas to try to find the right ‘fit’. I remember going through a ‘punk’ stage: I dyed my hair green and pink, carefully sliced my jeans and pinned the gaps together with safety pins so I fulfilled that radical ‘I don’t care’ persona (in hindsight though, I remember I still ironed my clothes carefully—clearly, I cared). When I realised the punk persona wasn’t a great

‘fit’, I bought a silver marijuana leaf pendant and wore it on a necklace along with a black t-shirt with a marijuana leaf emboldened across the front. I was about 14—and had never tried the stuff, I’d never even seen it. But I did get kudos from my peers because they thought I obviously knew how to procure weed, and that I’d tried some. (My acting skills must have been pretty impressive—it was several years later before I even saw what it looked like). So, because I was gaining credibility and kudos with this ‘fit’, I kept it until I left school and started in secretarial school, where I changed again. This time I was coiffed and manicured and was the embodiment of the perfect young lady (I recall around the same time, my mother who was beside herself, sent me to a ‘finishing school’ to try to knock some of the rough edges off. I must have been a handful!)

Look back to your own adolescence, and I’m pretty sure you’ll recognise this behaviour of trying to find your ‘fit’ in either yourself or others.

I’m going to take a little side step here and talk about birth order. When you have more than one child, the youngest will generally (but not always) try personas which are not already adopted by the older child/children. For example, if the oldest child is studious and gets good grades, chances are the younger child won’t try to emulate this, as this ‘role’ has already been taken. It’s more likely that they’ll try to be the sporty kid, the arty kid or the no hoper kid—usually anything but the smart kid.

Next time you head to the local shopping centre, check out the different ‘fits’ the teens are trying on—the tough guys, the emos, the skater boyz, the surfers, the nerds, the gamers. See how many you can spot. It’s fascinating. The reality is that these teens haven’t figured out who they are and how to ‘be’ in this world but they want to give the illusion that they have. Their identity is what they’re questioning—thus, a link back to my underpinning questions of identity, reality and illusion - and the myth of Narcissus.

Are we raising a(nother) generation of narcissists?

I'd never even held a baby before I held my daughter. I was terrified of her—so tiny, and fragile, and perfect. What terrified me even more was that she didn't come with an instruction manual. The year was 1991 and there was no Google or mother's blogs to ask. What had I done? The most I could hope for was that I didn't inadvertently kill her. I was just making this motherhood stuff up as I went along.

My daughter, perfect as she was, remained unnamed for 2 weeks. Her father and I had agreed that if our child was a boy, he would do the naming, and if our baby was a girl then I would get the task. The list of names if I recall correctly, included Pru, Ainsley and Chloe. None of them were quite right—none suited her—so Baby X it was.

I've always been a reader, a fan of good, well written literature and when I pondered one evening, I came up with the name Bronte—and it was perfect. I was a fan of the Bronte sisters —authors from the late 1800s who wrote strong female protagonists into their novels in order fight the patriarchy of the time. *Jane Eyre* is a perfect example. The name was unusual, unique enough that not many people had heard of it—and it suited my girl, because I thought she was unique and I wanted her to be a powerful, strong woman.

So, the name was, and is, hers. I didn't realise it then, but I'd taken the first step in creating a narcissist, and it's only by strong parenting rules and boundaries, along with teaching and reinforcing ideals such as empathy and gratitude that's she's a well-balanced, socially aware young woman with a strong social conscience (phew! Ducked a bullet there!)

There are claims that the world (or at least the first-world) is on the brink of a narcissism epidemic. In fact, a study conducted in 2009 by researchers Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell¹, showed a dramatic rise in narcissism from previous generations. Basically, we're more narcissistic than ever before. And it appears the trend is growing. This increase in narcissism is a cultural sickness and is having a huge impact of how people behave, how we like to look and how we treat others. But this generation didn't raise itself, so it's safe to suggest that the previous generations played a big role in this growing trend.

It has been suggested that the Baby Boomers were the generation that initially started the trend of narcissism. The generation that rebelled against the strict upbringings of more traditional generations who had suffered through the frugality of the Great Depression, meant they wanted change. Young men grew their hair long while young women burned their bras. Elvis was hip thrusting and there were drugs galore. There was "free love" with lots of sex outside of the confines of marriage. The Boomers were rebelling en masse. Previous generations shook their heads and just like all the generations before them, people asked, "What's the matter with kids today?"

"What's the matter with kids today?"

Young people have always had the previous generations lamenting their behaviours. I include some famous quotes to show that criticising the current generation of youth has been occurring since time immemorial. And remember, I'm not criticising our Millennials, I'm explaining why they are like they are.

¹ Their excellent text, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, Free Press, 2009) was one of the first primary sources of research for my doctoral degree. I highly recommend the book to you—it's well written, easy to read, and covers many aspects of narcissism not covered in this book.

Aristotle:

They [Young People] have exalted notions, because they have not been humbled by life or learned its necessary limitations; moreover, their hopeful disposition makes them think themselves equal to great things -- and that means having exalted notions. They would always rather do noble deeds than useful ones: Their lives are regulated more by moral feeling than by reasoning -- all their mistakes are in the direction of doing things excessively and vehemently. They overdo everything -- they love too much, hate too much, and the same with everything else. (Aristotle (384 BC – 322BC)

Hermit:

The world is passing through troublous times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behavior and dress. (From a sermon preached by Peter the Hermit in A.D. 1274)

Hesiod:

I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words... When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint. (Hesiod, 8th century BC)

Chesterton:

I believe what really happens in history is this: the old man is always wrong; and the young people are always wrong about what is wrong with him. The practical form it takes is this: that, while the old man may stand by some stupid custom, the young man always attacks it with some theory that turns out to be equally stupid.

Freeman:

The children now love luxury; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are tyrants, not servants of the households. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize over their teachers.

This quote is often attributed to Socrates, Plato or Aristotle. However, its source is Kenneth John Freeman whose original analysis of complaints against young people was used in his Cambridge dissertation of 1907. Freeman's original quote:

The counts of the indictment are luxury, bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect to elders, and a love for chatter in place of exercise...

Children began to be the tyrants, not the slaves, of their households. They no longer rose from their seats when an elder entered the room; they contradicted their parents, chattered before company, gobbled up the dainties at table, and committed various offences against Hellenic tastes, such as crossing their legs. They tyrannised over the paidagogoi and schoolmasters.

As you can see by these quotes, when boundaries and rules are relaxed people's behaviours also change. Young people will challenge authority and this often occurs with the support of and pressure from their peers. This is how generational changes occur. When the baby boomers relaxed their rules, the teens pushed down the walls and rebelled. After the austerity of World War II and Korean War, there was prosperity and lives became easier. As parents, it is common to want the next generation to have easier or better lives than what we had. This is a pivotal point in how narcissism was created, then fostered to create the current generation, the Millennials, also known as GenYs and Zs or 'Generation Me'. Families relaxed, boundaries shifted and rules were either stretched, discarded or broken, and technology changed our culture, the way we viewed the world and the way we communicated. Of course, there was always going to be a major shift.

How did we get here and where are we heading?

Let's take a look at how our culture and values have changed over the last 100+ years. Understanding these movements will help to realise how we got to where we are today. Our forefathers were altruistic or unselfish, and culturally today, we're narcissistic, or selfish; what happened in between?

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation x	Millennials
Birth years	1900-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-current
Current age	116-71	70-52	51-36	35 and younger
Major influencers on behaviour	<p>WWII, Korean War, Great Depression, Rise in Corporations, Space Age</p> <p>Lived through or raised by parents that just survived the Great Depression.</p>	<p>Civil Rights, Vietnam War, Sexual Revolution, Cold War/Russia, Space Travel</p> <p>Highest divorce rate and 2nd marriages in history.</p> <p>Prosperity was promised to them as children and they pursue it. As a result, they are seen as being greedy, materialistic and ambitious.</p>	<p>Dual Income families and single parents, First Generation of latchkey kids, Activism, Corporate downsizing,</p> <p>Mothers work, highest number of divorced parents</p> <p>The first generation that will not do as well financially as their parents did.</p>	<p>Digital media, child focused world, school shootings, terrorist attacks, AIDS, 9/11 terrorist attacks.</p> <p>Typically grew up as children of divorce</p> <p>They hope to be the next great generation & to turn around all the "wrong" they see in the world.</p> <p>More sheltered than any other generation as parents strive to protect them from the evils of the world.</p>
Core values	<p>Adhere to rules</p> <p>Conformers/Conformity</p> <p>Dedication/Sacrifice</p> <p>Delayed Reward</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Don't question authority</p> <p>Duty before pleasure</p> <p>Hard work</p> <p>Law and order</p> <p>Loyalty</p> <p>Patriotism</p> <p>Patience</p> <p>Respect for authority</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Savers</p> <p>Trust in Government</p>	<p>Anti-war</p> <p>Anti-government</p> <p>Anything is possible</p> <p>Equal rights</p> <p>Equal opportunities</p> <p>Loyal to their children</p> <p>Optimism</p> <p>Personal gratification</p> <p>Personal growth</p> <p>Question everything</p> <p>Spend now, worry later</p> <p>Team oriented</p> <p>Transformational</p> <p>Trust no one over 30</p> <p>Want to "make a difference"</p>	<p>Balance</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Entrepreneurial</p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Highly Educated</p> <p>High job expectations</p> <p>Independent</p> <p>Informality</p> <p>Lack of organisational loyalty</p> <p>Pragmatism</p> <p>Seek life balance</p> <p>Self-reliance</p> <p>Scepticism/Cynical</p> <p>Suspicious of Boomer values</p> <p>Think globally</p> <p>Techno literacy</p>	<p>Avid consumers</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Extreme fun</p> <p>Highly tolerant</p> <p>Hotly competitive</p> <p>Like personal attention</p> <p>Self-confident / sociable</p> <p>Sociability</p> <p>Members of global community</p> <p>Most educated generation</p> <p>Extremely techno savvy</p> <p>Extremely spiritual</p> <p>Now!</p> <p>Optimism</p> <p>Realism</p> <p>Street smarts / well-travelled</p>
Value most	Family/community (WE)	Success	Time	Individuality (ME)

With thanks: excerpt adapted from <http://www.wmfc.org/uploads/GenerationalDifferencesChart.pdf>

There are a few poignant points from the table which, when dissected, show the path of the narcissistic culture. See if you can find them. I'll start. Look at the last line "Value most": note the focus has moved from the Traditionalist's core value of family/community to the current generation's core value of individuality. Put simply this means our self-talk and belief systems have moved from "If it's not good for the family or community, I'm not doing it", to the Millennial's mantra "If it's not good for me, I'm not doing it." Basically, we've become selfish and this ideological shift is showing in our behaviours and belief systems. But as I said before, the Millennials didn't raise themselves and the narcissism is, by and large, something that is taught.

A simple study of baby names can show how narcissism is growing around the world. From the 1990s, a desire to have a child stand out as 'special' meant the creation of new names, such as, literally, 'Unique' (223 babies were named 'Unique' in California in the 1990s), along with a deviation in spelling of these new names (Uneek, Uneque, Uniquee). If parents weren't making up new names, they were changing the spelling of popular names such as Jasmine, which now have derivatives of 'Jazmine, Jazmyne, Jazzmin, Jazzmine, Jasmina, Jazmyn, Jasmin, and Jasmyn'. I've seen Erica spelt Ericka, Erika and, believe it or not, Airwrecker. This shift in baby naming was a drive by parents to make their children stand out and not be like anyone else. Now, to make selecting the perfect special name for our 'princess' easy, there are websites that will generate 'one off' baby names ensuring their child will hold a distinctive and deserved place on the planet.

From an early age, children are being taught just how special they are, and this is reinforced at home and through an education system which also indoctrinates the children (even as early as kindergarten) with the same message. Children are taught how special they are because they have teeth, a skeleton, fingers and toes. What seems to be absent is the message that our wonderful bodies are normal—and most people have them. Because of that, no-one is more special than anyone else.

Spot the parents who're enabling entitlement in their children

Most teachers will be the first to tell you that the more difficult part of their job is dealing with parents. Here are just some of things that parents have said to teachers (spot the ones who are raising narcissists):

“Our taxes pay your wages!” (Year 3, Sydney)

“When are you going to teach my son to brush his teeth?” (Kindergarten, Sydney)

“During my first year of teaching a parent abused me for making their child sign a legal document without a parent present — it was their homework contract. (Year 5, Hobart)

One parent asked to take a child home every single week after assembly to avoid them coming back again at 3pm, meaning he would miss an entire block of learning as well as recess. (Year 2, Sydney)

One complained that her child didn't get an award on presentation day, saying that her child had “worked his butt off all year for nothing!” (Year 2, Sydney)

“His lunch needs to be heated up every day.” (Kindergarten, Melbourne)

“He doesn't drink water.” (Year 3, Melbourne)

“I want my child to do everything all the other students do” — from the same parent who, after an incident, had said “Don't make him do maths if it's going to make him angry!” (Year 2, Sydney)

“You have too many friends on Facebook.” — after they stalked my account. (Year 5, Sydney)

“My child didn't do anything wrong.” (always a popular one despite the parents not witnessing any of the related incidents) (K-6 teacher, Sydney)

“My child always tells the truth” (Year 3, Melbourne)

“How do I get him to do what I say?” (Year 4, Sydney)

“Why can't my child read yet?” in week 5 of kindergarten. (Sydney)

Source: The Courier Mail 02.02.2016

Messages that foster narcissistic children are often subliminal—I see almost daily on my Facebook feed that some (usually) mother is so ‘proud’ of her child because a first tooth has broken through, or the child rolled over, or took a first step. Here’s the thing: These are normal developmental stages. Generally, unless there’s a disability or medical issue, these milestones will happen naturally.

Little Billy is not special because he sat up—pride is not what the parents should be feeling, let’s change the dialogue and try, ‘excited’ or ‘happy’.

There is no place for pride in these instances. Pride should be reserved for real achievement rather than natural body functions or movements. In doing what they’re doing, these parents are teaching their babies to expect attention from behaviours they didn’t get a say in, or put any effort in. Let’s face it, if this is the case, why would they bother trying to do anything out of the ordinary.

A combination of permissive parenting, self-esteem focused parenting, and education which praises stagnant or lacklustre performance, teaches children they are ‘special’, ‘stars’ and ‘winners’, irrespective of their accomplishments. An example of this is the ‘every child player gets a prize’ philosophy, where each child in a competition receives an award—even the kid that didn’t try at all—he gets the same as the kids who tried really hard. Rewarding someone for just turning up is counter-productive and results in teens, and in turn adults, who expect a reward where none is deserved. The world is not like that. We’re setting our children up for the bust.

I had the pleasure of listening to an inspiring young adventurer who spoke at a graduation ceremony held at my University. The young man was aged in his mid-twenties and had climbed big mountains and trekked through heavy jungles and was basically a pretty cool fellow. He started by saying (this is not verbatim):

I was always told that I was special and that I could do anything. So, when I left school, I decided I wanted to climb Mount ... (a big mountain I've forgotten the name of). It hadn't been done before but because I'd been raised to believe that I could do it, I believed I'd be successful. I bought a rucksack and hiking boots and planned out my trip. The day came when my adventure would start and I took the challenge on.

Two days later I was winched out by emergency rescue helicopter.

It took the young man several more attempts until he finally achieved his goal. So, he'd been taught he could do anything, but not that he'd have to prepare, plan and work for it – which in this young man's quest, I think are pretty important points.

He acknowledged that being taught how special and unique he was, and being told he could do anything and be whatever he wanted, did not actually teach him that he needed to work and work hard to achieve his goals. He thought it would be easy. It wasn't, and he failed several more times. Training, planning, getting smarter, packing lighter, learning along the way, failing, and failing again all happened before he eventually was successful.

Teaching children they are special is damaging, and creates an entitlement mentality which does not reflect the reality of adult life.

The permissive parenting trend, specifically the ‘every child player gets a prize’ ideal comes from the myth that competition is ‘bad’ thing. All children should be equal. The super-fast sporty kid is always going to run faster than, say, the lazy kid, and apparently, that’s not ‘fair’. Giving them both a ribbon isn’t ‘fair’ either. If the lazy kid didn’t try, he doesn’t deserve a ribbon. That’s like rewarding the kid for just turning up on the day.

American Steelers’ line-backer James Harrison made headlines in August 2015 when he found out his two sons had been given, what he termed, ‘participation trophies’, and he demanded they be taken back to the school, saying on social media:

I came home to find out that my boys received two trophies for nothing, participation trophies!” Harrison wrote. “While I am very proud of my boys for everything they do and will encourage them till the day I die, these trophies will be given back until they EARN a real trophy. I’m sorry I’m not sorry for believing that everything in life should be earned and I’m not about to raise two boys to be men by making them believe that they are entitled to something just because they tried their best...cause sometimes your best is not enough, and that should drive you to want to do better...not cry and whine until somebody gives you something to shut u up and keep you happy.

Harrison concluded his comment with the hashtag ‘Harrison Family Values’. Healthy competition teaches us to be better, to improve and enhance our talents. It shapes goals and prepares us for the ‘real’ world.

It seems to be the thing now; the thought that competition is bad for our children. Schools will organise a football match, and if both teams turn up, then everyone’s a winner; there are no losers. But a little competition is healthy. It promotes growth and drives us to be better, teaching us about others and ourselves. Competition creates creativity and your child will take chances and try something new. It’s this line of thinking that has made our culture advance.

Along with healthy competition comes learning about how to be a gracious winner, and then, how to be a gracious loser. Our children won't win at everything so they need to accept this truism (so do parents) and we need to teach them that life will not always go their way. So, next time your kid gets a 'turning up' ribbon, send it back to the school—it's counterproductive.

The following controversial faculty graduation speech by Wellesley High School English teacher, David McCullough, to the Class of 2012, is an illuminating and refreshing lesson in a world where our children have been coddled and elevated and praised beyond comprehension. McCullough's words are a valuable lesson to our children, and as a result, our culture. This is an abridged version but it set the internet alight! People were shocked: someone dared tell our children they weren't special—how dare he! (Actually, rather than being maligned, McCullough was lauded, which was nice to see). I know it's long but it's well worth the read:

“ ... [C]ommencement is life's great ceremonial beginning, with its own attendant and highly appropriate symbolism. Fitting, for example, for this auspicious rite of passage, is where we find ourselves this afternoon, the venue. Normally, I avoid clichés like the plague, wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole, but here we are on a literal level playing field. That matters. That says something. And your ceremonial costume... shapeless, uniform, one-size-fits-all. Whether male or female, tall or short, scholar or slacker, spray-tanned prom queen or intergalactic X-Box assassin, each of you is dressed, you'll notice, exactly the same. And your diploma... but for your name, is exactly the same.

All of this is as it should be, because none of you is special.

You are not special. You are not exceptional.

Contrary to what your u9 soccer trophy suggests, your glowing seventh grade report card, despite every assurance of a certain corpulent purple dinosaur, that nice Mister Rogers and your batty Aunt Sylvia, no matter how often your maternal caped crusader has swooped in to save you... you're nothing special.

Yes, you've been pampered, cosseted, doted upon, helmeted, bubble-wrapped. Yes, capable adults with other things to do have held you, kissed you, fed

you, wiped your mouth, wiped your bottom, trained you, taught you, tutored you, coached you, listened to you, counseled you, encouraged you, consoled you and encouraged you again. You've been nudged, cajoled, wheedled and implored. You've been feted and fawned over and called sweetie pie. Yes, you have. And, certainly, we've been to your games, your plays, your recitals, your science fairs. Absolutely, smiles ignite when you walk into a room, and hundreds gasp with delight at your every tweet. Why, maybe you've even had your picture in the Townsman! And now you've conquered high school... and, indisputably, here we all have gathered for you, the pride and joy of this fine community, the first to emerge from that magnificent new building...

But do not get the idea you're anything special. Because you're not.

The empirical evidence is everywhere, numbers even an English teacher can't ignore. Newton, Natick, Nee... I am allowed to say Needham, yes? ...that has to be two thousand high school graduates right there, give or take, and that's just the neighborhood Ns. Across the country no fewer than 3.2 million seniors are graduating about now from more than 37,000 high schools. That's 37,000 valedictorians... 37,000 class presidents... 92,000 harmonizing altos... 340,000 swaggering jocks... 2,185,967 pairs of Uggs. But why limit ourselves to high school? After all, you're leaving it. So think about this: even if you're one in a million, on a planet of 6.8 billion that means there are nearly 7,000 people just like you. Imagine standing somewhere over there on Washington Street on Marathon Monday and watching sixty-eight hundred yous go running by. And consider for a moment the bigger picture: your planet, I'll remind you, is not the center of its solar system, your solar system is not the center of its galaxy, your galaxy is not the center of the universe. In fact, astrophysicists assure us the universe has no center; therefore, you cannot be it. Neither can Donald Trump... which someone should tell him... although that hair is quite a phenomenon.

"But, Dave," you cry, "Walt Whitman tells me I'm my own version of perfection! Epictetus tells me I have the spark of Zeus!" And I don't disagree. So that makes 6.8 billion examples of perfection, 6.8 billion sparks of Zeus. You see, if everyone is special, then no one is. If everyone gets a trophy, trophies become meaningless. In our unspoken but not so subtle Darwinian competition with one another—which springs, I think, from our fear of our own insignificance, a subset of our dread of mortality — we have of late, we Americans, to our detriment, come to love accolades more than genuine achievement. We have come to see them as the point — and we're happy to compromise standards, or ignore reality, if we suspect that's the quickest way, or only way, to have something to put on the mantelpiece, something to pose with, crow about, something with which to leverage ourselves into a better spot on the social totem pole. No longer is it how you play the game, no

longer is it even whether you win or lose, or learn or grow, or enjoy yourself doing it... Now it's "So what does this get me?" As a consequence, we cheapen worthy endeavors, and building a Guatemalan medical clinic becomes more about the application to Bowdoin than the well-being of Guatemalans. It's an epidemic — and in its way, not even dear old Wellesley High is immune... one of the best of the 37,000 nationwide, Wellesley High School... where good is no longer good enough, where a B is the new C, and the midlevel curriculum is called Advanced College Placement. And I hope you caught me when I said "one of the best." I said "one of the best" so we can feel better about ourselves, so we can bask in a little easy distinction, however vague and unverifiable, and count ourselves among the elite, whoever they might be, and enjoy a perceived leg up on the perceived competition. But the phrase defies logic. By definition there can be only one best. You're it or you're not.

If you've learned anything in your years here I hope it's that education should be for, rather than material advantage, the exhilaration of learning. You've learned, too, I hope, as Sophocles assured us, that wisdom is the chief element of happiness. (Second is ice cream... just an fyi) I also hope you've learned enough to recognize how little you know... how little you know now... at the moment... for today is just the beginning. It's where you go from here that matters.

As you commence, then, and before you scatter to the winds, I urge you to do whatever you do for no reason other than you love it and believe in its importance. Don't bother with work you don't believe in any more than you would a spouse you're not crazy about, lest you too find yourself on the wrong side of a Baltimore Orioles comparison. Resist the easy comforts of complacency, the specious glitter of materialism, the narcotic paralysis of self-satisfaction. Be worthy of your advantages. And read... read all the time... read as a matter of principle, as a matter of self-respect. Read as a nourishing staple of life. Develop and protect a moral sensibility and demonstrate the character to apply it. Dream big. Work hard. Think for yourself. Love everything you love, everyone you love, with all your might. And do so, please, with a sense of urgency, for every tick of the clock subtracts from fewer and fewer; and as surely as there are commencements there are cessations, and you'll be in no condition to enjoy the ceremony attendant to that eventuality no matter how delightful the afternoon.

The fulfilling life, the distinctive life, the relevant life, is an achievement, not something that will fall into your lap because you're a nice person or mommy ordered it from the caterer. You'll note the founding fathers took pains to secure your inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—quite an active verb, "pursuit"—which leaves, I should think, little time for lying around watching parrots

rollerskate on Youtube. The first President Roosevelt, the old rough rider, advocated the strenuous life. Mr. Thoreau wanted to drive life into a corner, to live deep and suck out all the marrow. The poet Mary Oliver tells us to row, row into the swirl and roil. Locally, someone... I forget who... from time to time encourages young scholars to carpe the heck out of the diem. The point is the same: get busy, have a go at it. Don't wait for inspiration or passion to find you. Get up, get out, explore, find it yourself, and grab hold with both hands. (Now, before you dash off and get your YOLO tattoo, let me point out the illogic of that trendy little expression—because you can and should live not merely once, but every day of your life. Rather than You Only Live Once, it should be You Live Only Once... but because YOLO doesn't have the same ring, we shrug and decide it doesn't matter.)

None of this day-seizing, though, this YOLOing, should be interpreted as license for self-indulgence. Like accolades ought to be, the fulfilled life is a consequence, a gratifying byproduct. It's what happens when you're thinking about more important things. Climb the mountain not to plant your flag, but to embrace the challenge, enjoy the air and behold the view. Climb it so you can see the world, not so the world can see you. Go to Paris to be in Paris, not to cross it off your list and congratulate yourself for being worldly. Exercise free will and creative, independent thought not for the satisfactions they will bring you, but for the good they will do others, the rest of the 6.8 billion—and those who will follow them. And then you too will discover the great and curious truth of the human experience is that selflessness is the best thing you can do for yourself. The sweetest joys of life, then, come only with the recognition that you're not special.

Because everyone is."

The last line of McCullough's speech "everyone is", is what's missing in the education of our children. The education I speak of comes not only from institutions, but from the family home. Our children are being bombarded with overt and covert messages which are training them to be narcissists.

As your child grows and matures, she's being influenced about behaviour, fashion, what's cool and what's not. And trust me, they're not interested in being influenced by you, but you may be enabling the influence. The media is reinforcing what 'beautiful' is and what 'popular' looks like. There is a trend to idolise 'shallow' celebrities such as Paris Hilton, and the Kardashians, all of who are famous for being famous. This phenomenon has a name: 'The cult of the celebrity'. I remember when the weather girl on

television was just the weather girl—now she’s a celebrity. The disturbing thing is though, that these celebrities tend to be role models for young people. Paris Hilton has announced that her own idol is the plastic doll ‘Barbie’, who she says, ‘may not do anything, but she always looks great doing it’. Obviously, an emphasis on looks is about as deep as a rain puddle. In a non-narcissistic culture, the emphasis would be on doing good for others and the planet, being genuine, caring human beings who do not harm or take advantage of others.

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