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Are Today's Young People Really That Different from Previous Generations?

A Skeptical Perspective on "Generation Me"

by Kali H. Trzesniewski and M. Brent Donnellan

Commentators suggest that socio-cultural changes in recent decades, such as the rise of the culture of self-worth, declines in social connectedness, changes in parenting practices, and increases in perceptions of threat, have coalesced to create a relatively unique generation of young people (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Lasch, 1979; Putnam, 2000; Twenge, 2006). Many of these accounts portray recent generations in a negative light. For example, Americans born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s have been grouped into a single cohort, and labeled "Generation Me" because they seem to have a heightened sense of egotism, increased self-esteem, and unrealistically high expectations for their future (Twenge, 2006). This generation is also alleged to exhibit elevated levels of misery and other symptoms of psychological distress (Twenge, 2006; but see Arnett, 2007). In 2008, *60 Minutes* ran a story about members of the so-called "Millennial" generation (individuals born between 1982 and 2002) in the workplace and proclaimed that a "new breed of American worker is about to attack everything you hold sacred" (Safer, 2008).

The program described Millennials as cynical, unaccustomed to hard work, and having fragile egos because their "… childhoods filled with trophies and adulation didn't prepare them for the cold realities of work" (Safer, 2008). All in all, there seems to be considerable concern over the apparently unique characteristics of today's young people.

However, concerns about generational decline are not new. Past concerns are most clear when examining the generational gaps of the 1960s and the 1920s. For example, a 1967 *Time Magazine* article about the "hippies" stated, "To their deeply worried parents throughout the country, they seem more like dangerously deluded dropouts, candidates for a very sound spanking and a cram course in civics—if only they would return home to receive either" (The Hippies, 1967). An unnamed businessman offered a similar perspective about the "flappers" of the 1920s in a 1926 issue of the *Dallas Morning News*: "The worst part is that they don't care what people – their mothers and fathers and uncles and aunts – think of them. They haven't any sense of shame, honor or duty…Daily doses of good, old-fashioned discipline is what restless youth need" (Richardson, 1926). The psychologist G. Stanley Hall wrote in 1904 that "Modern life is hard, and in many respects increasingly so, on youth. Home, school, church, fail to recognize its nature and needs and, perhaps most of all, its perils" (p. xiv). It wouldn't surprise us if we heard older individuals make any of the preceding remarks about the young people of 2009.

As social scientists we approach questions about generational change from an empirical perspective and with a healthy dose of skepticism. This skepticism is informed by our knowledge of the complexities of birth-cohort analyses as well as our conviction that scientific research should not be used to fuel unfounded stereotypes of young people (see also Arnett, 2007). Indeed, an appreciation for the long history of sentiment regarding generational decline suggests that recent pronouncements about generational excesses should be taken with a grain of salt. In this essay we describe our perspectives on the methodology of generational studies and reiterate some of our concerns with the "Generation Me" perspective of today's young people.

What Are Cohort Effects and How Should They Be Studied?

Social scientists who study generational changes are interested in the study of birth cohort effects. A birth cohort is simply a group of individuals who share similar birthdays and are therefore thought to have experienced a common set of developmental experiences. To date, there is no universal standard for defining birth cohorts and different authors lump and split birthdates into different cohorts in fairly idiosyncratic ways. Nonetheless, the basic idea of a birth cohort effect is that individuals born in the 1960s, for example, are somehow different than individuals born in the 1970s because they had different life experiences, experiences which exerted a relatively consistent effect across all members of the birth cohort (e.g., perhaps all people exposed to the Watergate hearings as young adolescents became particularly cynical).

Unfortunately, the study of cohort effects is exceedingly difficult. At first blush, the most difficult challenge is the need for historical data. If a researcher wants to know if adolescents in 2009 have higher self-esteem than adolescents did in 1959, then such a researcher needs data on the same self-esteem measure from both groups. This

hypothetical researcher would also ideally want to document that the properties of the measurement instrument have not changed over time such that the measure was more or less valid for making trait inferences in 1959 versus 2009.

One solution to this challenge of needing historical data to identify cohort effects is to use a method known as the cross-temporal meta-analysis (see Twenge, 2006). This approach takes advantage of the extensive questionnaire data about attitudes and personality traits that different researchers have collected over the last decades. The strategy is straightforward: Collect all of the studies that included a particular measure on an age-restricted sample (e.g., college students, adolescents) and compute the association between the year of data collection and average scores on that measure. If average scores from college students on a given measure have changed from say the 1950s to the 2000s, then researchers might infer that there has been a cohort-related change in that attribute. A fundamental question is whether such an inference is valid.

We have argued that such inferences are usually not valid (e.g., Trzesniewski, 2008a). Simply put, we believe that researchers need data that are suitable for making population-based inferences and the data used in most relevant cross-temporal meta-analyses are not appropriate (see Costello, Erkanli, & Angold, 2006 for an appropriate use of the cross-temporal meta-analytic method for making population inferences). To be sure, researchers interested in generational changes are interested in generalizing to a very broad class of people (e.g., all Americans born within a certain time frame). This means that data used for generational analyses should be collected using a scientific sampling plan, a plan which permits valid inferences from a sample to a defined population of interest (e.g., all young people born from 1972 to 1980). This principle is taught in virtually all methods courses in the social sciences. As noted by Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), "… the incontrovertible fact is that, in nonprobability sampling, it is not possible to estimate sampling errors. Therefore, validity of inferences to a population cannot be ascertained" (p. 321). This concern with valid population-based inferences is the reason that there are professional pollsters and companies that specialize in assessing public opinion. A good resource for understanding some of the more technical issues behind scientific polling is available in a report entitled "20 Questions a Journalist Should Ask about Poll Results" produced by the National Council on Public Polls (http://www.ncpp.org/?q=node/4).

In short, our objection is not with the cross-temporal meta-analytic method per se, but rather our objection is that the method is usually applied to studies that are inappropriate for population-based inferences. The reality is that the college student samples that are incorporated into many of these cross-temporal meta-analytic studies were not generated using probability-based sampling methods. They are convenience samples, and as noted by Schwarz, Groves, and Schuman (1998), "[s]uch samples, be they college students who voluntarily sign up for a study or readers who respond to a questionnaire printed in a magazine, do not allow inferences to any population because their representativeness is unknown" (p. 145). In other words, the studies analyzed in the typical cross-temporal meta-analysis are not appropriate for making inferences to a defined population, such as all young people of a particular generation. Aggregating the data cannot solve this inferential dilemma.

We should also point out that college students from conventional 4-year institutions, the primary participants in most psychological research, are a fairly select group of young people. They represent approximately 20% of all American youth aged 18 to 24 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a, Table 9; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b, Table 2). Thus, even if these college student samples were designed to make inferences to that population of Americans (and remember they are not), it would still leave a clear majority of 18 to 24 years olds unrepresented in the samples analyzed by researchers using college student samples.

Given our perspective on valid population inferences, we have been relatively critical of the evidentiary basis for many of the "Generation Me" effects Twenge and her colleagues identify in their work. Twenge has responded that "it is odd they [Trzesniewski, Donnellan, and our colleague, Richard Robins] would argue for the analysis of only

randomly sampled, nationally stratified data. Very little such data exists" (Twenge, 2008, p. 1450). Here we are reminded of the valuable insights of the statistician John Tukey: "The data may not contain the answer. The combination of some data and an aching desire for an answer does not ensure that a reasonable answer can be extracted from a given body of data" (p. 74 - 75).

Importantly, there are actually existing resources that can be used to study cohort effects in a way that is valid for making population-based inferences. One such resource is the Monitoring the Future (MTF) project, an ongoing, nationally representative study of high school seniors that began in the mid 1970s (see Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1996; Johnston, O'Malley, Schulenberg, & Bachman, 1998 for a more detailed description). Across the 30 years of the study, over 450,000 high school seniors have participated in this project. Schools and participants are selected using carefully designed sampling techniques to provide a final sample each year that is generally representative of the population of high school seniors living in the 48 coterminous states who agreed to participate. Over 95% of schools approached agreed to participate and over 80% of students within those schools participated. Of those who did not participate, the most common reason was being absent from school. Although the study is voluntary (as are all survey studies conducted by ethical social scientists), only a very small portion of the students actively refused to participate (1%). Accordingly it is reasonable to assume the final sample of participants represents U.S. high school students quite well. Data were collected following standardized procedures via closed-ended questionnaires administered in classrooms by University of Michigan representatives and their assistants. This study is close to ideal for testing cohort effects because a large, representative sample of individuals of the same age have been asked the same questions for 30 years, and a full set of raw data from 1976 to 2006 is readily available in electronic format for interested researchers.

What Can Be Learned from The Monitoring the Future Survey (1976-2006)?

We conducted an analysis of change in 31 constructs that were measured in the MTF to try to address many of the "Generation Me" claims made by Twenge and her colleagues. We quantified generational changes by simply correlating year of administration with observed scores. Overall, we found little support for generational differences, finding typically small correlations, if any, between year and levels of each construct. In fact, we found no meaningful change in 22 constructs (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, in press). In particular, we found correlations that were close to zero (defined here as any correlation smaller than |.10|; Cohen, 1988) for the constructs summarized in Table 1.

Only nine effects were substantial enough to be considered a small effect (i.e., a correlation somewhere between |.10| and |.30|), and none were large enough to be considered a large effect (i.e., a correlation above |.50|). Most notably, members of more recent cohorts expressed fewer worries and concerns about social issues (r = -.23), they were less trusting of others (r = -.12), and were more cynical of institutions (e.g., r = .11). Members of more recent cohorts expressed less interest in keeping up with materialistic trends (r = -.14); however, at the same time they were more tolerant of blatant consumerism and the marketing of unnecessary material goods (r = .17). In line, with "Generation

Me" ideas, members of more recent cohorts tended to have higher expectations for their future (e.g., $r = .23$ for expecting to graduate college) and they seemed less convinced that working hard will lead to desired jobs ($r = .11$).

Table 1: Constructs Not Showing Generational Change (i.e., *r* with year of data collection less than |.10|)

Egotism	Self-Enhancement
Individualism	Self-Esteem
Locus of Control	Hopelessness
Happiness	Life Satisfaction
Loneliness	Antisocial Behavior
Time Spent Working	Political Activity
Time Spent Watching Television	The Importance of Social Status
The Importance of Religion	

Our primary conclusion from these analyses was that the bulk of the results pointed to generational consistency rather than generational differences. In fact, the direction of some correlations ran counter to the "Generation Me" profile. For example, the correlation for self-esteem ($r = -.02$) was actually negative in sign (i.e., if anything, more recent cohorts had lower scores than older cohorts), whereas the correlations for happiness ($r = .02$) and life satisfaction ($r = .02$) were positive in sign (i.e., if anything, more recent cohorts had higher scores on these variables than older cohorts, counter to a prediction of increased misery). However, given how extremely close these effects are to zero, we did not consider these constructs as showing any meaningful change over time.

All in all, we found little reason to conclude that the average member of "Generation Me" is dramatically different from members of previous generations. Today's youth seem to have the same self-esteem scores as previous generations and they appear to be just as happy and satisfied as previous generations. In fact, based on the variables we examined, today's youth seem to have psychological profiles that are generally similar to youth from the past 30 years. The potential qualifications to this generalization are that we found that more recent generations have higher expectations for their educational careers and they are a bit more cynical and distrusting than previous generations (although these trends seem to predate "Generation Me"; see Robinson & Jackson, 2001). Nonetheless, using the Monitoring the Future datasets, we found little evidence to support the conclusion that the youth of 2006 were considerably different from the youth of the late 1970s.

What About Narcissism?

There has been considerable attention to whether today's youth are more narcissistic than previous generations. Indeed, Twenge and her colleagues have recently raised concerns about an emerging "epidemic" of narcissism (e.g., Twenge & Foster, 2008). One limitation of our MTF analyses is that there was no direct measure of narcissism. Narcissism is a complex construct and it is important to understand what it is and how it is typically assessed before getting into issues of generational changes. Narcissism has a long history in psychoanalytic writings as it was perhaps first discussed Havelock Ellis (1898) who wrote of a "Narcissus-like tendency" for sexual urges to be directed toward the self in the form of autoeroticism. That said, it is difficult to precisely define narcissism as it is understood by

contemporary psychologists because researchers in psychiatry, clinical psychology, and personality/social psychology do not always agree about the best ways to conceptualize this construct (e.g., Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008).

The vast majority of social and personality psychology research uses a measure called the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) to study narcissism. Cain et al. (2008) estimate that over 75% of social/personality research on narcissism since the mid-1980s has used this measure. In many ways, the NPI's content has come to define the construct of narcissism for social and personality researchers. However, Cain et al. (2008) also note that the "content of the NPI total score may reflect a confusing mix of adaptive and maladaptive content" (p. 643). Likewise, Emmons (1987) noted that "Narcissism [as assessed by the NPI], rather than being a unidimensional construct, consists of four moderately correlated factors tapping the domains of leadership, self-admiration, superiority, and interpersonal exploitiveness [sic]." (p. 15). There is debate over the underlying structure of the measure and different groups argue that there are two, three, four, or seven reasonably separable constructs embedded within the NPI. The reality is that the NPI total score seems to capture some amalgam of confidence, leadership, and social potency along with more socially harmful elements of personality such as a sense of entitlement and a willingness to exploit others. This fact makes it difficult to give a clear and unambiguous interpretation of what is represented by a relatively high score on this measure, as it might reflect heightened levels of socially toxic traits (e.g., entitlement), somewhat obnoxious traits (e.g., vanity), socially adaptive traits (e.g., leadership), or some indeterminate mixture of these components.

Despite concern about interpretation of the total NPI score, this measure has been used to examine whether narcissism is increasing in today's youth (e.g., Trzesniewski et al., 2008b; Twenge et al., 2008). Here we should emphasize that none of the results from these studies should be used to generalize to all American young people because none were collected with scientific sampling plans. At most, these studies should spark curiosity and fuel debate about an important topic. The earliest NPI data point is from Raskin and Terry (1988) who collected data from students at U.C. Santa Cruz and U.C. Berkeley from 1979 to 1985. The average response at that time was to endorse 39% of the items in a narcissistic fashion. We reported that the average score for a large sample of University of California at Davis undergraduates was about 38% in 2006 (Trzesniewski et al., 2008b). This figure was quite similar to the mean reported by Raskin and Terry (1988) and thus we were not terribly impressed by the evidence for secular changes at U.C. schools from Northern California, the epicenter of the self-esteem movement. That said, we also issued this caveat about our own work: "…consistent with our sampling concerns, these results should be interpreted cautiously because they are based on convenience samples" (Trzesniewski et al., 2008a, p. 910). Twenge et al. (2008) estimated that the average NPI score in 2006 was 43% versus 38% in 1982. The absolute difference between these estimates amounts to around 2 items on the NPI. In all, the recent discussion about an "epidemic" of narcissism boils down to a small number of items and a fairly small range of average scores (38% to 43%) on a measure that can be controversial to interpret. Viewed from such a perspective, it is not clear that any of these NPI findings should be used to make the case that there is an emerging epidemic of narcissism.

Furthermore, the actual meta-analytic results in Twenge et al. (2008) paint a more nuanced picture of secular increases in narcissism than is often portrayed in summaries and media accounts. Simply put, increases may be due to increased confidence or self-sufficiency in young women attending college today. Twenge et al. (2008) reported that the trend for increasing narcissism was apparently more pronounced for women than men. The trend for an increase in men was not even statistically detectable based on their sub-analysis of the 44 studies that had information reported by gender (out of 85 total studies). This gender effect may have profound implications for how the purported secular

change in narcissism is best interpreted, especially in light of the perspective that the NPI measures multiple traits, including things like leadership, social potency, and confidence. The Twenge et al. analysis might simply indicate that today's generation of women who attend college are more confident and assertive than previous generations of women who attended college. This seems to be an equally plausible but far less nefarious interpretation for any observed changes in the NPI (e.g., as an indicator of an epidemic). In short, we are very reluctant to conclude that any observed changes in the NPI are an indicator an epidemic of pathological traits.

Finally, we should add that full blown Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) or the personality disorder that is diagnosed by clinicians and psychiatrists is very rare (Lenzenweger, Loranger, Korfine, & Neff, 1997; Torgersen, 2005; see Cain et al., 2008; p. 648 for a review). In fact, NPD appears to be one of the least commonly observed "official" personality disorders (Torgersen, 2005). These considerations have made us very skeptical of the idea that there is good evidence for an epidemic of narcissism. To be clear, we are not saying that the claim has been definitely falsified rather we are saying that there are reasons to be skeptical of such a claim.

Summing Up

Questions about generational differences are inherently difficult to address and this is bound to create discussion, dissent, and even outright controversy. As it stands, we believe that the best evidence thus far points to consistency over the past 30 years, whereas Twenge and her colleagues believe the evidence points to widespread generational changes. We imagine that readers might be puzzled by the seemingly inconsistent portraits of today's youth described in this increasingly contentious debate. Moreover, to many non-social scientists it might seem painfully obvious that today's young people are ruder, cruder, and more self-important than previous generations, based on their own observations and experiences.

In response to any of these anecdotal impressions of youth we point to the considerable amount of psychological research suggesting that great care should be exercised when forming generalizations about entire groups of people (e.g., all individuals born in a particular decade) based on limited perceptions that might be unduly influenced by extremely memorable exemplars. Consider how easy it is to think of a particular young person who is arrogant, egotistical, miserable, extremely lazy, or any of the other less flattering adjectives used in reference to that segment of the population. This ease may simply reflect an availability bias, reflecting the fact that more "memorable individuals" stick out in our memories (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). It is also the case that once a stereotyped generalization is established, a confirmation bias may set in whereby individuals selectively attend and recall pieces of information that are consistent with that generalization. It appears that individuals are less likely to pay attention and remember pieces of information that are inconsistent with their preconceptions. Thus, there may be psychological reasons for the impressions held by adults about kids "these days" that have little to do with actual generational differences (for a review of social cognitive mechanisms involved in stereotype formation and maintenance see Hamilton & Sherman, 1994).

We are also convinced that there is reasonably good evidence for normative personality development with age (see e.g., Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005) such that individuals, on average, appear to become more conscientious, more emotionally stable, and more agreeable as they age. It might simply be that older adults in 2009 overlook the personality changes that they themselves experienced as they matured from young people into full-fledged adults with the "typical" responsibilities of adulthood such as earning a living, participating in a committed romantic partnership, and taking care of children. Thus, the somewhat negative impressions of the characteristics of today's young people might just reflect contrasts between the personalities and preoccupations of those in their 40s and 50s as compared with the personalities and preoccupations of those in their late teens and early 20s.

The more difficult question then remains – is there any way to reconcile our position with that of Twenge and her colleagues? Overall, we believe that the differences in our respective positions boil down to two main issues: (1) differences in the willingness to generalize to entire populations of young people from convenience samples that were not collected using scientific sampling methods and; (2) differences in the interpretation of effect sizes associated with available generational trends. The first issue seems to us to be fairly cut-and-dry as we believe that relatively few social scientists would disagree with our position that inferences from convenience samples are more like "faith-based" appeals rather than scientifically valid inferences.

The second issue regarding effect sizes is more of a matter of style and preference as the interpretation of trends requires the application of subjective judgment. For example, let's assume that the rise in narcissism truly amounts to an increase of two scale points on the NPI from 1982 to 2006 (the estimate from the Twenge et al. meta-analysis). Is a change of two scale points practically or theoretically important and noteworthy? Different researchers will attach different degrees of significance to a change of two scale points on a self-report measure that is based on an arbitrary metric (see Blanton & Jaccard, 2006). We admit that we are unsure as to the real-world meaning of such a change and we strongly question whether a two scale point increase has any bearing on who should be selected for a jury trial. We submit that no one knows when a change of a few scale points on the NPI becomes problematic or whether two scale points on this kind of measure should provide an impetus for societal concern. The bottom line is that we are uncertain as to what kind of applied significance should be attached to any apparent changes on the NPI.

In light of these issues, we argue that a conservative approach to generational change is warranted given the quality of the existing evidence and the real possibility that negative stereotypes of today's young people might be reinforced by potentially flawed studies (Arnett, 2007). To be frank, we are concerned that the findings reported by Twenge and her colleagues may help justify negative impressions of youth given that apparently long-held stereotypes (see the opening paragraph) are now somehow "validated" by scientific research. At this point, we are simply not convinced that the evidence warrants any strong conclusions about generational changes that have applied significance. In line with our conservative approach, the editors of a special issue of the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* summarized the literature with respect to the evidence and implications of generational differences at work: "many of the empirical findings are less strong and consistent than popular sentiment suggests. Indeed, there may be more variation among members within a generation than there is between generations" (Macky, Gardner, Forsyth, 2008, p. 860). At this point, we strongly concur.

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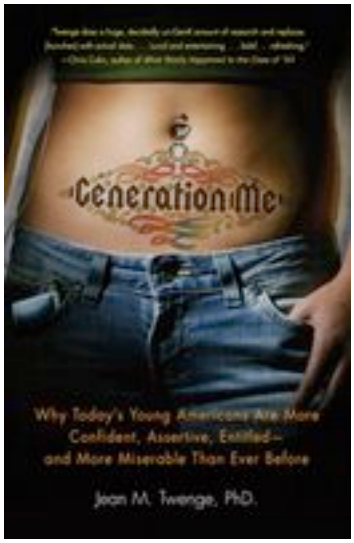
Generation Me in the Jury Box

by Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell



A group of strangers sits in front of you in the courtroom. Who are these people? What are their individual experiences? How will those experiences influence their decisions in your case? Some might start to answer these questions by putting jurors into categories – how many are male, how many are female, how many of each race or ethnicity. Most would also notice age, and would wonder how that will affect jurors' perceptions. But age is actually two variables – age itself, or how experiencing more years of life affects one's perspective – and generation, or how one's attitudes and personality have been shaped by the culture of the times.

Until recently, much of the material on generational differences was based on conjecture. Authors such as William Strauss and Neil Howe (*Generations*, *Millennials Rising*) argued that generations came in cycles of four (for example, they predicted that those born after 1982 would resemble the "Greatest Generation" who fought WWII and would thus be civically-oriented rule followers). However, outside of some broad behavioral data from the U.S. Census, they had no real data to support their theories – nothing that would confirm or disconfirm the psychological differences captured in their ideas.

I have spent my research career trying to change that, conducting almost 20 studies that explore how generations differ from each other psychologically. Initially, I had no agenda and was a fan of Strauss and Howe's books. In the end, however, much of what my research uncovered was inconsistent with Strauss and Howe's theories. At least in terms of psychological differences, generations do not occur in cycles; instead, the

changes are primarily linear, with each generation taking the previous generations' traits to the next level. There is no sudden shift in personality for someone born before or after 1982 (Strauss and Howe's cutoff for what they call the "Millennial" generation). Thus generational labels such as Boomers, Xers, and GenY are of limited use. What's more important is the number of birth years separating two people – e.g, 20 years or 40 years. Although I occasionally use generational labels (such as Generation Me or GenMe to describe today's young people), I primarily rely on labels such as "older" and "younger" generations; those in the middle in terms of age (today, the GenXers in their 30s and 40s) will typically fall in the middle in terms of traits and attitudes.

The Data Don't Disagree: Younger Jurors Are Likely To Be More Narcissistic

There is another major difference between my findings and Strauss and Howe's theories: the most consistent finding across all of my studies was an increase in individualistic traits. Many other authors (e.g., David Myers in *The American Paradox*, Francis Fukuyama in *The Great Disruption*) have documented the shift toward more individualistic behaviors and attitudes, and the trend appears in psychological data as well. I've found that younger generations score significantly higher in individualistic traits such as assertiveness, agency (including acting as a leader and being dominant), self-esteem, and even extremes of individualism such as narcissism (Twenge, 1997, 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Twenge et al., 2008). This, of course, contradicted Howe and Strauss' idea that those born after 1982 would be concerned more with society than with themselves.

The finding regarding narcissism resulted in a research paper that purported to show different effects (Trzesniewski et al., 2008). However, it is somewhat strange that these allegedly opposing findings have been framed as a "debate," mostly because our datasets and theirs actually show very similar results. Our study of narcissistic traits, drawn from the responses of college students across the country, showed an increase in narcissistic traits between 1982 and 2006 using 85 samples, with the change especially strong since 2000. Trzesniewski and colleagues' (2008) data from UC Davis also show an increase in narcissism between 2002 and 2007, with the year-by-year rate of change the same or even larger than the increase in our analysis (Twenge & Foster, 2008). Thus both datasets show an increase in narcissism during the most recent decade.

The only place we differ is in what happened before 2002, and the divergence stems from a substantial difference in the data used in each evaluation. Their analysis includes just two datapoints prior to 2002 (one from 1982 and one from 1996). Our analysis includes 58 datapoints collected between 1982 and 2001 that also include their two. In addition, these two datapoints are from a different campus (UC Berkeley) than their later data (from UC Davis). Thus it is very possible that differences by campus are causing or contributing to the variation – with time and campus perfectly confounded, drawing conclusions is difficult. After 2002, when the data are all from one campus, they show the same rise in narcissism we found. In short, everyone agrees narcissism has been rising the last five years.

A completely independent study has also found evidence for a generational difference in narcissism. A group sponsored by the National Institutes of Health interviewed a nationally representative sample of almost 35,000 Americans in 2005 and asked them if they had ever experienced certain symptoms; they then determined if these symptoms met the criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD, the clinical form of the trait). Because the researchers asked about lifetime experience, one would expect that older people, who have lived many more years, would be more likely to have experienced the disorder. However, the data showed the opposite: Only 3% of people over age 60 had experienced NPD, compared to 9% of people in their twenties – even though a 25-year-old has had only 7 years to experience the disorder (which cannot be diagnosed until one is 18), compared to 40 years for someone who is 65 (Stinson et al., 2008). Even if older people failed to recall some earlier instances of symptoms, this suggests a strong generational increase in narcissism.

There is also cultural evidence supporting the conclusion: Plastic surgery and procedures have increased fivefold in just 10 years; even invasive surgeries like breast augmentations quadrupled between 1997 and 2007 (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2008). The square footage of U.S. homes nearly doubled in 30 years (National Association of Homebuilders, 2006), and levels of debt rose from 16% of disposible income in 1978 to 19% in 2007 (United States Federal Reserve, 2008). The circulation of celebrity gossip magazines has surged even as other types of magazines have faltered. High school students are markedly overconfident about their future educational and career prospects (Reynolds et al., 2006). Other changes are less quantifiable but more stunning: In 2006, it became possible to hire fake paparazzi to follow you around when you go out at night. Most packages include a copy of one of the shots on a fake celebrity magazine cover. These changes are so large and pervasive that they suggest the change in individual-level narcissism is a pale reflection of the much bigger sea change in the culture. (Twenge & Campbell, 2009; we discuss these changes at length in *The Narcissism Epidemic*, also addressing where they came from).

There Are Meaningful Generational Differences

Trzesniewski and Donnellan (in press) also present a critique based on their analysis of data from a nationwide sample of high school students called Monitoring the Future. This paper concludes that there are few generational differences. However, the data show many statistically significant generational differences, most of which are consistent with my findings. Since the 1970s, high school students have become more likely to agree that "people should do their own thing," that having lots of money is important, and that it's okay to buy things you don't need. There are also small increases in self-satisfaction and believing one is more intelligent than peers. Consistent with a cultural boosting of self-feelings, GenMe students are twice as likely to report earning an "A" average even though fewer do many hours of homework (Twenge, in press). More recent generations are also more likely to anticipate that they will be "very good" at important adult roles such as spouse, parent, and worker (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). As before, this is not a "debate" with competing data, as both datasets show similar results.

However, not all of the results are consistent with our data. For example, Monitoring the Future does not show an overall increase in self-esteem, as our data does across middle school, high school, and college samples. It does show a small increase in self-liking, however (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). In science as in law, the best approach is to rely on the preponderance of the evidence, and most of the evidence, from most sources, shows an increase in positive self-feelings over the generations.

There are other meaningful generational differences as well. Other data showed increases in anxiety and poor mental health, perhaps the price of focusing on the self rather than relationships (Twenge, 2000). Younger generations have a more external locus of control, meaning they are more likely to believe that their fate (and that of the country and world) is determined by luck and powerful others rather than their own actions (Twenge et al., 2004). The

upside of individualism is evident as well: Less prejudice, more tolerance, and more opportunities regardless of a person's background (Twenge, 2006). Younger generations take it more or less for granted that women and minorities will participate fully in society and in the workforce.

Generational Differences Are Clearly Relevant

Trzesniewski and Donnellan (in press) also argue that generational changes are too small to be relevant. However, many generational changes are in fact quite large. For example, 82% of 1990s college students scored higher on anxiety than the average college student in the 1950s (Twenge, 2000); 65% of college students in 2006 scored higher in narcissism than the average 1982 student (Twenge et al., 2008).

Yet even the smaller generational differences are worth noting. Whether a given difference is large enough to matter is an extremely subjective judgment. The effect of secondhand smoke on lung cancer, which has spawned restrictive laws across the country, is less than one-fourth the size of the change in narcissism over 24 years in the nationwide data. It is less than a tenth of the size of the change in anxiety over 50 years. It is half the size of the change in agreeing it is good to "do your own thing," which the other authors considered too small to deign to discuss in their paper. It is also smaller than the increase in thinking one is more intelligent than one's peers, which the other authors also dismissed as negligible.

There are several reasons to take relatively small effects seriously. First, small changes at the average multiply into larger ones at the extremes. In a bell curve, a small shift at the middle pushes the tail of the distribution higher so that two or three times as many people now fall into the extreme category. Narcissism is a good illustration – the small to moderate change at the average translates into three times as many people in their twenties having experience with NPD as compared to people in their sixties. So if one generation scores higher in assertiveness on average, there will certainly be those who fit this generalization and those who are notable exceptions. An average change does not mean that everyone fits the profile. But there will be two or three times as many who are highly assertive in the younger generation compared to the older one.

Many generational differences are the same size (or in many cases larger) than gender differences. Yet few would question the wisdom of paying attention to the gender composition of a jury. Gender is also an illustration of small average changes multiplying into larger ones at the extreme: On average, the gender difference in aggression is just a little larger than the change over time in narcissism in 24 years. Yet our courtrooms and prisons are filled with many, many more men than women who have committed violent crimes.

Trzesniewski & Donnellan (in press) have also argued that we believe there are generational differences because older people's perceptions have changed over time. However, all of the data presented in this article – and by Trzesniewski and Donnellan themselves -- come from reports from young people themselves. Thus this explanation does not fit the data. In fact, a recent Harris poll suggests that members of the younger generations actually have more negative views of their generation that those in older generations do (Harper, 2008).

It is also very important to note that these changes are not just generational: They are cultural (this is covered in more depth in our book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*). As authors like Myers and Fukuyama pointed out, Western cultures shifted decisively away from duty and social rules throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s and beyond, actively promoting the notion that the individual should come first. As I document in *Generation Me* (Twenge, 2006), parents began to tell children they could be anything they wanted to be. Popular songs declared that loving yourself was the greatest love of all. Schools began programs to raise children's self-esteem. Pop psychology taught that you have to love yourself first before you can love someone else. When a culture

changes, the younger members experience and reflect the changes most strongly; however, the young do not raise themselves.

Generational Differences Are Important To Your Trial Practice

In practical terms, what do these generational differences mean for the pool of potential jurors sitting in front of you? Younger jurors are more likely to be blind to differences in gender, race, and sexual orientation. A case of gay domestic violence, for example, would not faze many of them, whereas many older jurors would be confused or disturbed by such a case. Due to their more external locus of control, younger jurors will be more willing to believe arguments that defendants acted due to outside circumstances (e.g., childhood abuse, coming from a disadvantaged background). The older the juror, the more likely he or she respects authority and the rules of society. They may be more willing to automatically believe the testimony of law enforcement. In addition, the older generation is more likely to do what they are told. In contrast, younger generations need to be told *why* they are doing something. Younger generations may feel more entitled to perks and time off. Especially among those high in narcissistic traits (especially among the 9% with experience with NPD), younger jurors may feel less empathy for people (whether victims or perpetrators). A more engaging style may be necessary to engage younger jurors, who are used to multimedia and multitasking; many schools, for example, have abandoned the straight lecture because it puts this generation to sleep.

Overall, there are meaningful and important generational differences in personality traits and attitudes. Many other factors, such as gender, race, and class, will also influence jurors' viewpoints, but generation should certainly be considered. We might ask, "Why *not* consider generation?" Even if a generational effect is small, it could mean the difference between a favorable trial result and an unfavorable verdict for your client.

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We asked three experienced trial consultants to respond to the preceding and opposing perspectives on narcissism in our youth. Ken Broda-Bahm, Beth Foley and Doug Keene offer their thoughts on the implications of the foregoing research for jury selection, case narrative, and evidence-gathering.

Your Juror's Generation is a Clue, But Not a Verdict

by Ken Broda-Bahm

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Earlier this Spring, former professor Ward Churchill won a wrongful termination case against the University of Colorado. As Plaintiff, he argued that the lengthy investigation of his scholarship that led to his termination was a direct response to an essay he wrote after September 11th, 2001, comparing the victims of that attack to "little Eichmann's" who could be blamed for the suffering caused by America's financial empire. The jury was notable not only for its verdict, but also for its composition: Many of the more vocal members of this Denver jury were in their twenties and the oldest juror on that panel was just thirty-six.

Clearly in that case, and with any case, the jurors' verdict reflects a complex reaction to the evidence and to the particular story. But the practical question raised by these essays is whether we are reasonable to suspect that a generational effect may also be at work. If the Plaintiff believed that a younger cohort of jurors would be more likely to be assertive individualists apt to be impressed by a self-styled anti-authoritarian professor, and less likely to be civically-oriented social rule-followers who would be shocked by a lack of patriotism, were they on firm or shaky ground?

I will leave it to others more familiar with the various datasets in the preceding essays by Twenge and Campbell and by Trzesniewski and Donnellan to weigh in on their scientific value. But what seems clear to me from the essays is that there are at least some indicators from nationally representative samples showing modest to high generational differences consistent with a turn toward greater narcissism But it also seems clear that there are some strong reasons to believe that such differences are not uniform across either the spectrum of narcissistic attitudes or the relevant populations.

Faced with that, the option of saying "the jury isn't in yet" on generational differences, may be an academic luxury. For all of the jury selections, witness preparation meetings, and pre-trial research projects that are happening now, the question is what the practicing attorney and litigation consultant should do with the issue of generational difference at the present stage.

My own response is that the current knowledge on generational differences within the jury pool serves a heuristic function (a reason to ask further), but not a determinative function. That is, they don't provide a complete answer – at least not one that reliably applies to a given individual in the jury box. Twenge and Campbell, for example, note in their opening paragraph that the natural reaction to the group of strangers in the jury box is to start putting them into categories – age, gender, race, etc. While it is only human to notice those distinctions, experienced trial attorneys and litigation consultants are no doubt aware that these demographics are not the place to start, not only because they are unlikely to legally serve as a basis for a peremptory challenge, but more so because they serve as only weak and unreliable markers of what really counts when the case comes down to deliberations: attitudes. While a large-sample study might tell you that a given demographic category has a modest relationship to an attitude of interest, in the small-sample setting of the jury box, it is just the attitude that matters, and one cannot presume that an individual carries the same attitudes as the majority of her gender, race, or age-cohort.

While there are well-known risks to applying an analysis of the aggregate to a decision on an individual, the generational findings – even as they are contested – do provide good reasons to ask further about jurors' attitudes, using their generation as a clue to associated attitudes, but not as a reliable predictor. That is, while social scientists may or may not be able to make a reliable generalization, attorneys should not make a strike based solely on the presumption that a general trait adheres to an individual in question. But as jury pools include more and more individuals born after 1982, attorneys would still be well advised to ask voir dire questions focusing on attitudes that tend to be associated with narcissism.

Specifically, there are several potential attitudes of younger jurors that would be highly relevant in a litigation context, but they would not necessarily be all in the same direction. Jurors with a higher external locus of control, for example, would find it easier to side with a plaintiff in blaming factors like management and work conditions for a termination, and would be less likely to focus on that worker's personal responsibility. Jurors who tend to be more individualistic rather than relational, however, may be less interested in evidence about a given manager's poor relational style in the same case. Jurors who are

less oriented toward rule-following could more easily base their verdict on fairness or personal ethics rather than the law. However, those jurors who show less empathy may be less motivated to identify with the interests of the plaintiff as the injured party. The relevance of each of these attitudes will vary for every trial. Ultimately, the attorney will need to identify the specific relevant attitudes in a given juror instead of relying on broad categories like narcissism.

While attorneys and consultants will have many ways of addressing locus of control, individualism, and the like, there are also themes to be drawn from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory questions which could serve as a foundation for voir dire. While some questions would seem too personal or too "psychological" to ask a juror in open court, others would sound more natural. For example, the common question about whether one "enjoys managing other people on the job," gets at the dimensions of leadership and authority. The question of whether a person "enjoys taking responsibility for a decision" or whether they "feel better about a decision made by a group" gets at the dimension of individualism. The question of whether "accidents just happen," or whether "accidents usually have a cause" gets at the dynamic of locus of control.

Of course, the relevance and phrasing of these questions will vary for each case. But in the end, a potential juror's answers to questions like these will matter much more than their membership in a given generational cohort, or even their score on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Importantly, I would give the same advice even if the validity of "Generation Me" were undisputed. Knowing that there is, or may be, an aggregate difference is just the first step when the goal to assess the individual.

Returning to the example of the case of the fired professor used to begin this response, it is likely that Churchill's legal team would agree with Twenge and Campbell's conclusion that jurors' generational effect, at least as a starting point, "could mean the difference between a favorable trial result and an unfavorable verdict." However, it is also likely that the trial team would be quick to add that one shouldn't take that conclusion too far, especially when looking at damages in that case. The younger generation's attributed support for wealth, conspicuous consumption, and material goods was not in evidence, however, since they awarded the Plaintiff just $1.

Response to two perspectives on Narcissism in the Jury Box

by Beth Foley

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I have great respect for the cohort concept and have found it can provide valuable information for trial consultants as we try to understand how individuals and small groups make decisions in litigation. I'm convinced there are important distinctions between different cohorts that matter, but I'm not convinced narcissism is one of them.

To begin, I understand a cohort to be a group of people born over a relatively short and contiguous time period who are deeply influenced and bound together by events that happened in their formative years (approximately 14 to 18 years of age). Cohorts are best identified by distinct differences in values and attitudes from the cohort that immediately preceded them. For example, Gen X does not make much sense as a cohort unless you view them relative to the characteristics that defined the long-running baby boomer cohort. To my knowledge, no cohort has ever been defined by one characteristic or one personality trait like Gen Me.

Twenge and Campbell's article uses the concepts of generation and cohort interchangeably throughout its discussion and this is confusing because generation and cohort don't mean the same thing. Trzesniewski and Donnellan's article applies these two terms in a more disciplined way, which is important. Sociologists like Norman Ryder, a pioneer in cohort research, have always acknowledged that separating generational effects from other significant life and psychological influences is complex. Cohorts are vast groups of individuals with unique personalities and myriad traits, so studying a cohort is always a bit elusive. Overall, I think Twenge and Campbell's approach is too loose and inconsistent with these important concepts.

Twenge and Campbell's article starts out using the concept of a cohort and even refers to the most commonly accepted cohort groups (WWII, baby boomers and Gen X) but then in the next sentence abandons the paradigm of a cohort and loosely defines groups by age: "Although I occasionally use generation labels (such as Generation Me or Gen Me to describe today's young people), I will primarily rely on labels such as "older" and "younger" generations; those in the middle in terms of age (today the Gen Xers in their 30s and 40s) will typically fall in the middle in terms of traits and attitudes as well."

It's difficult for me to get my arms around Twenge and Campbell's conclusions because I wonder if the research is describing a sociological trend in the young generation or a psychological description of a cohort. It's also unclear to me which cohort they are referring to in the narcissism epidemic. The Gen Me cohort they arbitrarily define is anyone born after 1970. However, there is already a cohort born after 1970 and that is Gen X (1966 to 1976) The newest cohort is Gen Y, also known as the Millenials. Although there is much debate as to the years that define Gen Y, many believe it is anyone born from 1977 to the present. Is Gen Me a sub-cohort of Gen X or Gen Y?

I agree with Trzesniewski and Donnellan's conclusion that Gen Me is a pejorative term to describe America's youth**.** I have studied cohorts for several years, and although individualism and selfishness have been observed in Gen X and Y, it certainly does not accurately define them or the complexity of their cohorts.

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The "convenience samples" used in Twenge and Campbell's article make me doubt the validity of the research The sample of college students ages 18 to 24 indicates the data is skewed in many ways, the most obvious being socioeconomic. The sample doesn't seem adequate to reflect the whole population of young people driving a sociological trend.

The historical Monitoring the Future Survey data that Trzesniewski and Donnellan looked at may be a better sample because most psychologists define a person's "formative years" as starting before they go to college (if they go to college at all), 14 to 20 years of age, so a sample of high school students may be more appropriate for cohort analysis than a college sample.

Overall, I'm not surprised that Trzesniewski and Donnellan's research did not find evidence to support significant difference in personality traits between the youth of 1970 and 2006. Nor am I surprised that it did not see signs of an emerging epidemic of narcissism in young Americans.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) raises more questions than answers and is clearly difficult to interpret. Maybe someone who scores high on the NPI is just a confident leader, not a narcissist. Just because some people reported they experienced symptoms on the NPI measurement does not mean they are narcissistic or behave in narcissistic ways. Even if people have some symptoms on the NPI measurement, it doesn't mean that it's the most important aspect of their decision making. Twenge and Campbell's argument goes beyond describing what characteristics they see in younger people, to making subjective interpretations about their personalities,

One conclusion I do agree with Twenge and Campbell about is that even if a generational effect is small, it could make all the difference in the world in a jury trial. I do think the identification of a possible sociological trend in young people is insightful. I will look for markers of this in mock jurors and real jurors, not to diagnose narcissism, but to identify self-centered jurors and how that might influence decision making in a specific lawsuit, if at all.

As a trial consultant, I've always known I live somewhere between practitioners and statisticians. That is to say, I fly at 30,000 feet looking for clues or trends that will help me figure out what is driving decision-making, but I can't stay there. I have to get in the weeds to help my clients strategize and pick juries. I start with statistics and trends drawn from large populations, but I have to verify it is actually influencing decision making in my client's specific case. My experience is that in the world of small group decision-making (aka jury trials) qualitative research methods are the best tools to help a researcher see the distinctions between cohorts and how personality traits may affect decision making. Subtleties like rhetorical preferences, notions of witness credibility or the best way to teach a complicated concept to different cohorts can be identified in qualitative research.

I think it is possible that the younger generations studied by Twenge and Campbell may exhibit higher levels of selfishness than older generations, but I doubt it. One could argue the baby boomers are a self-absorbed cohort too. I can say that because I am a baby boomer. I always cringe when I am reminded that one characteristic of boomers is we came of age in the self-help era, e.g., I'm okay; you are okay and how to be self-actualized So, if there is a "Gen Me" it might actually have started with, well, me.

A more apt distinction of the baby boomer cohort is their most predominant economic value: "spend, spend, borrow, spend more. Boomers are the first cohort to make credit and debt a way of life. I think it's safe to say, this value has caused some boomers to do some very selfish things. Most of the CEOs running Wall Street for the last 10 years are baby boomers. Who knows about the deregulators, mortgage bankers, politicians and borrowers, but it's a good bet more of them are boomers than Gen Xers. A recent report from the Center for Economic Policy shows that it's baby boomers who are getting hit particularly hard in the current housing market.

This all indicates to me that the baby boomers are probably driving trends Twenge and Campbell describe, such as an increase in the square footage of homes and a fivefold increase in plastic surgery. I am not a clinical psychologist, so I don't know if the boomers are narcissistic or not. At the very least, we have to acknowledge that if the baby boomers' children are a little bit too self-absorbed, it's understandable.
If the baby boomers are just as self-centered as their kids, that would explain why Trzesniewski and Donnellan's findings indicate more consistency in young generations since the 1970s than differences.

In conclusion, I agree that normative personality development with age is a better explanation for any trend detected in data presented by Twenge and Campbell. One fundamental reason for this conclusion is that the qualities that distinguish a cohort don't change as they age as evidenced by the baby boomers. The WWII generation starts and ends with the same core values consistently throughout their lives. Maybe all people are just a little more self-centered in their twenties, but that fact alone does not adequately define a cohort.

TJE: Comment on Narcissism articles

by Douglas L. Keene

Dr. Doug Keene (dkeene@keenetrial.com) is a psychologist and founder of a national trial consulting firm, Keene Trial Consulting, based in Austin, Texas. He is the current President of the American Society of Trial Consultants.

As someone who has taught both statistics and personality assessment before finding my way to litigation consulting, these articles felt like a trip home after many years on the road. The issues and concerns of both authors are very familiar.

A litigator can't help but to read (or at least scan) the heavy statistics battle in the article without asking a couple of very sensible questions:

1. Is there a difference between generations?
2. Should I be concerned about it as it affects litigation?

The answer to the first question is "Yes". [Although we can't rule out the possibility that it is essentially narcissistic to assume that ones' generation is unique. Usually, these kinds of analyses seem to criticize a current trajectory, such as calling younger age groups lazy or narcissistic.] The harder part of Question 1 regards what the differences are, and how they shape juror behavior. How are younger people going to respond to the issues in a case differently than older jurors? To the characters in the story, and to the kinds of decisions they will have to make? Will their behavior as jurors be controlled by swelling levels of traits such as narcissism, or will they be more affected by worries about soaring unemployment and a nagging head cold?

The answer to the second question is essentially "Yes and No". There are differences between generations, or social cohorts, that are associated with age groups. Developmental experiences shape one cohort differently than another. The "No" part of the answer is that this is merely a fact, not necessarily a problem. The research described in the articles claims trends of research in populations, or samples that disclose population characteristics. The research results may be accurate, and may not be. But as a litigation consultant, I use the understanding of cohorts as a tool while looking at juror as being far more complex than that. Cohort is one color band in a wide spectrum. If a jury was made up predominantly of a single age cohort, I would be far more comfortable predicting certain characteristics based on membership, because there is a group-think that can be powerful. But that is not how most juries are composed, and not typically how they make decisions. In my experience, if you think of the juror as an individual, and try to understand what sort of life experience that person has had (including features attached to their age cohort status), how it has shaped their attitudes, what their affiliations are, what they like to think about, who they like to listen to—essentially, what lens they use to view the world—the big questions resolve themselves. There will be intergenerational differences, but the generational personality drift will not be any more influential than the continental drift. Characteristics ebb and flow.

Related to the idea of cohort is the developmental tasks of different age groups. The task of late teens through mid-twenties in past generations has been to settle into the working world, marry, and begin raising children. That is far less common now, with education taking longer, young adults leaving the home of their parents later, and overall delays in experiencing the weight and rewards of adulthood. Thus, the developmental tasks of young adulthood have changed, or shifted to a slightly older age bracket than a generation ago. Whether that is a function of a shift in personality traits (which I doubt) or of broader sociological (which seems more sensible) is hard to tease out in research. At trial, though, I am extremely interested in understanding what obligations and attachments someone has (to work, a spouse, children, extended family). Are they in their eighth year of undergraduate study, or are they going to night school while working and raising kids? Do they spend their spare time following sports and surfing the internet, or do they attend church and participate in after-work group social activities? Personality plays a part in everything we do, but as a factor in juror behavior, knowing lifestyle factors is more powerful.

A large part of the discussion by both the Trzesniewski and Donnellan article and the Twenge and Campbell article is about narcissism, not global intergenerational personality differences. What I find in talking with over 1000 jurors every year is not that younger people are more or less narcissistic than they were when I was their age, but that they talk about things differently. They are more willing to talk about their aspirations, their idealized hopes for the future, their dreams of a utopian world, sex, violence, and myriad other things that my parents would consider arrogant and unseemly. So, my mother would never be willing to say "I see myself as a good leader", despite the fact that she was, but my kids wouldn't be so shy.

I am uncomfortable with the inherent sloppiness of the term 'narcissism'. While Narcissistic Personality Disorder can exist as a stand-alone problem, it usually is seen as a descriptive component of very disabling conditions, including drug abuse, anxiety disorders, and serious mood disorders. It is what we used to refer to back in my clinical practice days as a 'garbage can diagnosis'. Along with 'borderline personality', it said more about how much you disliked the person it refers to than it does a clinical syndrome. Yes, it does exist as a separate syndrome, but as Trzesniewski and Donnellan's article points out, it is very unusual. As a trait it is more common, but more often it is nothing more than an adjective (and not a flattering one).

Physical appearance and body preoccupation ties in with the notion of narcissism in Greek mythology and also on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (see Question 19: a. "I don't particularly like to show off my body" or b. "I like to show off my body"). This is not a question that anyone would even ask polite company 50 years ago, but now we can all talk about it on surveys and it is likely endorsed by droves of people. Again, a big difference is in what we are comfortable discussing, not simply how we are different. As far as cosmetic surgery goes, the use of plastic surgery as an indicator of narcissism is counter-intuitive. A truly narcissistic person wouldn't feel a need to undergo modification —they are already perfect. Cosmetic surgery is for the 'worried well'—those who think that they aren't quite good enough, young enough, appealing enough. Anxious or depressed? Feelings of inadequacy? Maybe. Narcissistic? I don't think so.

As I studied the articles I asked myself "How would the questions in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (or a history of cosmetic surgery, ideal aspirations, etc.) disclose a juror's approach to issues in litigation?" It provides us questions that are worth pondering.

> Is a person with anxiety over their appearance (plastic surgery candidate) distressed by the idea of disfigurement more than someone who accepts being less attractive as a simple fact of life?
>
> Will someone who feels that they have great potential but who is clearly stuck in a mid-level career have especially strong feelings about a business fraud case?
>
> Will someone who feels, "I can usually talk my way out of anything" see that trait in others, including defendants who are trying to explain their conduct?

I also thought about issues that might affect one age cohort more than another. Different ages bring different awareness about the lessons of life. Younger people—with less life experience under their belt, and a sense of larger potential for the possibilities of the future—tend to endorse ideas such as:

Any achievement is possible.

I have time to fulfill my dreams.

I am in control of my future.

If you made an error, don't blame anyone else for it.

Attitudes such as these may sound like narcissism, but they are also indicative of optimism, confidence, faith in the future, and determination. On a jury, there may be obstacles to identifying with people who blame others for their failure to advance in a job, for their inability to recover from the death of a loved one, or accepting limitations following an injury.

As people age, they gain perspectives on the nature of life that teaches different things, and the impact on their role as jurors is also substantial.

Some injuries can hold you back forever.

Psychological injury can be as devastating as physical injury.

The mistreatment at one job has undermined a whole career.

People can feel trapped by circumstances into doing things they regret.

Narcissism is clearly a significant trait, and one of the hallmark characteristics of narcissistic people is not touched on in either paper: Their limited ability to experience empathy. Truly narcissistic people are emotionally disconnected, and can't share emotionally. When I see someone who appears to be unusually self-absorbed or lacking empathy (whether they are narcissistic or not) they become a more important factor in jury selection. This sort of juror is made uncomfortable by intense emotions from others and by feeling emotionally responsible. They may get angry at a person who causes this discomfort, they may blame the victim out of their own fear of victimhood, and overall they would rather keep emotions superficial.

Instead of true change in personality, what jurors have taught me is that there are age differences in what is comfortable to discuss, in preferences for how stories are told, for the language that is used, for a wish for particular kinds of demonstrative evidence, etc. But core values are not significantly different. Looking at a 20 year old in 2009 with an expectation that their core personality is different than a 20 year old in 1985 is a mistake. There are too many other things that will affect their decision-making far more. The challenge is to find jurors who will be engaged by the trial story that you can tell them, and to shape your story so that it speaks to their learning style, values, and experiences.

What trial lawyers need to know to be effective is far simpler than the nuances of this social science debate. With regard to personality styles and traits, it is as simple (and difficult) as figuring out which venire members are really interested in other people, which ones care only about what affects them and their own life, and which jurors you feel (as a lawyer) you can trust with such important decisions. Personality traits do have ramifications for how jurors process information, and how they make decisions. The reason that litigation consultants have insight into these subtle dynamics, is that through training and listening to thousands of jurors, consultants have the opportunity to learn where the subtle patterns lie. It is not usually with generational differences; more often it lies with values, traits, life experiences, and priorities.

A reply: Why generational differences have an impact

By Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell

Although we appreciate the cordial tone of this debate, there were several misconceptions that need to be remedied.

• The most serious misconception, raised by several authors, is that the differences we find are due to age and not generation. For example, Foley states, "normative personality development with age is a better explanation for any trend detected in data presented by Twenge and Campbell." This is not possible, as our data rely on people of the same age, comparing them across historical time. For example, the study on narcissism compares college students who completed the measure at some point between 1982 and 2006. Thus it compares different generations *when they were the same age*, so age cannot be causing any of the differences. That is, in fact, the most significant strength of the research method we use.

• Foley states, "Just because some people reported they experienced symptoms on the NPI measurement does not mean they are narcissistic or behave in narcissistic ways." Yes, it does. The NPI is the definitive measure of narcissism among normal populations. Thus when we report research about the negative outcomes associated with narcissism, these are the outcomes of someone who scores high on the NPI, because narcissism is *defined* as a high NPI score. This is also why the statement, "Maybe someone who scores high on the NPI is just a confident leader, not a narcissist" is also incorrect -- unless one believes that confident leaders regularly lack empathy, shirk responsibility for failure, take more for themselves and leave less for other people, and act aggressively toward those who insult them, all outcomes associated with high NPI scores.

• Keene states, "A truly narcissistic person wouldn't feel a need to undergo modification—they are already perfect. Cosmetic surgery is for the 'worried well'—those who think that they aren't quite good enough, young enough, appealing enough. Anxious or depressed? Maybe. Narcissistic? I don't think so." According to several medical journal articles, this statement is wrong. Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), along with histrionic personality disorder and body dysmorphic disorder, are the three most prevalent personality issues in those seeking cosmetic surgery (Malick, Howard, & Koo, 2008; Napoleon, 1993). About 25% of cosmetic surgery patients have been diagnosed with NPD – a very high figure, considering that 6% of the U.S. population, on average, has ever suffered from NPD (Napoleon, 1993).

• Keene states, "Yes, [NPD] does exist as a separate syndrome, but as Trzesniewski and Donnellan's article points out, it is very unusual." The National Institutes of Health study we cited in our original article – the most definitive on the topic to date – finds that almost 10% of Americans in their 20s have already experienced NPD; the prevalence across all age groups was 6%. Thus, NPD is far from unusual. And if almost 1 out of 10 people in their 20s experiencing NPD isn't an epidemic, we don't know what is.

• Trzesniewski and Donnellan cannot conclude from their MTF analyses that there are few generational differences, as they analyzed only 135 items of the more than 1,000 items in the Monitoring the Future dataset.

As these 135 variables were not randomly chosen, and the MTF dataset does not contain all variables sensitive to cohort change, counting how many variables show change is not informative.

- The "convenience samples" argument made by Trzesniewski and Donnellan and picked up by several of the commentators is problematic. There is a fair amount of debate about how to define a convenience sample. A collection of one's friends would certainly qualify, as they would likely differ in substantial ways from a random sample of the general population. But college students? As long as they weren't selected on a particular attribute, the worst that can be said is perhaps the results only apply to college students. This is not as selected a group as some have argued: 67% of high school graduates enroll in college. At the worst, one could conclude that the generational differences apply only to those who have had some college, which is still a good proportion of a jury pool. The most important point: This is *not* a challenge to the validity of the studies (as, for example, Foley states), but to their generalizability – a very different question. The studies are still valid (meaning they show a true effect) even if they apply to only part of the population.

- In addition, many of the cohort changes do apply to broader populations, as the Monitoring the Future dataset shows many results consistent with the college student data. In addition, my meta-analyses have replicated many of the college student results among samples of elementary, middle school, and high school students. Interestingly, by the definition of a convenience sample used by Trzesniewski and Donnellan, the MTF dataset is also a convenience sample, as only about three out of four of students agree to participate, and many of those don't answer all of the questions. It also does not include anyone who dropped out before spring of their senior year of high school. The MTF study originators note that "nonresponse in the MTF is more common among boys, nonwhites, students in lower academic tracks, and students with lower grade point averages." So it's not a perfect sample either, and the people who don't participate are systematically different from the people who do.

• Trzesniewski and Donnellan state that there are more similarities among generations than differences. However, this is true of virtually every study finding average differences among groups. For example, there are many more similarities among men and women than differences, but few argue that sex differences don't exist or are not meaningful, even though they are the same size (and often even smaller) than generational differences. Broda-Bahm makes a similar argument in saying, "one cannot presume that an individual carries the same attitudes as the majority of her gender, race, or age-cohort." We agree – these are differences on average, and will not apply to every individual.

• Foley states, "This all indicates to me that the baby boomers are probably driving trends Twenge and Campbell describe, such as an increase in the square footage of homes and a fivefold increase in plastic surgery." Yes, they did drive those trends, and we address this in the article – the rise in narcissism goes beyond generations, and beyond individual personality traits. And since the rise in narcissism and all of the other traits is linear, it is not just possible but likely that this trend started with the Baby Boomers. But the data clearly show it going up from there.

• Foley seems to misunderstand our argument about not using generational labels. The changes are linear, so the narcissism epidemic has not affected just one generation; narcissism has slowly continued to rise. The later one was born, the higher one is likely to score on narcissism. This obviates the need for debate over whether the cutoff between GenX and GenY should be 1970, 1977, 1982, or some other date. The GenMe label is not meant to replace these other generational labels; it is simply descriptive of personality traits that are now more common.

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The Limited Value of "Generation Me" in the Jury Box*

by M. Brent Donnellan and Kali H. Trzesniewski

We appreciate the comments and thought-provoking responses to our original paper. All in all, we have gained greater insight into whether any of the current discussions of generational change (or lack thereof) have practical relevance for trial consultants. In this response we briefly comment on this issue as well as mention a few of the other salient issues that have emerged in this exchange.

Debates Over "Generation Me" Have Limited Value for Trial Consultants

A major role of the trial consultant is to provide guidance on the selection of potential jurors for specific trials. Many of the responses from the trial consultants hinted that our exchanges with Twenge and Campbell provided little in the way of guidance for this basic task. We agree. It is interesting and even fun to debate research methodology, speculate about cultural changes, and engage in pop sociology; however, those are ultimately tangential issues for the day to day tasks of the jury consultant. Attorneys facing a pool of potential jurors are presented with a cross-section of people of different ages and backgrounds. The most basic message of personality psychology is that there are substantial individual differences in the traits that are likely to be relevant for a particular trial (e.g., prejudice, authoritarianism, empathy, intelligence). A trial consultant might like to know whether any of these relevant individual differences are linked with age, a variable that is completely redundant with birth cohort in this context. Knowing for certain whether the average 22 year old of 2009 is different from the average 22 year old of 1979 is of little value. The relevant issue is how much predictive value the age of a potential juror *at this moment in time* has for understanding how that individual will behave in the context of a specific trial. Today's trial consultants must deal with age differences as they manifest themselves in 2009.

Let's assume that a legal team determines that the attributes assessed by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) are relevant for a particular trial so that the team is interested in potential age differences on this measure. Foster, Twenge, and Campbell (2003) reported one of the most well known studies on this topic. They conducted a cross-sectional study in which they collected responses to the NPI from a sample of participants who responded to an advertisement on the internet. Note that with this design, age and birth year are perfectly correlated just as they are in any real jury selection context. Foster et al. found that the correlation between age and NPI scores was -.17 (p. 476); participants aged 20 to 24 scored about 15.50 on this measure, whereas participants aged 40 to 44 scored about 12.50. The overall standard deviation was 6.7. Let's ignore for the sake of this argument that Foster et al. was a convenience sample of self-selected participants and stipulate that their pattern of results generalizes to the population of potential jurors.

Just how diagnostic is age in this context? We assert that age (and thus generation) is *relatively uninformative in the context of actual jury selection* when considering NPI scores**.** We will simply quote Foster et al. (2003) directly on this point "[a]ge explains approximately 4% of the variance in reported [NPI scores], not a large amount by any measure" (p. 481). This conclusion seems to stand in stark contrast to the more optimistic conclusions about the importance of generation made by Twenge and Campbell.

To be sure, attorneys for both sides are permitted to ask questions of potential jurors both through direct questioning and through questionnaires as part of voir dire in hopes of winnowing away unqualified or unsuitable jurors. In other words, all parties involved in the legal dispute have a chance to get to know something about the individual qualities of potential jurors. Against that background, we think that those engaged in jury selection would be far better off if they focused on direct indicators of case-relevant traits rather than dwell on distal demographic variables like age or generational status. Drs. Keene and Broda-Bahm and Ms. Foley seem to agree on this point and all three provided helpful applied guidance on this topic. Wasting a preemptory challenge on a potential juror simply because she or he was part of Twenge's so-called "Generation Me" does not strike us as good practice. We would push our recommendation a bit farther by suggesting that the possible stereotypes inspired by "Generation Me" type-accounts might get in the way of removing the most "unfit" potential jurors for a given trial. In sum, there is nothing that we read from Twenge and Campbell or from the professional trial consultants that made us rethink our tentative conclusion that current academic discussions over potential generational changes in narcissism or any other "Generation Me" trait have little applied value in this context.

Responding to Twenge and Campbell

As it stands, we have other replies to Twenge and her associates that are either published or in press in academic journals (Donnellan & Trzesniewski, in press; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2009). We refer readers to those original papers for more detailed responses. Here we want to simply make three points.

First, we have never publicly speculated as to why Twenge and Campbell believe what they write. Unfortunately, a reader might get that impression based on their description of one of our papers: "Trzesniewski & Donnellan (in press) have also argued that we believe there are generational differences because older people's perceptions have changed over time." Our argument was actually based on an empirical article that is very much worth considering in this context (Eibach, Libby, & Gilovich, 2003). Eibach et al. noted that there is a long history whereby members of an older generation criticize and pass moralistic judgments on the younger generation that begs for explanation. Borrowing on their work, we suggested that one explanation for negative perceptions of "Generation Me" might be cognitive biases that prompt older adults to mistake changes that have occurred within themselves for changes in the outside world. We refer readers to the original Eibach et al. paper for further insight and empirical evidence about this proposed process.

Second, Twenge and Campbell assert that the U.C. Davis data regarding NPI scores support their conclusions about an epidemic of narcissism. This is not entirely accurate (see also Donnellan et al., 2009), and it is important to emphasize that this same assessment has also been reached by an outside research team. Specifically, Roberts, Edmonds, and Taylor (in press) added a new NPI mean from a recent college student study conducted at the University of Illinois (Mean = 15.69) and the U.C. Davis means into the Twenge et al. (2008) meta-analytic database. This aggregation had the effect of largely eliminating the original secular increase in narcissism reported by Twenge et al. This hardly seems like the outcome that one would expect if all of the NPI data are in agreement.

Finally, Twenge and Campbell attempt to place their effect sizes for generational change in a meaningful context by comparing their work with a "benchmark" effect size in medical science. However, comparisons between psychological effect sizes and medical effect sizes can be very misleading (Ferguson, in press). Ferguson even warns that "Comparisons between medical research and psychological research should simply be avoided." One of the major reasons for his recommendation is that there are potential errors in the ways that psychologists typically calculate

medical effect sizes that generally depress the relevant medical coefficients. Another reason for his recommendation, particularly relevant for our perspective, is that effect sizes in medicine are based on dependent variables that have a clear meaning that take no special training to appreciate (e.g., death or morbidity). The majority of generational effect sizes referenced by Twenge and Campbell are not intuitive because they refer to the connections between year of data collection and variables that are measured on an arbitrary metric. Most people have a good sense as to what it means to die from lung cancer whereas few people, including us, have a good grasp of the applied significance of a two point difference in NPI scores from 1982 to 2006.

We can press this point about effect size interpretation even further. The following statement is consistent with existing research: The gender difference in tendermindedness (r = .41; see Hyde, 2005, p. 585) is relatively close in magnitude to the newly calculated effect size for the connection between aspirin use and reduced risk of heart attacks (r = .52; Ferguson, in press). Although the sentence may sound impressive, the issue is whether it helps to clarify the relative importance of gender or aspirin to these very different outcomes. We doubt it. Moreover, we can add yet another benchmark effect size that further illustrates our concerns with effect size comparisons made by Twenge and Campbell. Ferguson (in press) calculated that the correlation between ESP and accuracy was about .16 (see Bem & Honorton, 1994). This is the size of the Twenge et al. (2008) individual effect size for increases in the NPI from 1982 to 2006 (see Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008). Thus, it might be fair to point out that the generational change in the NPI evident in Twenge et al. (2008) was just as strong as the effects of ESP on accuracy in one experimental paradigm. The bottom line is that we are not convinced that any of these comparisons ultimately helps to clarify the practical significance of the original generational findings.

Conclusion

At this point there is probably nothing more that can be done to reconcile our views with those of Twenge and Campbell. In closing, we would simply point out that our reading of the existing literature on generational change is more or less consistent with an earlier report issued by the National Research Council in which a panel of prominent scholars considered the implications of potential generational changes in youth attitudes and behaviors for military recruiting (Sackett & Mavor, 2003). We believe that their conclusions hold equally well today:

"[C]ontrary to claims of large and dramatic differences among youth cohorts in different generations, high-quality longitudinal research documents a high degree of stability in youth attitudes and values. Change is limited, and when it does occur, it occurs gradually. In addition, the popular literature is often based on selective, not systematic, data and analysis and on nonrepresentative samples. The committee does not believe that it is appropriate to give credence to popular portrayals of "generations" as a key explanatory concept for understanding youth attitudes and behaviors" (p. 305-306).

*Both authors contributed equally.

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Editorial Exuberations

Spring is in full swing when it seems like the new calendars just went up on the wall. Our May issue is the biggest we've assembled yet both in size and in the range of ideas/perspectives incorporated. Thanks to your reading and suggestions we are continuing to evolve and expand. *The Jury Expert* is also on Twitter with daily links relevant to litigation and a few fun things to mull over your morning libations. Keep the feedback, ideas, and suggestions coming!

We are pleased to have a lengthy feature on the controversy about Generation Y and the prevalence of narcissism. We are publishing this issue on the heels of a heated debate in the blawgosphere on Generation Y in the legal workplace (see a summary of that controversy here). In a departure from our usual style of one author and several trial consultants reacting to the piece--in this case we have two articles (one saying narcissism is on the rise in our young people and the other begging to differ). Three experienced trial consultants with special interests in generational issues provide feedback on the articles and how this controversy relates to litigation advocacy and then both authors respond. This feature doesn't resolve the differences of opinion between the researchers but we hope it gives you a sense of how to use (or not use) generation and/or age in jury selection, case sequencing and narrative.

Our second academic feature is one of which we can all be proud. It's an exploration of just how the process of deliberating on a jury makes us better people and better citizens. How nice to hear something uplifting about the jury process for a change! Two past Presidents of the American Society of Trial Consultants respond to this article (ten years in the making) and then the authors follow-up with additional thoughts.

In addition, we have pieces on a wide range of issues from trial consultants: deception, juror stress, technology in high profile trials, questioning the child witness, using a simple mnemonic to aid you in organization in voir dire, and how to prepare expert witnesses. And of course, our favorite thing (two again this issue). It's a lot to ponder. Come back and visit the website and read to your hearts content! That's why we're here. Use us. --***Rita R. Handrich, PhD***

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