

Parents Who 'Over-Value' Their Kids May Turn Them Into Narcissists

By Nicky Phillips

Science Editor

Parents who shower their child with too much praise, making them feel superior to others, may be cultivating a narcissist, researchers suggest.

Psychologists from the Netherlands studied more than 500 children for several years and found kids who had been "overvalued" by their parents were more likely to suffer from narcissism.

While parents may think telling their child they are more special than others will increase their self-esteem, the group found no evidence of this. Instead they discovered it was warmth and affection from parents that boosted a child's self-esteem.

People with narcissism feel superior to others and believe they deserve special treatment. Some research has pointed to an increase of this attitude in Western culture, while other scientists have struggled to establish a trend.

How narcissism evolves in some people and not others has perplexed psychologists for some time.

University of Amsterdam psychologist Eddie Brummelman and his team asked 565 children to complete detailed questionnaires that assessed them for narcissistic traits, asking participants whether they agreed with statements such as "kids like me deserve something extra".

Their parents were asked to judge whether their child was "more special than other children", a measure of whether they overvalued their children.

Dr Brummelman said when children are seen by their parents as being more special and more entitled than other children they may internalise the view that they are superior individuals, a view that is at the core of narcissism.

While it might seem likely that a child narcissist is the product of narcissistic parents, the researchers found no evidence for this. Nor did they find a lack of parental warmth and affection linked to narcissism, as some previous studies have postulated.

However, the researchers, whose findings are published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal, were quick to point out that parents overvaluing their kids is not the sole origin of narcissism.

"Like other personality traits, narcissism is moderately heritable and partly rooted in early emerging temperamental traits," they said.

Some children, because of their temperamental traits, might be more likely than others to become narcissistic when exposed to parental overvaluation and more research is needed to tease apart the findings, they said.

UNSW child psychology researcher Mark Dadds said the study's findings were interesting because they examined two competing theories about the origin of narcissism, finding "clear

support" that children learned the attitude from their parents rather than developing it to compensate for a parents' lack of warmth.

However, he said it was important to note that the parental factor that predicts narcissism is "over-valuing", an extreme attitude in which parents felt their child deserved special treatment.

"Parents should value their children, and praise and let them know of their positive worth," said Professor Dadds.

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