

College students becoming more vain, study says

By DAVID CRARY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK
Today's college students are more narcissistic and self-centered than their predecessors, according to a comprehensive new study by five psychologists who worry that the trend could be harmful to personal relationships and American society.

"We need to stop endlessly repeating 'You're special' and having children repeat that back," said the study's lead author, Professor Jean Twenge of San Diego State University. "Kids are self-centered enough already."

Twenge and her colleagues, in findings to be presented at a workshop today in San Diego on the generation gap, examined the responses of 16,475 college students nationwide who completed an evaluation called the Narcissistic Personality Inventory between 1982 and 2006.

The standardized inventory, known as the NPI, asks for responses to such statements as

"If I ruled the world, it would be a better place," "I think I am a special person" and "I can live my life any way I want to."

The researchers describe their study as the largest ever of its type and say students' scores have risen steadily since the current test was introduced in 1982. By 2006, they said, two-thirds of the students had above-average scores, 30 percent more than in 1982.

Narcissism can have benefits, said study co-author W. Keith Campbell of the University of Georgia, suggesting it could be useful in meeting new people "or auditioning on 'American Idol.'"

"Unfortunately, narcissism can also have very negative consequences for society, including the breakdown of close relationships with others," he said.

The study asserts that narcissists "are more likely to have romantic relationships that are short-lived, at risk for infidelity, lack emotional warmth, and to exhibit game-playing, dishonesty and over-controlling and violent behaviors."

Commission backs 2-cent hike in letter rate, 'forever' stamp

By RANDOLPH E. SCHMID
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON
Say goodbye to those pesky 1- and 2-cent stamps that used to clutter up desks and purses every time the price of mailing a letter went up.

A new "forever" stamp, good for mailing a letter no matter how much rates rise, was recommended Monday by the independent Postal Regulatory Commission.

The panel also called for a 2-cent increase in first-class rates to 41 cents, a penny less than the post office had sought.

In addition, the changes would sharply scale back the price of heavier letters.

"Adoption of this proposal is good for the Postal Service, postal customers and our postal system," commission chairman Dan G. Blair said at a briefing.

A forever stamp would not carry a denomination but would sell for whatever the first-class rate was at the time.

For example, if the 41-cent rate takes effect, forever stamps would sell for 41 cents.

If rates later climbed to 45 cents or more, the price of the forever stamp would also go up at the counter or machine, but those purchased before the change would still be valid to mail a letter.

So there would be no need to buy small-denomination stamps to add to envelopes.

MIDWEST WINTER STORM

'We dodged a bullet'



Travelers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport wait in a special United Airlines ticketing area to rebook flights that were canceled after a weekend winter storm forced the cancellation of flights in the Midwest and threatened flights in the East on Monday.

Winter weather cancels some flights; few other problems reported

By BEN NUCKOLS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE
The storm that pounded the Midwest over the weekend brought relatively light snow to the Northeast on Monday, delaying some commuters but sparing the region a repeat of the Valentine's Day ice storm that brought airline flights to a standstill.

Forecasters had feared the snowflakes could melt in the air, then refreeze into sleet closer to the ground. Instead, the weather was just cold enough that the wet, heavy flakes never melted, and they piled up quickly.

"We dodged a bullet, actually, with the temperature staying just above freezing," said Sandra Dobson, a spokeswoman for the Maryland State Highway Administration.

Maryland received 3 to 6 inches. The New York City area and Connecticut got up to 4 inches, a fraction of the amount that fell in the Midwest during the weekend.

JetBlue, which canceled more than 1,000 flights in the wake of the Valentine's Day storm, called off at least 68 flights Monday



Helen Burish, of Madison, Wis., and her dog Bullseye build a snowman on Sunday. More than 2 feet of snow in parts of the Midwest grounded some air flights.

into or out of Columbus, Ohio; Richmond, Va.; Portland, Maine; and Washington and Chicago.

During the Valentine's Day storm, JetBlue was heavily criticized because passengers were stranded on planes at Kennedy Airport for up to 10½ hours.

But this time JetBlue was not alone.

Delta Air Lines Inc. reported 175 canceled flights Monday throughout the Northeast. American Airlines canceled 20 flights in and out of JFK.

About 100 flights were also canceled at the Newark airport. The Baltimore-Washington area's three major airports were open, but some airline schedules were disrupted.

The Midwest took the brunt of the storm, with more than 2 feet of snow falling in southeastern Minnesota. Winter storm warnings remained in effect Monday for northern Wisconsin and Michigan.

The National Weather Service said an additional foot of snow was possible in northern Michigan.

Heavy ice brought down miles of power lines and utility poles, mostly in Iowa, blacking out hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses.

Nine traffic deaths were blamed on the huge storm system: eight in Wisconsin and one in Kansas. Major highways in parts of Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska were blocked for much of the weekend, and tornadoes destroyed homes in the South.

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ALL ABOUT HEALTH

TREATING ALCOHOL ABUSE

By the faculty of Harvard Medical School

Q: What medications can help alcoholics stay sober, and how do they work?

A: Staying sober can be very challenging for people with alcoholism (see illustration). In 2005, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism updated its guidelines for doctors. The guidelines encourage doctors to consider medication in addition to behavioral therapy for people who are dependent on alcohol or who have recently stopped drinking but are experiencing cravings or "slips." More than 50 clinical studies of drugs and plant extracts to treat alcohol dependence are now under way. But as of 2007, the Food and Drug Administration has approved only three drugs for this purpose. They are disulfiram (Antabuse), naltrexone (ReVia, and an injectable form of the drug, Vivitrol) and acamprostate (Campral).

Whether someone should take medication, which one to take and what dose to use depend on a number of factors. The drugs work in different ways, and alcohol affects each person differently. As such, a person may respond better to one medication than another. Here is a brief rundown on each:

Disulfiram (Antabuse): Disulfiram blocks an enzyme that helps break acetaldehyde, a chemical made by the body when you drink alcohol. If you drink while taking disulfiram, acetaldehyde builds up in your bloodstream, causing flushing, headache, nausea and vomiting. The drug discourages alcohol use by making you ill if you drink. But it doesn't eliminate your desire for alcohol. The drug can sometimes cause chest pain, increased blood pressure and, in rare instances, cardiac arrest and death. People with serious health problems such as heart disease, diabetes or liver disease shouldn't take it. People who take disulfiram need regular blood tests to check their liver health. The drug has few side effects in people who are not drinking, however. Disulfiram seems to be effective for older, severely alcoholic men who are monitored carefully by family members and professionals.

Naltrexone (ReVia, Vivitrol): Naltrexone reduces your craving for a drink. And, if you do drink, the drug blunts the pleasurable effects of alcohol. Doctors generally recommend naltrexone for people who have stopped drinking and are trying to avoid a relapse. But some people who have not been able to abstain completely may use it to control their drinking. In many, but not all, studies of this drug, people taking naltrexone abstained from alcohol longer and had fewer relapses than those taking a placebo (dummy pill). An analysis of 29 studies found that naltrexone reduced the risk of relapse or a return to heavy drinking by more than one-third during the first three months after withdrawal. But the effect only lasts while the person is taking the drug. Like disulfiram, people taking naltrexone need blood tests to check their liver health.

Naltrexone used to be available only in pill form. But some people who are alcohol-dependent have difficulty sticking to a daily medication schedule. In mid-2006, the FDA approved an extended-release formulation of naltrexone called Vivitrol, which is given by injection once a month in a doctor's office. In one six-month study, researchers at Harvard Medical School compared this treatment to a placebo. Both groups of patients also underwent psychotherapy. Injected naltrexone reduced heavy drinking by about 25 percent and also boosted the rate of abstinence.

Acamprostate (Campral): Scientists are not sure how acamprostate works. But they believe it affects two brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) in a way that diminishes the unpleasant symptoms of long-term abstinence, such as restlessness, anxiety and insomnia. In so doing, the drug may reduce cravings. To take this drug, you need to have normal kidney function, which can be checked with a simple blood test.

Acamprostate is approved for people who have quit drinking and are also receiving some form of psychotherapy. It may not be effective in people who are actively drinking or are abusing other substances. Many studies show the drug boosts abstinence rates among those who are alcohol dependent and have recently undergone detoxification. Drug therapy for alcoholism is a very active area of research, so there's good reason to hope that additional -- and perhaps more effective -- medications or combinations of medications will become available in the future. Everyone who has watched a friend or relative struggle against alcohol abuse will raise a toast to that -- nonalcoholic, of course.

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