**KCTL Teaching and Learning Reading Group**

**Discussion Questions – November 30, 2011 (Room M391)**

In chapter 13 “The Chocolate Cake Trap,” Twenge & Campbell cite research by novelist Jodi Picoult, they note, “Novelist Jodi Picoult spent many hours talking to high school girls while researching her recent books about teen issues, *The Tenth Circle* and *Nineteen Minutes*. These girls told her that hookups were the norm, and that although they sometimes wanted an actual relationship, it wasn’t cool to say so. After these conversations, Picoult concluded, ‘It was clear to me that we’re turning out a generation of kids who don’t know how to have a relationship with someone’” (p. 225).

* Emotionally intelligent (e.g., emotional literacy) education is increasingly being emphasized to counter the relational disconnection seen in younger generations. Is this too little too late? Does education have the power to reverse this trend?
* Does this trend away from significant relationships pose challenges to college educators’ work to foster learning relationships with students?

In chapter 14 “All Play and No Work,” Twenge & Campbell argue, “In 2007, a Harvard professor noted that, 20 years ago, ‘When a few students were sick and missed an exam … they used to be apologetic and just grateful that I would even offer a makeup. These days I have kids who think it’s no big deal to miss a test if they have any conflict and then they think that *they* should decide when I give the makeup.’ Some students say, ‘I need an A in this course,’ as if an A were an entitlement rather than something to be earned. Others expect to get good grades just for paying tuition, even telling faculty members, ‘You work for me.’ The most entitled have decided that they get good grades by arguing, saying things like ‘I’m not leaving your office until you change my grade to an A’” (p, 231).

* Is what this professor reports a series of isolated behaviors from a small group of students or representative of a larger trend?
* How do your experiences (similar or contrary) speak to this theme?

In chapter 15 “God Didn’t Create You to Be Average,” Twenge & Campbell note, “Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of college students who did some type of volunteer work increased from 27.1 to 30.2%. Though a positive development, it does not yet “suggest the possible emergence of a new civic generation,” as the group that did the survey declared” (p. 252).

* If this statistical increase does not signal a “new civic generation” what instead does it indicate?
* Does the fact that many colleges are now requiring civic engagement – Kingsborough has started to work on increasing civic engagement opportunities in the curriculum – detract from the work that is done by students?
* If you were to look at your own course – how could you increase or develop civic involvement content either for regular or extra credit?

In chapter 16 “The Prognosis,” the authors argue that the media’s celebration of narcissism is shaping how the world views America, “They don’t see our historic great leaders, or political philosophy, or achievements in the arts and sciences. Instead they see blockbuster movies (especially action movies), our TV shows … , our pop music, and Paris Hilton. The face we present to the world is largely made up of gossip and trash.” (p. 266-267).

* How does this shape the expectations of the 52% of students who come to Kingsborough after being born abroad? How does this shape our future generations of students?
* The authors argue that the current economic collapse might turn the generation around like the Great Depression corrected the hedonistic climate of the roaring twenties. Do we have evidence of our students learning these lessons?

In chapter 17, “Treating the Epidemic of Narcissism” authors Twenge & Campbell observe narcissism in our reactions to the Virginia Tech massacre noting, “Korea where [Seung-Hui] Cho’s parents emigrated from, reacted with a culture-wide feeling of shame. The South Korean ambassador apologized for Cho’s actions. Imagine being a teen in South Korea and hearing this. You would think that this mass murder was a source of shame for the nation, not something that made you an outlaw or a cool killer […] It is difficult to imagine and American teen thinking twice about his scheme to shoot up his school because it would bring shame on his family. He’d be more likely to think about his brilliant plan being discussed on NBC, especially after he sends them a media package with cool pictures of himself holding guns, as Cho did” (p. 298).

* This comment is likely to ignite discussion amongst readers but to what extent is what the authors say here true? Does narcissism fuel the perpetrators behind highly publicized school shootings or it too simplistic to think of such events in terms of narcissism?

**In conclusion:**

* Has “The Narcissism Epidemic” changed the way you will approach your students in future semesters? If yes, what lessons do you take away from this work? If, no, describe how your experiences show a contrary picture of the American student from the one painted here.
* Would you share this work, in parts or as a whole with your students? What reactions do you anticipate? What classroom lessons might this work supplement?
* Take the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) created by Dr. Drew Pinsky and S. Mark Young, and included in their book *The Mirror Effect* this test is mentioned by Twenge and Campbell. The test and its instructions appear on the next page.

**Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)**

**by Dr. Drew Pinsky and S. Mark Young**

Directions: The book advises answering the 40 questions below in a single sitting, without asking for help or clarification. It notes, "There's no such thing as a good or bad result on this test. Scoring high on the narcissism inventory, or high on any of the component categories, doesn't mean you have a disorder, or that you're a good or bad person."

Print this out or track your choices of which statements best match you — then test your friends, family, that guy at the office — anyone who's narcissism score you want to know.

**1.** A. I have a natural talent for influencing people.

B. I am not good at influencing people.

**2.** A. Modesty doesn't become me. B. I am essentially a modest person.

**3.** A. I would do almost anything on a dare. B. I tend to be a fairly cautious person.

**4.** A. When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed.

B. I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.

**5.** A. The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.

B. If I ruled the world it would be a better place.

**6.** A. I can usually talk my way out of anything.

B. I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.

**7.** A. I prefer to blend in with the crowd. B. I like to be the center of attention.

**8.** A. I will be a success. B. I am not too concerned about success.

**9.** A. I am no better or worse than most people. B. I think I am a special person.

**10.** A. I am not sure if I would make a good leader. B. I see myself as a good leader.

**11.** A. I am assertive. B. I wish I were more assertive.

**12.** A. I like to have authority over other people. B. I don't mind following orders.

**13.** A. I find it easy to manipulate people. B. I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.

**14.** A. I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.

B. I usually get the respect that I deserve.

**15.** A. I don't particularly like to show off my body. B. I like to show off my body.

**16.** A. I can read people like a book. B. People are sometimes hard to understand.

**17.** A. If I feel competent I am willing to take responsibility for making decisions.

B. I like to take responsibility for making decisions.

**18.** A. I just want to be reasonably happy.

B. I want to amount to something in the eyes of the world.

**19.** A. My body is nothing special. B. I like to look at my body.

**20.** A. I try not to be a show off. B. I will usually show off if I get the chance.

**21.** A. I always know what I am doing. B. Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing.

**22.** A. I sometimes depend on people to get things done.

B. I rarely depend on anyone else to get things done.

**23.** A. Sometimes I tell good stories. B. Everybody likes to hear my stories.

**24.** A. I expect a great deal from other people. B. I like to do things for other people.

**25.** A. I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.

B. I take my satisfactions as they come.

**26.** A. Compliments embarrass me. B. I like to be complimented.

**27.** A. I have a strong will to power. B. Power for its own sake doesn't interest me.

**28.** A. I don't care about new fads and fashions. B. I like to start new fads and fashions.

**29.** A. I like to look at myself in the mirror.

B. I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror.

**30.** A. I really like to be the center of attention.

B. It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention.

**31.** A. I can live my life in any way I want to.

B. People can't always live their lives in terms of what they want.

**32.** A. Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me.

B. People always seem to recognize my authority.

**33.** A. I would prefer to be a leader.

B. It makes little difference to me whether I am a leader or not.

**34.** A. I am going to be a great person. B. I hope I am going to be successful.

**35.** A. People sometimes believe what I tell them.

B. I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.

**36.** A. I am a born leader. B. Leadership is a quality that takes a long time to develop.

**37.** A. I wish somebody would someday write my biography.

B. I don't like people to pry into my life for any reason.

**38.** A. I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.

B. I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go out in public.

**39.** A. I am more capable than other people.

B. There is a lot that I can learn from other people.

**40.** A. I am much like everybody else. B. I am an extraordinary person.

**SCORING KEY:** Assign one point for each response that matches the key.

1, 2 and 3: A

4, 5: B

6: A

7: B

8: A

9, 10: B

11, 12, 13, 14: A

15: B

16: A

17, 18, 19, 20: B

21: A

22, 23: B

24, 25: A

26: B

27: A

28: B

29, 30, 31: A

32: B

33, 34: A

35. B

36, 37, 38, 39: A

40: B

The average score for the general population is 15.3. The average score for celebrities is 17.8. Pinsky says he scored 16.

Young says it is important to consider which traits are dominant. For example, an overall score that reflects more points on vanity, entitlement, exhibitionism and exploitiveness is more cause for concern than someone who scores high on authority, self-sufficiency and superiority, he says.

**The seven component traits by question:**

• Authority: 1, 8, 10, 11, 12, 32, 33, 36

• Self-sufficiency: 17, 21, 22, 31, 34, 39

• Superiority: 4, 9, 26, 37, 40

• Exhibitionism: 2, 3, 7, 20, 28, 30, 38

• Exploitativeness: 6, 13, 16, 23, 35

• Vanity: 15, 19, 29

• Entitlement: 5, 14, 18, 24, 25, 27