

The Ripple Effect: Wealth Contagion and Its Influence on Behavior

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Abstract: Our contemporary culture places high value on wealth, which negatively influences the cognitions, emotions and behavior of our youth. Contemporary theorists have termed this wealth contagion as 'Affluenza' which changes the fabric of the society and negatively affects the developmental outcomes throughout individual's life and poses serious threats to young adults. The present research has empirically explored how affluent and non-affluent differ on different dimensions of Narcissism. The data of 100 affluent & 100 non-affluent students identified with Mattison Affluenza Scale (2012), in the age range of 18-24 yrs., were collected from different colleges and universities of Punjab & Chandigarh. The narcissistic tendencies were assessed on seven dimensions of Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988). It was hypothesized that affluent individuals would be high on narcissism as compared to their non-affluent counterparts. Unpaired t-test revealed that affluent and non-affluent differed significantly ($t=24.17^{**}$) on narcissism. The global score on narcissism of affluent participants ($M=32.04$) came out much higher in comparison to global score of non-affluent participants ($M=16.74$). The findings are line with previous researches reporting that high level of affluence may play a significant role in narcissistic tendencies in youth due to their increases sense of entitlement and heightened feelings of uniqueness and individualism (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Twenge et al., 2008)

Keywords: Affluenza, Non-Affluent, Narcissism, Unpaired t-test.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of globalization and technological advancements, people have abundant opportunities to excel in their career and earn more money. People prefer luxury and lavishness and are happy to sacrifice humanity for it due to which the fabric of the society is getting weaker, resulting in alienation, withdrawal, interpersonal relationship difficulties, depression and even suicidal behaviors. In India too, the traditional stable society, mostly agrarian, has changed to a highly developed, industrial and space society. In such a developing society, the youth from various strata of the society with diverse cultures, religions, economic status, language and life styles, experience difficulties in adaptation to the changing roles and value systems. The problem becomes more serious when most of us provide our children with far more than basic needs because our psyche is influenced by societal unveiled acceptance of flauntable wealth as the sole yardstick of success (Chima, 2007). **Affluenza**, a *Rich-Kid Syndrome*, is relatively new term coined to describe a social ill that has infiltrated the core of society. Stemming from increasingly common societal dispositions of materialism, greed, and self-absorption, affluenza has become a parasite that all stinking rich people unknowingly host. Breyer (2013) defines it as a condition of having wealthy parents who set no limits. Affluent parents do not inculcate the culture of caution and discipline in their children and at the same time rise against those who try to enforce discipline on children. Research studies (Powdthavee, 2010; Thoits & Hannan, 1979) suggest that children who are raised surrounded by wealth are at greater risk for academic, psychosocial and behavioral problems. Abundant wealth and resources create contexts that enhance the personal freedoms of affluent individuals and give rise to solipsistic social cognitive tendencies in which an individualistic focus on one's own internal states, goals, motivations, and emotions shapes the self, perceptions of the social environment, and relationships to other individuals, leading to unprecedented levels of narcissism.

Narcissism is a mental condition, in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others. It is caused by certain factors, spreads through particular channels, appears as various symptoms, and might be halted by preventive measures. Children who are given everything may end up with symptoms of affluenza, which have been described as including lack of motivation, low self-esteem, difficulty in delaying gratification, inability to tolerate frustration, a sense of entitlement, misbelief that the world revolves around them and perhaps having no empathy or understanding of the needs of others. Young children acquire narcissism learn to be narcissistic," said Harris Stratyner, a Manhattan psychologist who works primarily with wealthy families. The culture and it's cultural processes, related to economic prosperity, increased urban living, formal schooling, and commerce may also shift values away from collectivism toward individualism and, in turn, narcissism (Greenfield, 2009; Keller, 2012). The socio-cultural environments vary in their levels of affluence and differentially emphasize individual versus communal tendencies that shape different levels of narcissism. Narcissism may not be evenly distributed across all strata of society. It varies by people's socioeconomic status; their social class or their position in terms of their actual objective resources (e.g., wealth, education) and corresponding subjective perceptions of social class rank (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt & Keltner, 2012).

Researchers have consistently proven that there is a negative relationship between materialism and psychological well-being or life satisfaction (Belk, 1985; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Sheldon & Krieger, 2014). Individuals, who improperly valued extrinsic rewards such as fame and wealth over intrinsic rewards such as interpersonal relations, personal growth, and community service, have poor mental health and low well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Ryan et al., 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). Factors that emphasize individual achievement and "standing out from the crowd" may promote narcissism (Cai, Kwan, & Sedikides, 2012). Despite of the huge psychological costs of affluence, the concept of Affluenza has not been rigorously evaluated specifically in Indian settings because youth in poverty are widely recognized as being "at-risk" rather than the affluent people at the other end of the socioeconomic continuum who increasingly and consistently are showing significant problems. Keeping in mind the quote by *John Kenneth Galbraith* that "*Of all classes, the rich are the most noticed and the least studied*", and dearth of research in this area, It was hypothesized that affluent individuals would be high on all dimensions of narcissism as compared to their non-affluent counterparts.

2. EXPERIMENTAL SELECTION

The study was conducted in different colleges and universities of Punjab & Chandigarh after obtaining permission of their respective Heads and Principals. A total of 200 subjects between the ages of 18 and 24 years were approached. The study group comprised of 100 affluent and 100 non affluent screened in with Affluenza Scale (Oliver James, 2007). All screened 200 participants were administered Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Written informed consent was taken from each participant. Incidental sampling was used for data collection.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

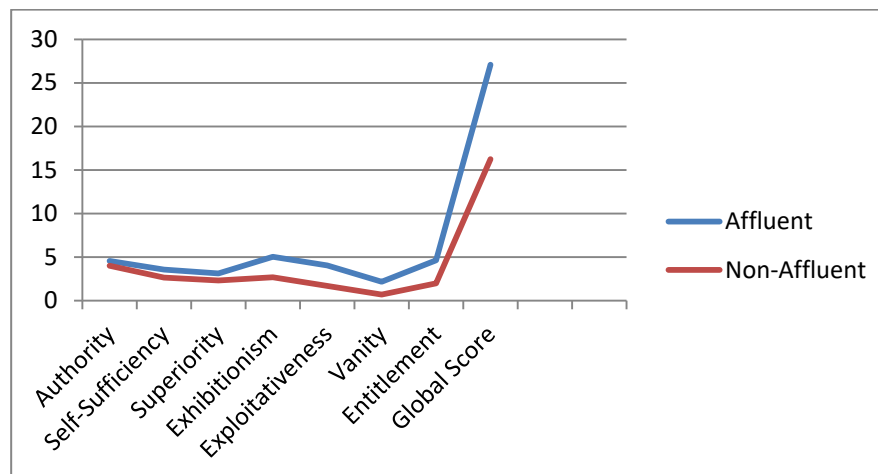
In the light of stated hypothesis, means, standard deviations and unpaired t-test was computed for global score as well as for different dimensions of narcissism.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Means, SDs and t-ratio of Affluent and Non-Affluent on Different Domains of Narcissism

Dimensions of Narcissism	Means		SDs		t-ratios
	Affluent	Non-Affluent	Affluent	Non-Affluent	
Authority	4.56	4.02	0.50	0.82	3.97**
Self-Sufficiency	3.56	2.66	0.67	0.63	6.91**
Superiority	3.12	2.32	0.66	0.55	6.58**
Exhibitionism	5.02	2.70	0.80	0.51	17.41**
Exploitativeness	4.04	1.68	0.78	0.65	16.38**
Vanity	2.16	0.72	0.58	0.54	12.84**
Entitlement	4.64	2.00	0.69	0.45	22.57**
Global Score	27.08	16.26	1.72	1.78	30.85**

As evident in Table No 1 that mean scores of affluent individuals on Authority (M=4.56, SD=0.50), Self Sufficiency (M=3.56, SD=0.67), Superiority (M=3.12, SD=0.66), Exhibitionism (M=5.02, SD=0.80), Exploitativeness (M=4.04, SD=0.78), Vanity (M=2.16, SD=0.58), Entitlement (M=4.64, SD=0.69) were comparatively higher than non-affluent on Authority (M=4.56, SD=0.50), Self Sufficiency (M=3.56, SD=0.67), Superiority (M=3.12, SD=0.66), Exhibitionism (M=5.02, SD=0.80), Exploitativeness (M=4.04, SD=0.78), Vanity (M=2.16, SD=0.58), Entitlement (M=4.64, SD=0.69). Statistically significant difference has been found between these groups: Authority ($t=3.97, p<.01$), Self Sufficiency ($t=6.91, p<.01$), Superiority ($t=6.58, p<.01$), Exhibitionism ($t=17.41, p<.01$), Exploitativeness ($t=16.38, p<.01$), Vanity ($t=12.84, p<.01$), Entitlement ($t=22.57, p<.01$). Affluent individuals scored much higher on narcissism (M=27.08, SD=1.72) in comparison to non-affluent (M=16.26, SD=1.78). Significant difference was found in both groups ($t=30.85, p<.01$). This shows that subjects who scored low on affluenza also scored low on narcissism. The results led to the acceptance of the hypothesis that affluent would score higher on narcissism as compared to non-affluent.



Graph 1: Shows mean differences between Affluent and Non-Affluent on Different Domains of Narcissism

These findings are consistent with the literature that provided evidence of a relationship between affluenza and negative psychological consequences. Researchers have consistently proven that there is a negative relationship between materialism and psychological well-being or life satisfaction (Belk, 1985; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Sheldon & Krieger, 2014). Parents who privilege their children without demanding performance and raise their children with abundance wealth and indulgence unconsciously make their children vulnerable of greater risk for psychosocial and educational problems, stress disorders, depression, neglect, substance abuse, and underachievement at rates exceeding their urban or middle class counterparts (Koplewicz, H. & Williams, K., 2006). The psychological well-being of affluent youth is greatly affected; in spite of possessing luxuries such individuals are quite prone to various attitudinal, emotional and behavioral problems. affluent youth suffer from inadequate self-esteem; delayed maturity; lack of motivation; self-discipline; boredom; misuse of power; guilt, alienation; suspiciousness; negativity from others; excessive options; fear of losing; lack of good parenting; and dynastic parental expectations (Gerald et. al, 2014).

Affluent individuals' higher scores on authority, self-sufficiency and superiority imply that relatively abundant resources and elevated rank increase their control over their lives, reduce exposure to external influences, and provide more personal choice, all of which promote greater independence and self-sufficient and make the affluent class narcissistic (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). In contrast, lower-class individuals, who have reduced resources, subordinate rank, and reduced personal control, are more interdependent and other-focused (e.g., Piff et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2007). Upper-class individuals wish to be in charge and gain power - a dominant trait of narcissistic personality. They think that they can do things at their own and don't need other people so they tend to see themselves as supreme and others as inferior and deserving of rejection or criticism. Narcissism is regarded as a focus on individualism and concern for individual goals of wealth and fame (e.g., Fukuyama, 1999; and James, 2007). Attention to one's appearance is a defining feature of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008). Researchers indicate that upper-class individuals were more prone to behave narcissistically by looking at themselves in the mirror and that this tendency was not reducible to self-consciousness about appearance. Affluent people generally display "entitlement mentality - an unjustified sense of privilege", which characterizes the culture of narcissism

(Lasch, 1991). An entitlement mentality is a state of mind in which an individual comes to believe that privileges are instead rights, and that they are to be expected as a matter of course. Higher social-class standing was positively associated with increased feelings of entitlement in an adult and university student sample.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study has established a connection between affluenza and narcissism indicating that materialistic pursuits pose a barrier to the good life among youngsters aged 18 to 24. In comparison to non-affluent, affluent individuals have vast untapped resources for actualizing their personal and social destiny, but because of their dysfunctional beliefs and attitudes, they are unable to assess different situations accurately resulting in personal and social maladjustment. The more people aspire to materialistic goals, the more at risk they are for developing psychological disorders.

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