

How fierce competition could be making us more self-centred

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Competition is fierce but success pays off (Source: Getty)

Over the last 150 years, people have become more interested in themselves than in the progress of society as a whole, a new report suggests.

As the job market becomes more difficult to penetrate, competition heats up and we apparently find ourselves working harder than our parents for the same returns. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our interest in everyone else takes a back seat.

Researchers at the Arizona State university looked at the correlation between societal shifts and a change in attitudes in the US, and found that as people became more educated, moved to the cities and gave up manual labour jobs for office-based jobs, they also took a more “culturally individualist” attitude towards life.

This was seen to be evident from an increase in a number of factors such as presence of individualist words in books, percentage of single-child families, percentage of adults living alone, and divorce rates.

Since preference for uniqueness is also a key factor of individualism, they looked in to the prevalence of unique baby names – those not in the top 20 for the time - and found an increase over the 150-year period. The results are published in the [journal Psychological Science](#).

"We found that changes in the social class structure precede changes in individualism," said Professor Igor Grossmann, main author of the study.

"As demands of American society shifted from manual labour to office jobs, Americans gained education and wealth, both of which promote self-direction and ultimately facilitate individualism."

The sample they looked at was in the US, but the researchers believe the results could be expanded to other countries that have gone through similar cultural changes.