



JURONG JUNIOR COLLEGE

JC 2 Preliminary Examination 2008

General Certificate of Education

GENERAL PAPER

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INSERT

TUESDAY

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1 hour 30 mins

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

This insert contains Passages A and B for Paper 2.

This paper consists of 4 pages (including this page)

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Passage A

*Trevor Turner writes about **Narcissism**.*

- 1 There is something mad about the modern world. It's as if there is a collective neurosis where the delights of personal convenience have, paradoxically, created intolerable sensitivities. Or maybe it's that our collective unconscious (as outlined by Carl Jung) is in fact fragmenting. Jung believed that we share a sense of symbols, dreams and feelings that go back to primitive times and reflect memories of our ancestors' experiences. 5
- 2 There seems to be a rising tide of mental illnesses, a rising demand for 'lifestyle' medications and even several new 'conditions'. Common 'shyness' is now a 'social phobia'; screwing around is 'sexual-addiction syndrome'; and bad-tempered people now have 'emotionally unstable personality disorders'. So why not 'malignant self-actualization' syndrome (MSA) – defined as a disabling condition which elevates personal choice into the highest arbiter of everything? It's not yet in the standard psychiatric disease classifications but maybe it should be. 10
- 3 The signs of MSA are all around us. Your own flat, your own car, your own space and your own 'personal' computer are the sacred must-haves of today. Yet loneliness can make you sick. Increased illness and in particular 'somatization' – the tendency to turn worry and stress into a physical symptom – is associated with people living alone. Likewise the future looks set for an increasingly privatized lifestyle. By 2021 it is expected that over 40 per cent of men and a third of women will be living on their own. 15 20
- 4 But what are the roots of this obsession with the self? Psychiatrists have long described a range of personality disorders characterized by the inability to think more than a few moments ahead and the dominance of uncontrolled impulse. Today a rising tide of narcissism is spreading like a toxic social algae. The modern dominance of the camera and the importance of image over language may be one of the culprits. Comic books, films, mobile phones that take pictures – all value the look of things much more than the meaning of things. This obsession with appearance has created two enormous and increasingly profitable industries – cosmetics and food. A recent advertisement announced proudly that 1,200 researchers were striving night and day to get new products on to the shelves. At the same time fast-food franchises and instant meals are generating rising levels of obesity and further profits in the diet industry. And cosmetic surgery, for the not-quite-right nose or the flabby gut, drains medical resources from the needy to the greedy. 25 30
- 5 Perhaps the most important ingredient fuelling MSA is our addictive society. If we take drug and alcohol addicts as the ultimate example of those serving their own needs to the detriment of others – ranting, robbing or ruining so as to ease their personal pain – we can also see how subtler addictions are fiercely reinforced by our highly controlled society. George Orwell's paranoid world of 1984 – published in 1948 – was bad enough, but we have gone way beyond that. Who are we fighting this year? Mr Bush and Mr Blair will tell us. What's the right beer to drink? Bud has a great ad and that Mexican stuff with a lemon in the top still looks cool. We are so hooked on a thousand creature comforts, in the West at least, that we do not see the dependency downsides of coffee (anxiety), sugar (obesity), cars (heart disease) or additives (tantrums). 35 40
- 6 Personally I blame too much counselling and chat shows. The urge to talk over every minor upset or half-baked relationship has become a modern principle. It may 45

be unfashionable to say so but the age of private therapy hasn't exactly been a success – two world wars, weapons of mass destruction and global pollution. But we need to rediscover how to educate ourselves into accepting, embracing even, inconvenience. Let's get back to working and playing with other people rather than talking about ourselves. What about compulsory team sports? What about tax breaks for not living alone, for not owning a car, for not having cosmetic surgery? What about abolishing TV? What about conversation over meals? What about 'others before self' as my mother used to say? 50

Adapted from "I Shop, Therefore I Am", New Internationalist, April 2003

Passage B

*Lakshmi Chaudhry writes about **Narcissism and the Media**.*

- 1 We now live in the era of micro-celebrity, which offers endless opportunities to celebrate that most special person in your life, i.e., you - who not coincidentally is also *Time* magazine's widely derided Person of the Year for 2006. An honor once reserved for world leaders, pop icons and high-profile CEOs now belongs to "you," the ordinary netizen. 5
- 2 Web 2.0's greatest successes have capitalized on our need to feel significant and admired and, above all, to be seen. The latest iteration of digital democracy has indeed brought with it a new democracy of fame, but in doing so it has left us ever more in the thrall of celebrity, except now we have a better shot at being worshipped ourselves. 10
- 3 So we upload our wackiest videos to YouTube, blog every sordid detail of our personal lives, add 200 new "friends" a day to our MySpace page, all the time hoping that one day all our efforts at self-promotion will merit - at the very least - our very own Wikipedia entry.
- 4 In the 1950s, only 12 percent of teenagers agreed with the statement, "I am an important person." By the late 1980s, the number had reached an astounding 80 percent, an upward trajectory that shows no sign of reversing. The spike in narcissism is linked to an overall increase in individualism, which has been fostered by a number of factors, including greater geographical mobility, breakdown of traditional communities and, more important, "the self-focus that became mundane and commonplace over the last two decades." In schools, at home and in popular culture, children have been inculcated with the same set of messages: You're special; love yourself; follow your dreams; you can be anything you want to be. 15 20
- 5 Since a key component of narcissism is the need to be admired and to be the centre of attention, Generation Me's attraction to fame is inevitable. Without any meaningful standard by which to measure our worth, we turn to the public eye for affirmation. Our "normal" lives seem impoverished and less significant compared with the media world, which increasingly represents all that is grand and worthwhile, and therefore more "real." 25
- 6 "It's all about you. Me. And all the various forms of the First Person Singular," writes cranky media veteran Brian Williams in his contribution to *Time*'s year-end package. "Americans have decided the most important person in their lives is...them, and our culture is now built upon that idea." So, have we turned into a nation of egoists, uninterested in anything that falls outside our narrow frame of self-reference? 30

- 7 There is a happier alternative. If these corporate technologies of self-promotion work 35
 as well as promised, they may finally render fame meaningless. If everyone is
 onstage, there will be no one left in the audience. And maybe then we rock stars can
 finally turn our attention to life down here on earth. Or it may be life on earth that
 finally jolts us out of our admiring reverie in the mirrored hall of fame. We forget that
 this growing self-involvement is a luxury afforded to a generation that has not 40
 experienced a wide-scale war or economic depression. If and when the good times
 come to an end, so may our obsession with fame. Think global war, widespread
 unemployment, climate change. But then again, how cool would it be to vlog your life
 in the new Ice Age - kind of like starring in your very own *Day After Tomorrow*. LOL.

Adapted from "Mirror, Mirror on the Web", The Nation, January 2007

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