

Professor defines connection between narcissism and envy

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Understanding the relationship between narcissism and envy may provide some insight into sudden outbursts of aggressive behavior. Narcissism has long been associated with envy in the field of psychology, but an Iowa State study provides new evidence about that connection.

Zlatan Krizan, assistant professor of psychology at Iowa State University, said his research shows most narcissists, because of their inflated sense of [superiority](#), are not likely to feel [envy](#).

"They really buy into their own fantasy," Krizan said. "If you think you're the greatest, it makes sense that you wouldn't envy others because everybody is beneath you, so there's nothing to envy. It's really the vulnerability that predicts envy and it predicts it very, very strongly."

The study, published in the *Journal of Personality*, disputes existing theories that suggest envy is a core characteristic for those who are self-absorbed, arrogant and exploitive. Krizan said his work helps to better define the different dimensions of narcissism – what psychologists refer to as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. Those who are more vulnerable show stronger feelings of envy.

"Narcissism is a more multi-faceted construct than we believe," Krizan said. "I think that's an important point, because this public image of narcissism that most people have of this grandiose, dramatic individual is only one side of the coin."

Krizan and Omesh Johar, a graduate student at Iowa State, surveyed nearly 200 undergraduate students and more than 150 adults to identify their feelings of envy and the frequency. Those identified as vulnerable had low self-esteem, were often distraught, anxious and depressed.

"These individuals still think they're special, entitled, and they want to be great, but they just can't do it," Krizan said. "As a result they're vulnerable, their self-esteem fluctuates a lot, they tend to be self-conscious and not very proactive, but passive, shy, and introverted."

When the feeling of envy is added to the mix, Krizan said it can be a potentially dangerous combination. Though vulnerable narcissists are not as overt in their behavior, they may be more prone to unexpected outbursts of aggression.

"It's these vulnerable individuals who are in some sense more worrisome because they are quiet, sort of festering in anger out there in a corner. And it's just a matter of time before they get frustrated and lash out and verbally assault somebody, maybe even an innocent party, because of some provocation that they felt," Krizan said.

This becomes a concern when that anger turns to violence. Krizan said the Columbine school shooting in 1999 is an example in which narcissism and envy were possible motivating factors. He points to the videotapes left behind by the two shooters as evidence.

"If you look at evidence that is often left over, in Columbine for example you had those videos, these shooting escapades seem to be a kind of power grab by these individuals," Krizan said. "The tapes are also narratives, in which they are the person taking control, they're the one in charge and they will determine how things will go."

It is important to note that there is always a combination of factors that

contribute to the violence in these extreme cases. However, Krizan said understanding how envy and [narcissism](#) are related will help in the diagnosis and definition of narcissistic personality disorder and its antisocial consequences.

More information: www.psychology.iastate.edu/~zkrizan/pdf/Krizan%20&%20Johar%20%282012%29%20Envy%20and%20narcissism.pdf

Provided by Iowa State University

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