

Sexual statistics—studying the intimate relationship between narcissism and satisfaction

February 14 2017, by Elaine Smith

If you learned that your next-door neighbours were having sexual relations more frequently than you and your partner, would it bother you?

Three U of T Mississauga researchers set out to understand how people view their sex lives in comparison to those of others and discovered that sexual narcissism colours the way people make and view those comparisons.

"For some people, those comparisons are pretty influential," said Lisa Day, a PhD candidate at UTM.

In new research published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Day, Emily Impett, a UTM psychology professor, and Amy Muise (now a York University professor) looked at how these comparisons affect both relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction for people with varying degrees of sexual narcissism.

Sexual narcissism should not be confused with general narcissistic personality traits. It is defined as "the tendency to exploit others, a lack of empathy, feelings of grandiosity and an excessive need for validation in the sexual domain." They're the people, for example, who buy you dinner and expect sexual favours in return.

The trio of researchers discovered that many people seemed to be curious about the sex lives of others. Individuals who had a high degree of sexual narcissism were very susceptible to comparisons with others, regardless of whether the source was friends, colleagues, survey data or magazine articles. They tended to make comparisons favourable to themselves (downward comparisons). Comparisons that showed them in a lesser light (upward comparisons) appeared to decrease their satisfaction, both with their sexual relationship and their overall relationship.

"Individuals with a high degree of sexual narcissism tend to make comparisons with those who are less sexually skilled, for example," Day said. "When they do make comparisons with someone doing better than they were, it gets under their skin."

By contrast, individuals with a low degree of sexual narcissism weren't much affected by favourable comparisons; they didn't have much of an impact on how sexually satisfied they were or how much satisfaction they derived from their relationships.

The researchers reached these conclusions through three studies that used participants from the Amazon survey roster. In the each study, the participants were measured for sexual narcissism and for personality narcissism. In the first study, participants were then asked to recall the most recent comparison they had made between their sex lives and that of others – data show that people make such comparisons on five per cent of the days in the year.

The researchers assessed the direction of these comparisons. "People who were higher in sexual narcissism were more likely to recall a [favourable] social comparison, which in turn predicted greater sexual and relationship satisfaction immediately after recalling that comparison," they wrote.

In the second study, the researchers asked the participants how much they would be bothered by sexual comparisons with those who had more prowess or more regular [sexual relations](#) if those people were: (a) their best friend, (b) their partner's best friend, and (c) the average couple. The results, wrote the researchers, "showed that [people](#) who were higher in sexual narcissism reported that they would be more bothered by upward social comparisons, and, in turn, reported lower sexual and [relationship satisfaction](#)."

In the third study, subjects were given a doctored magazine article relating to sexuality and randomly asked to compare its findings to their own sex lives in an upward fashion, a downward fashion or not to make any comparison. They were then asked about their satisfaction with their personal relationships and their sexual relationships. As anticipated, those with a high degree of sexual narcissism were very sensitive to such comparisons and were dissatisfied with their sexual and personal relationships when forced to compare themselves in a non-favourable way.

"People are curious about the sexuality of others and make comparisons that impact how they feel about their own relationships," Day said. "This curiosity has opened a completely new line of research for us."

Provided by University of Toronto

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