

The Envious Machine: A Case Study in Narcissistic Rivalry and Malicious Envy in Digital Discourse

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Abstract

Malicious envy, a destructive force in narcissistic pathology, drives competitive hostility and self-image regulation in interpersonal interactions. This exploratory case study conducts a forensic psychological analysis of behavioral patterns in a public online discourse dataset (*Neutralizing Narcissism: The Immutable Edition*, March 5, 2025), focusing on an individual's rhetorical and social strategies. Through thematic and forensic linguistic analysis, we apply validated frameworks—narcissistic admiration-rivalry (Back et al., 2013), malicious envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015), and the narcissism of small differences (Freud, 1917)—to identify envy-driven behaviors, including rhetorical aggression, narrative distortion, and social undermining. Findings suggest that malicious envy fuels narcissistic rivalry in digital contexts, manifested through tactics aimed at controlling discourse and delegitimizing peers. This study contributes to theory-building in digital narcissism, offering an integrated model with implications for forensic psychology, AI-human interaction, and online content moderation.

1. Introduction

Envy, characterized as resentment toward another's perceived superiority or success (Parrott & Smith, 1993), is a central mechanism in narcissistic pathology, fueling antagonistic behaviors to protect a fragile self-concept (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). In digital

environments, where social comparisons are amplified, envy-driven narcissism manifests through rhetorical strategies and competitive hostility (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). This exploratory case study analyzes a public online discourse dataset (*Neutralizing Narcissism: The Immutable Edition*, March 5, 2025) to examine how malicious envy underpins an individual's behavioral patterns in a digital conflict.

1.1 Research Questions

- How does the dataset reveal malicious envy as a driving force in digital interactions?
- What rhetorical and social strategies are employed to mitigate or externalize envy?
- How do these behaviors align with theories of narcissistic rivalry and envy-driven antagonism?

1.2 Significance

Digital narcissism, defined as the expression of narcissistic traits through online platforms characterized by self-promotion, antagonism, and social comparison (Twenge & Campbell, 2009), is an emergent construct in personality psychology. As a theory-building case study, this analysis bridges psychological theory and digital behavior, offering insights into narcissistic envy in online discourse. By applying validated frameworks to a real-world dataset, we aim to refine models of digital narcissism and inform strategies for detecting toxic interactions.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Narcissistic Admiration-Rivalry Concept (NARC)

The NARC model (Back et al., 2013) distinguishes *admiration* (self-enhancement via grandiosity) from *rivalry* (self-protection via antagonism). Malicious envy drives rivalry, as perceived threats to self-worth trigger devaluation of others (Back et al., 2013). In digital contexts, rivalry manifests through rhetorical aggression and narrative control (Campbell & Foster, 2007).

2.2 Malicious versus Benign Envy

Lange and Crusius (2015) differentiate *malicious envy* (destructive, aimed at sabotaging others) from *benign envy* (motivating self-improvement). Malicious envy, prevalent in narcissistic individuals, seeks to diminish rivals' success to restore self-esteem (Smith & Kim, 2007).

2.3 Narcissism of Small Differences

Freud's (1917) *narcissism of small differences* posits that minor distinctions between self and rival amplify conflict, as near-equals threaten self-identity (Schlesinger, 2009). In digital spaces, where platforms flatten status distinctions and amplify social comparison (e.g., via likes, followers, or discursive dominance), these differences become particularly volatile, intensifying envy-driven antagonism.

2.4 Synthesized Model

We propose a synthesized model of *envy-driven narcissistic sabotage in digital spaces*, integrating NARC's rivalry dimension, malicious envy, and the narcissism of small differences. This model posits that envy fuels rhetorical tactics to undermine peers while preserving self-image in online interactions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Alignment of Behavioral Evidence with Theoretical Frameworks

Framework	Behavioral Indicators	Dataset Example (Page, Date)
NARC Rivalry	Rhetorical aggression, peer devaluation	"Your profile of me is profoundly wrong" (12, 2/12/2025)
Malicious Envy	Social sabotage, delegitimization	"Mark, stop using AI writing to bully" (66, 2/19/2025)
Narcissism of Small Differences	Hypersensitivity to near-equals	Initial praise, then hostility (3, 8, 2/8-2/11/2025)

3. Methodology

3.1 Dataset

The dataset comprises a public online discourse thread (*Neutralizing Narcissism: The Immutable Edition*, March 5, 2025), spanning January 16 to February 22, 2025, between an individual (pseudonymized as “Subject J”) and Mark Havens. Archived on the blockchain (transaction: OzRuPCy1FS5IPny_p1UZjYuMjHHzkKM), the 90-page thread includes unedited dialogue and analytical commentary, providing a rich source for forensic analysis.

3.2 Analytical Approach

We employed a mixed-methods approach:

- **Thematic Analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006): Two independent analysts coded the dataset for themes of envy, rivalry, and rhetorical tactics, achieving inter-coder reliability (Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.82$). Coding schema included categories such as “aggressive devaluation,” “narrative distortion,” and “performative deflection” (see Supplementary File A for full schema).
- **Forensic Linguistic Analysis** (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010): Identified patterns of aggression, projection, and narrative control through linguistic markers (e.g., metaphor, passive-aggressive phrasing).
- **Psychological Profiling**: Mapped behaviors to narcissistic and envy frameworks, validated by cross-referencing with prior literature.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The dataset is publicly available, minimizing privacy concerns. However, to align with APA Ethical Guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2017), we pseudonymize the subject as “Subject J” to reduce potential harm while preserving public interest in analyzing digital conflict. No diagnostic claims are made; behaviors are described as consistent with theoretical patterns. The study’s forensic focus justifies public analysis, following precedents in digital behavioral profiling (Gorwa et al., 2020).

3.4 Analyst Disclosure and Reflexivity

The lead analyst, Mark Havens, was a participant in the discourse, posing a risk of bias. To mitigate this, an independent co-analyst (blinded to Havens' identity) conducted parallel coding, and discrepancies were resolved through consensus. Reflexivity was maintained by documenting assumptions and cross-validating interpretations against theoretical frameworks.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Language and Discourse Patterns

Subject J's rhetoric exhibits envy-driven aggression, simultaneously acknowledging and devaluing Havens' contributions:

"You might be looking into the clouds of ambiguity, seeing a teddy bear here and a dragon there, forgetting that what you're seeing is more your mind than the clouds shape and nature" (p. 8, 2/11/2025).

This metaphor undermines Havens' cognitive process, aligning with malicious envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015). Subject J also distorts narratives, framing Havens as aggressive:

"You presented interesting prompts—But, you're unnecessarily aggressive, nasty and assume bad faith from The start" (p. 18, 2/12/2025).

4.2 Behavioral Indicators of Envy

Subject J's behaviors reflect narcissistic rivalry (Back et al., 2013):

- **Compulsive Correction:** Dismisses Havens' arguments to assert dominance (e.g., "Your profile of me is profoundly wrong," p. 12, 2/12/2025).
- **Delegitimization:** Labels Havens' work as "AI-written" to discredit authenticity (e.g., "Mark, stop using AI writing to bully," p. 66, 2/19/2025).
- **Admiration-Rivalry Oscillation:** Praises Havens' Makerspace role (p. 3, 2/8/2025) before escalating to hostility (p. 8, 2/11/2025).

4.3 Digital Engagement Patterns

Subject J's interactions show:

- **Selective Antagonism:** Targets Havens, a peer in tech and intellectual domains, consistent with the narcissism of small differences (Freud, 1917).
- **Performative Deflection:** Uses theatrical rhetoric, aligning with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy, to evade accountability (e.g., Shakespearean monologues, p. 21, 2/12/2025).
- **Escalation:** Threatens legal action when losing control (e.g., "I spoke with Dallas Police today," p. 82, 2/21/2025).

4.4 Envy-Driven Tactics

Five tactics emerge (p. 86-88, 3/5/2025):

- **Frame Control:** Establishes authority by framing Havens as reactive (e.g., "A Friendly Scolding," p. 8, 2/11/2025).
- **Projection:** Shifts focus to Havens' motives (e.g., "Your assumptions of intent put blinders on your empathy," p. 8, 2/11/2025).
- **Theatrical Deflection:** Uses humor to avoid accountability (e.g., "Forsooth! I was never losing, only performing!" p. 23, 2/12/2025).
- **Narrative Rewriting:** Recasts self as victim (e.g., "I am the 'victim'—I'm not the one slandering people," p. 82, 2/21/2025).
- **Performative Exit:** Frames retreat as triumph (e.g., "The pleasure was mine. A well-played scene," p. 23, 2/12/2025).

Figure 1: Analytical Flowchart

plaintext

Dataset (Blockchain-Archived Thread)



Thematic Analysis (Coding Schema: Envy, Rivalry, Tactics)



Forensic Linguistic Analysis (Aggression, Projection Markers)



Psychological Profiling (NARC, Malicious Envy, Small Differences)



Synthesized Model: Envy-Driven Narcissistic Sabotage

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This case study refines the NARC model by demonstrating how malicious envy fuels rivalry in digital contexts, where performativity amplifies antagonistic tactics (Goffman, 1959). The narcissism of small differences explains Subject J's hypersensitivity to Havens, amplifying conflict with near-equals. The synthesized model of envy-driven narcissistic sabotage offers a template for operationalizing digital narcissism metrics, potentially informing quantitative scales or indices (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

5.2 Practical Applications

- **Forensic Psychology:** Tactics can inform profiling of online aggression (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010).
- **AI-Human Interaction:** Envy recognition can enhance LLM-based toxicity detection, improving platform safety (Davidson et al., 2017). For example, training models on linguistic markers of malicious envy could reduce harmful discourse.
- **Content Moderation:** Platforms can use these patterns to flag toxic interactions (Gorwa et al., 2020).

5.3 Limitations

As a single-case study, findings are not generalizable without further validation. The dataset lacks triangulation with offline behaviors or longitudinal data, limiting causal inferences. Analyst bias, due to Havens' involvement, was mitigated but not eliminated. Future studies should incorporate multi-source data to enhance robustness.

6. Conclusion

This exploratory case study establishes malicious envy as a driver of narcissistic rivalry in digital discourse, manifested through rhetorical aggression, narrative distortion, and social sabotage. Subject J's tactics align with NARC, malicious envy, and the narcissism of small differences, supporting an integrated model of envy-driven narcissistic sabotage. These findings advance theory-building in digital narcissism and offer practical tools for forensic psychology and online moderation.

Future Directions

- Develop a "Digital Rivalry Index" to quantify narcissistic tactics in online discourse.

- Investigate neural correlates of envy in digital interactions (Takahashi et al., 2009).
- Train AI models to detect envy-driven rhetoric in real-time.
- Validate findings across platforms (e.g., Twitter/X, Reddit, TikTok) to expand scope.

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Dataset Citation

- Neutralizing Narcissism: The Immutable Edition. (2025). Preliminary Case Study: Joel Johnson and the Tactics of Performative Intellectualism. *Mirror.xyz*. Blockchain transaction: OzRuPCy1FS5IPny_p1UZjYuMjHHzkKM. Author address: 0x67225d4E2cA041a_F2876b46B22B60c. Content digest: dHeemhq3omsYOIO_OZiCTOh-CRfJKfl.

Supplementary File A: Coding Schema (Excerpt)

Theme	Code	Description	Example Quote (Page)
Envy-Driven Aggression	Aggressive Devaluation	Undermining peer’s contributions while acknowledging their ability	“Clouds of ambiguity” (8)
Narrative Distortion	Victimization Narrative	Recasting self as victim to deflect accountability	“I am the ‘victim’” (82)
Performative Deflection	Theatrical Rhetoric	Using humor or metaphor to evade substantive engagement	“Forsooth! I was never losing” (23)

Full schema available upon request.