

Psychologists say 'group-level narcissism' linked to negative attitudes toward immigrants

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Feelings of entitlement and superiority that go beyond patriotism and love of country may be a key predictor for Americans who will feel or behave negatively toward undocumented Latino immigrants, according to a study from The University of Texas at Arlington.

Researchers looked at those enhanced feelings of superiority - referred to as group-level narcissism – along with a factor called national in-group identification in a new work to be published in the August issue of the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science*. National in-group identification happens when a person's individual identity is strongly tied to and dependent on their membership in a group, like being an American.

Previous research has found that strong in-group identity is not necessarily a predictor of [negative attitudes](#) toward other groups. The UT Arlington team found, however, that attitudes changed when a strong in-group identity was paired with an average or above average group narcissism. Then, negative attitudes toward undocumented Latino immigrants were more likely.

"When you look at the rhetoric surrounding undocumented, Latino immigrants in the United States, the perspectives vary widely – from those who characterize [undocumented immigrants](#) as criminals to those who support expanding full citizenship rights," said Patricia Lyons, a

graduate of the psychology doctoral program in the UT Arlington College of Science and a member of the research team. "We were interested in understanding how and why attitudes varied so widely from a psychological perspective. The group narcissism measure gave us a way to understand these attitudes. "

Lyons co-authored the study with Jared Kenworthy, a UT Arlington associate [psychology professor](#), and Ph.D. candidate Lauren E. Coursey. Lyons is currently on the psychology faculty at Mountain View College in Dallas.

The team surveyed 223 university students with tools designed to measure their national in-group identity and propensity for group-level narcissism, which is defined as "an inflated image of one's group based on feelings of superiority, entitlement and the need for constant attention and praise at the collective level."

For example, the test assessing group narcissism asked participants to rank how strongly they agreed with statements such as "If America ruled the world it would be a better place" and "America is the best country in the world."

The newly published paper builds on earlier research by Kenworthy and Lyons about the relationship between in-group identification, group-level narcissism and negative attitudes toward Arab-Americans. That study also found that group-level narcissism was linked to negative attitudes.

The researchers believe that increases in group-level [narcissism](#) may be prompted by perceived threats to someone's group from an outside group. Those perceived threats could center on a loss of valuable resources or job opportunities, or threats to one's personal beliefs. The team hopes to examine the threat component in future research.

At a time when conversations about immigration reform can often turn ugly, the research team hopes their latest work adds to understanding about what can cause divisive attitudes and how those relationships might be improved.

Still, there are no easy answers, Kenworthy said.

"One thing we do know from previous research is that mere knowledge about, or even contact with, another group is not adequate to reduce negative attitudes," Kenworthy said. "First, members of different groups must be given the opportunity to come together in a setting of mutual goals, equal status and cooperation."

More information: The study is titled: "National Identity and Group Narcissism as Predictors of Intergroup Attitudes Toward Undocumented Latino Immigrants in the United States" and can be found online here: hjb.sagepub.com/content/35/3/323.abstract

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