# Study links narcissism and social media to romantic ‘ick’ sensation



# Understanding "The Ick": A Psychological Perspective

It’s a sensation that many have experienced yet few can articulate: the sudden, visceral feeling of disgust towards a romantic partner known colloquially as "the ick." You might find yourself in a comfortable relationship, only to be unexpectedly repulsed by something as trivial as the way your partner ties their shoelaces or the speed at which they send texts. Recently, researchers have unveiled intriguing insights into this phenomenon, suggesting that the experience of "the ick" could be linked to specific personality traits and broader psychological patterns.

A recent study led by Eliana Saunders at Azusa Pacific University explored this phenomenon, finding that around 64% of participants had experienced the ick at some point in their dating lives. Notably, women were more likely than men to report both familiarity with the term and personal experiences of it. The study also identified a stark divide in how different genders react to "ick triggers": women were more frequently put off by speech patterns or perceived misogynistic behaviour, whereas men often cited vanity or ostentatious trends as turn-offs.

The research team delved deeper, discovering that those who possess higher narcissistic traits or strict standards for their partners are more likely to report instances of the ick. Narcissism, particularly grandiose narcissism, characterised by an inflated sense of self-importance and a constant craving for admiration, significantly correlates with the likelihood of experiencing this sensation. Consequently, it raises a vital question: Does the encounter with the ick indicate genuine incompatibility, or could it stem from personal insecurities and high expectations?

This phenomenon has garnered considerable attention online, amplified by platforms like TikTok, where users share their own experiences and triggers for the ick. Social media thus plays a dual role: while it helps normalise discussions around such feelings, it may also lead individuals to adopt increasingly rigid standards in their romantic pursuits. Dr. David Kellerman, who has studied the psychological ramifications of social media on relationships, reflects that, “The instant connectivity and the curated portrayal of relationships can perpetuate unrealistic expectations.”

From a psychological standpoint, many experts argue that the feeling of disgust could serve as an evolutionary mechanism designed to protect individuals from undesirable traits that may signal poor mate compatibility or even risk of disease. Research in this realm suggests that these instincts may, however, lead to self-sabotage if individuals become overly attached to the notion of the perfect partner. The editorial stance in various studies underscores the importance of reflection—assessing whether a given instance of the ick is genuinely a deal-breaker or a reflection of heightened sensitivity.

In response to this growing discourse, experts recommend open communication within relationships. Talking about troubling feelings rather than harbouring them can prevent misunderstandings and facilitate deeper connections. Reflections on personal triggers may lead to greater self-awareness, helping people differentiate between legitimate incompatibilities and those rooted in personal biases or heightened expectations.

Ultimately, while the ick can function as a useful marker of mate incompatibility, it is vital to approach such feelings critically. As Saunders succinctly puts it, “Ask yourself: Is this something I truly can’t deal with, or am I being overly critical?” Understanding the psychological foundations of the ick can help individuals navigate their relationships with greater clarity and empathy, paving the way for healthier romantic engagements.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14687553/Have-YOU-experienced-ick-youre-narcissist.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/02/nx-s1-5273847/did-your-date-give-you-the-ick-heres-the-science-behind-the-feeling)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14687553/Have-YOU-experienced-ick-youre-narcissist.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/traversmark/2025/02/20/a-psychologist-explains-the-science-behind-getting-the-ick/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/traversmark/2025/02/20/a-psychologist-explains-the-science-behind-getting-the-ick/), [[5]](https://www.georgetown.edu/news/ask-a-professor-the-neuroscience-of-the-ick/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.time.com/6958762/why-you-get-the-ick-psychology/), [[6]](https://www.all-about-psychology.com/get-the-ick.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/02/nx-s1-5273847/did-your-date-give-you-the-ick-heres-the-science-behind-the-feeling), [[7]](https://www.latestly.com/technology/science/psychologists-uncover-why-you-get-the-ick-in-relationships-6656850.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14687553/Have-YOU-experienced-ick-youre-narcissist.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/traversmark/2025/02/20/a-psychologist-explains-the-science-behind-getting-the-ick/> - This article delves into the psychological and evolutionary aspects of 'the ick,' a sudden feeling of repulsion toward a romantic interest. It discusses how disgust sensitivity, narcissism, and perfectionism contribute to this phenomenon. The piece also highlights gender differences, noting that women are more likely to experience 'the ick' and suggests that social media amplifies these feelings. The author emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and managing expectations in relationships to navigate 'the ick' effectively.
3. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/02/nx-s1-5273847/did-your-date-give-you-the-ick-heres-the-science-behind-the-feeling> - This NPR article explores the concept of 'the ick,' a sudden aversion to a romantic partner, through the lens of psychology and evolutionary biology. It discusses how disgust may have evolved as a protective mechanism against disease and undesirable traits. The piece also examines how social norms and personal biases influence the experience of 'the ick.' Experts suggest that while this feeling can serve as a defense mechanism, it may also lead to self-sabotage in relationships.
4. <https://www.time.com/6958762/why-you-get-the-ick-psychology/> - Time magazine investigates the psychological underpinnings of 'the ick,' a sudden feeling of repulsion toward a romantic partner. The article discusses how evolutionary factors, such as the need to avoid poor health or social acceptance, may trigger this response. It also considers the role of relationship anxiety and defense mechanisms. Experts weigh in on whether 'the ick' should be a deal-breaker and suggest that open communication with one's partner can help address these feelings.
5. <https://www.georgetown.edu/news/ask-a-professor-the-neuroscience-of-the-ick/> - Georgetown University's article examines the neurological basis of 'the ick,' a sudden aversion to a romantic partner. It discusses how uncontrollable brain processes may contribute to this feeling and how it relates to idealization and reality in relationships. The piece also touches on the role of social norms and personal biases in experiencing 'the ick.' Experts suggest that while this response is natural, it may not always be constructive and can hinder the development of genuine connections.
6. <https://www.all-about-psychology.com/get-the-ick.html> - This article provides an in-depth look at 'the ick,' a sudden feeling of repulsion toward a romantic partner. It explores psychological concepts such as cognitive dissonance, idealization, and evolutionary psychology to explain why individuals experience this phenomenon. The piece also offers examples to illustrate how 'the ick' manifests in real-life situations and discusses the complex interplay of psychological processes involved in romantic relationships.
7. <https://www.latestly.com/technology/science/psychologists-uncover-why-you-get-the-ick-in-relationships-6656850.html> - This article summarizes a study that investigates the psychological factors behind 'the ick,' a sudden aversion to a romantic partner. The research identifies triggers such as gender incongruence, public embarrassment, and annoying speech. It also examines how narcissism and perfectionism influence the likelihood of experiencing 'the ick.' The study highlights gender differences, noting that women are more likely to experience this feeling and suggests that social media trends may contribute to heightened standards in relationships.