

New study suggests narcissists have weaker cognitive abilities than they think



A new study by cognitive psychology researchers at the University of Waterloo says that narcissists are worse at critical thinking than they believe they are. (Hassan Ouajbir / pexels.com)



Alexandra Mae Jones, CTVNews.ca writer
@AlexandraMaeJ

Published Tuesday, September 3, 2019 8:27PM EDT

Last Updated Tuesday, September 3, 2019 9:04PM EDT

A new study suggests that although narcissists often perceive themselves as being very intelligent, they may be less likely to use critical thinking skills, and have difficulty thinking beyond a gut instinct when problem solving.

In particular, so-called “grandiose narcissists” are significantly overconfident in their intellectual performance -- a feeling not backed up by their results on cognitive reasoning tests.

There have been many studies looking at how personality impacts behavior, but this study, published in the journal “Thinking & Reasoning,” goes a step further to try to inspect the connection between personality and how a person thinks.

RELATED STORIES

[Brain imaging lie detector: Researchers discover two techniques to beat this test](#)

[Study examines why people experience 'radically different' effects from cannabis](#)

[More sleep, less screen time may reduce impulsivity in kids: study](#)

[Should professionals join public in diagnosing Donald Trump?](#)

[Men are most narcissistic of us all: study](#)

Shane Littrell, the lead author of the study and a cognitive psychology PhD student at the University of Waterloo, told CTVNews.ca over the phone that he was inspired to study this because of the political and social climate in the U.S.

“Certain events of the past couple of years have kind of brought a focus on narcissism and other personality traits like it into the public consciousness,” he said.

“So I started thinking, well, what is it? Is there something about narcissism that isn't just about this grandiosity, and what we call self-enhancing, puffing themselves up to feel better about themselves? Maybe it's not just a purely personality thing, maybe it actually has to do with their cognition. Are they making decisions and processing information in a way that is distorted?”

The study clarified that there are two types of narcissist: grandiose and vulnerable. A grandiose narcissist is the person we all think of when we hear the word narcissist. They feel superior to others, have more entitlement, and have a strong, usually inflated, level of self-esteem.

Vulnerable narcissists, Littrell explained, are more insecure. While a grandiose narcissist tends to shrug off criticism, a vulnerable narcissist might post a carefully curated image on social media and then feel extremely hurt if they do not receive the amount of positive attention they expected, Littrell said.

The study aimed to look at, among other questions, whether narcissists were capable of the self-reflection

RELATED LINKS

[Overconfidently Underthinking: narcissism negatively predicts cognitive reflection](#) 

necessary for critical thinking.

In order to judge this, the study put participants through a few tests.

One was a longer version of the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT), a basic test involving logic questions structured deliberately to trick a reader into making a snap judgement. Questions are phrased in a way that seems to imply a simple answer -- but that simple answer is always the wrong one. This can help judge whether people go with a gut instinct or whether they are able to sit with a problem longer and think deeply in order to find the right answer.

The study also assessed participants on self-reported engagement in reflection, overconfidence, impulsiveness, and how often they examined their own thoughts and whether they understood them.

The study went through a few rounds, starting out with 100 participants. In their results, Littrell said "the grandiose narcissists tended to be really overconfident in all of their intellectual (output) and that didn't tend to be the case for the vulnerable narcissists."

He explained that although vulnerable narcissists were able to enter into that reflection period, going beyond their first instinct, "it's like they start to doubt their own cognitive process, so then they just default back to that gut spot."

On the other hand, the grandiose narcissists wouldn't even enter into that process, Littrell said.

"They are so overconfident that the first thing that pops into their mind, they're like, 'Yeah, that's right'."

In a later round of the study, which surveyed around 400 people, intellectual ability was part of the assessment, to better isolate whether narcissism itself still correlated with a lack of critical thinking. Even grandiose narcissists who had a higher cognitive ability than other narcissists were still not as smart as they thought they were, the study found.

And compared to the average person, grandiose narcissists on a whole had a lower intellectual ability, Littrell said.

Does a narcissist know when they're a narcissist?

There have been previous studies, Littrell said, that prove that grandiose narcissists know when they fit the term. However, they usually don't care.

Although he said "in a perfect world," he would hope that a narcissist might read this new study and reflect upon themselves, Littrell doubted that would happen.

"There's (past) research showing that when they get negative feedback, even when it's not really harsh, they tend to just discount it," Littrell said.

He added that he wouldn't "make any sweeping statements like, 'It's hopeless,'" in terms of whether narcissists can develop the ability to self-reflect. He is currently working on further research into narcissism.

While the results of this study may seem obvious to some people, research like this underlines the fact that narcissism isn't just a matter of opinion or personality, but a factor that can possibly predict or affect a person's cognitive ability.

As for whether cognition influences personality or vice versa, Littrell said the question, to him, is a chicken-and-the-egg situation.

"Narcissistic eggs make unreflective chickens."

TOP VIDEO



'I'm leaving now because of a double standard': U.S. lawmaker resigns after intimate photos leaked



Formalizing the impeachment investigation of Trump



British Columbia man charged in 'horrific' animal abuse case

DON'T MISS



Rainy weather forcing parts of Canada to postpone Halloween

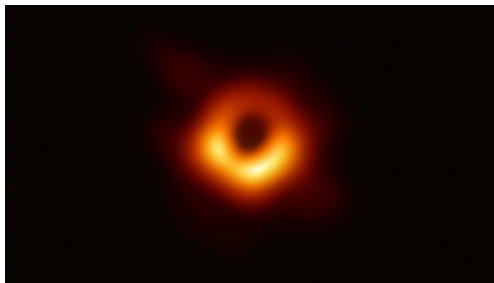


'He got five cars': Bear learns how to open vehicle doors



Haunted House offering \$20k to anyone who can complete it

MORE NEWS FROM SCI-TECH



A new type of black hole has been discovered and it may be the smallest ever

Twitter pulls back on political ads, but pitfalls await

Sidewalk Labs and Waterfront Toronto reach deal on reduced scope for Quayside

Woman livestreamed her brain surgery on Facebook

Greta declines cash prize, says 'the climate does not need any more awards'

Facebook agrees to pay fine in Cambridge Analytica scandal

JOIN THE CONVERSATION...



Use of this Website assumes acceptance of [Terms & Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

© 2019 **BellMedia** All rights reserved.