

Narcissists less likely to use critical thinking processes for making sound decisions

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Narcissists are less likely to use critical thinking processes that are important for solving problems and making sound decisions, new research from the University of Waterloo shows.

The researchers found that while many narcissists may perceive themselves as highly intelligent, critical thinkers, they are less likely to use important reflective thinking strategies when solving problems. Therefore, the high levels of confidence they have in their [intellectual abilities](#) are often misplaced.

Shane Littrell, lead author and cognitive psychology Ph.D. student at Waterloo, said that while there is research connecting personality to behaviour, "our research takes a step toward understanding how personality is associated with reflective thinking."

Grandiose narcissists are significantly overconfident in their intellectual performance

As part of a series of studies investigating the relationship between [narcissism](#), impulsiveness, and cognitive reflection, two types of narcissism—grandiose and vulnerable—were assessed. Grandiose narcissists feel more entitled, superior to others, and have higher self-esteem, while vulnerable narcissists feel more insecure, defensive, introverted, and have lower self-esteem.

In one study, the researchers recruited 100 participants from the United States and assessed their performance on the Cognitive Reflection Test, self-reported engagement in reflection, metacognitive insight, Need for Cognition, and intuitive thinking. In a later study, the assessments were repeated, with the additional examination of the impact of overconfidence on cognitive ability.

"We found that grandiose and vulnerable narcissism are negatively associated with certain types of important reflective thinking processes," said Jonathan Fugelsang, who co-authored the study along with Evan Risko, both supervisors of Littrell and cognitive psychology professors at Waterloo.

Their results confirmed that grandiose narcissists are significantly overconfident in their [intellectual performance](#). "We also found that when [vulnerable narcissists](#) attempt to engage in cognitive reflection, they're more likely to find it a confusing and ineffective experience," said Littrell.

The research has helped to identify the associations between narcissism and reflective thinking processes, which could have important implications for broader societal questions. "In light of recent events over the past few years, the impact of narcissism (and other more negative personality attributes) has seen an increased interest from the media and the public at large. So, we felt this study might help answer interesting questions related to that larger public conversation," Littrell said.

"With this research, we are able to learn more about the various factors involved in critical thinking and [decision making](#). The better we understand the things that can lead people to make poor decisions, the more we can help them make better ones," Risko said.

The study appears in the journal *Thinking & Reasoning*.

More information: Shane Littrell et al. Overconfidently underthinking: narcissism negatively predicts cognitive reflection, *Thinking & Reasoning* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/13546783.2019.1633404](https://doi.org/10.1080/13546783.2019.1633404)

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