

Popular science summary

The term “Narcissist” is usually used to describe individuals who are puffed up and who constantly exploit others and are seeing all but themselves. Narcissism does not necessarily have to be a full-range personality disorder, it is rather a personality trait which everyone in greater or lesser extent has. Probably, given this common character, most of us know a person who might be labelled as narcissistic. Recently, in the scientific literature, different portraits of narcissistic individuals have been described. On the one hand, we might deal with a person who is always in the center of attention, who dresses up as a star and who always strives to be in the spotlight. On the other, we have a person who is withdrawing, but who is also exaggeratedly interpreting everything as a personal attack and is constantly seeking threats within the surroundings. These portraits are labeled as agentic and neurotic narcissism, respectively. Although they are largely different, there is something that connects them. More specifically, it is the hostility towards others, lack of compliance with norms and deep and entitled feeling that the world is spinning around them. This portrait is labeled as antagonistic narcissism.

As can be seen, the structure of narcissism is a little bit more complicated than involuntary associations. The results of recent studies indicate, moreover, that a narcissistic individual would behave differently across different contexts and situations. These studies emphasize that narcissism in a large extent could be interpreted as a process, which, in reaction to the on-going events may lead to different solutions. For instance, within a situation where all admires a narcissistic individual – there is no need to change anything. But when a threat emerges, narcissistic individual will try to diminish this threat (e.g., through aggression). In some situations, however, it might be impossible to do so, which may force a narcissistic individual to the state of momentarily feeling down, which would be interpreted that the whole world is against them and there was nothing they could do. In this line of research, narcissism is understood as a state, which might change across contexts and situations.

Current research aims to better understand this state of narcissism and attempts to explain how these narcissistic states fluctuate, how stable they are and in which situations they emerge. To answer these questions, we planned two experimental studies aimed to assess the reactions to successes and failures, as well as two intensive longitudinal studies in which the very same individuals would take part in a studies lasting for 14 days, reporting many times across the day about their state narcissism. Connecting momentary and longer assessments of state narcissism we would be able to better understand the nature of these changes. Knowing this mechanism might be a key factor in the future of developing an evidence-based therapy of narcissism, because especially during the feeling down period, therapists notice best advances during the therapeutic process.