

How does the narcissistic mind work? In this project, we examine the association between trait narcissism and cognitive functioning. Nowadays, narcissism is often investigated as a subclinical personality trait that varies between people. In the research literature two major forms of narcissism are distinguished – grandiose and vulnerable. They both share some feature, such as self-concentration, entitlement and antagonism, however, they differ in many respects. Grandiose narcissism is characterized by social boldness, unrealistically positive self-views, self-enhancement, high self-esteem and high approach motivation. Vulnerable narcissism reflects low self-esteem, social withdrawal, insecurity, hostility and high avoidant motivation. The research on cognitive functioning in narcissism is scarce. The review of the existing research literature on cognitive processes in narcissism suggests that each form of narcissism is associated with distinct cognitive tendencies. Specifically, grandiose narcissists show a bias towards stimuli that are positive and refer to agentic attributes. Thus, grandiose narcissists manifest increased approach motivation for positive-agentic information. In other words, their mind is set on mode ‘explore and conquer’. Vulnerable narcissists tend to focus on negative information and have difficulties disengaging attention from negative/threatening stimuli. Thus, they are hypervigilant and ruminate negative information. In other words, their mind is set on mode ‘beware and monitor’. Additionally, we suggest that the cognitive biases might be fueled by narcissists’, at least in grandiose type, poor metacognitive abilities and confirmation bias. In line with this argumentation, we propose potential interventions that might reduce biases of narcissists.

In the project we plan six studies that will examine cognitive functioning of people with different levels of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and six cognitive areas: attention, cognitive scope, memory, problem solving and intelligence. Within each study we will create two independent groups. One group will perform the task in ‘regular’ conditions, while in the other group we plan interventions to reduce the cognitive biases in narcissism (especially grandiose). The project might provide evidence about unique cognitive profiles of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, suggesting that both traits reflect partially distinct phenotypic expressions of narcissism.