

Narcissism and Risky Economic Behavior

by

Jessica Young

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

Approved July 2023 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Nicholas Alozie, Chair

Kathy Thomas

Scott Scheall

Arizona State University

August 2023

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether different types of narcissistic behavior are associated with different kinds of economic risk behavior. The thesis examines five published articles to establish whether the sub-classifications of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) are significantly linked to economic risk behavior, broadly defined. The primary hypothesis states that different classifications of narcissistic behavior will be associated with different kinds of economic risk behavior. The paper finds, broadly, that different kinds of narcissistic behavior classifications are indeed associated with different kinds of economic risk behavior. Specifically, grandiose narcissism (GN) is associated with higher rates of risky gambling behavior; however, manifestations of vulnerable narcissism (VN) appear to play an integral role in the relationship. The paper also finds that both GN and VN are associated with higher rates of oniomania where mediating roles of impulsivity, materialism, and emptiness are present. The thesis concludes that addressing the issue of narcissism cannot be viewed through the lens of any unilateral perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of narcissism and economic risk behavior will be at the forefront of this literature review; more specifically, to determine whether the relationship between sub-classifications of narcissism, outlined by five various subtypes: grandiose, vulnerable, antagonistic, communal, and vulnerable, will have an association with economic risk behaviors. Economic risk behavior will be determined within the parameters of betting/gambling and oniomania (addictive shopping). The term *narcissist* is used colloquially in contemporary society and is often associated with individuals who present as vain or self-centered; however, the meteoric rise of narcissism, universally known as the “narcissism epidemic,” (Pierre, 2016) describes a much more serious personality disorder with far greater implications across the social sciences. Narcissists do not have a complete personality. The attachment to the ego makes narcissists incapable of showing solidarity to others or of taking care of the common good. The economic impacts of gambling and addictive shopping are two things that need to be speculated on in further depth to understand if these risky behaviors have a more positive or undesirable effect on society.

Sociological Foreground

To begin, the origins of the term *narcissist* is embedded in Greek mythology which chronicles the exploits of a young, handsome teenager who falls hopelessly in love with his own reflection. In the most popular adaptation of the story, the young lengths, incorporating carefully crafted manipulation tactics as well as coercion, to receive the admiration they feel they are entitled to. “It is because of this aspect of the

disorder that it is widely believed that narcissism is a direct reflection of the individual's interpersonal need to regulate their own self-esteem and emotions" (Hyatt, et al., 2018).

Narcissistic personality types are measured through self-report surveys and questionnaires such as the narcissistic personality inventory (NPI), the most universally used scale, which can also be applied to assess narcissistic personality disorder as it exists on a spectrum. Clinical theories of narcissism postulate that the disorder stems from early adverse childhood experiences, which involve various forms of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction experienced in childhood. "Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are related to increased risk for a host of negative outcomes, which have far-reaching impacts beyond a single time-period, person, or generation. The wide-ranging health and social consequences of ACEs underscore the importance of preventing ACEs before they happen" (Ports et al., 2020).

These theories focus on instabilities in early social, or parental, relationships as one of the primary etiologies of NPD and view narcissism, at its foundation, as a failing to acquire a healthy development of the self. According to George Herbert Mead, whose work first covered social constructionism, argues that individuals as social creatures construct their own realities through their interactions with others. Taking this construct into consideration, "the child's self develops and matures through interactions with others, predominantly the mother, that ultimately provide the child with opportunities to gain approval and improve themselves over time" (Fluyau, 2023). This leads to the child being equipped to identify positive role models in their life.

Empathy, provided by caregivers, is one of the most salient and imperative necessities during the formative years of a child. “While they are in the height of constructing and developing their sense of self, parents will “mirror” their child which helps them to foster a more realistic sense of self. Empathy from caregivers also allows a child to view firsthand the shortcomings of their parents as well as their limitations, which leads them to internalize an authentic image of themselves that is possible to attain” (Fluyau, 2023). In other words, they have more wiggle room to be themselves without the pressure of being perfect. “Problems begin to surface, however, when parents lack empathy and fail to provide their children with approval and validation” (Fluyau, 2023).

According to Heinz Kohut, an Austrian psychoanalyst, “narcissism is essentially arrested development, meaning a child is “stuck” at a particular age (typically the age in which ACE’s occur) which results in the child remaining grandiose and idealistic while co-occurring with the need to idealize others to maintain their own self-esteem through association with others” (McLean, 2007).

Conversely, other theories suggest that narcissism is a defense that has developed from the child’s reaction to cold detachment and lack of empathy from caregivers (McLean, 2007). As a byproduct, the child learns to cope with this unhealthy attachment by responding to parental neglect with rage (McLean, 2007). From this perspective, the narcissistic defense mechanism that is being employed by the child is an attempt to reconcile their own identity (or lack thereof) by evoking admiration in others. “Consequently, narcissists remain grandiose on the exterior but because they question

their self-worth they are also, paradoxically, vulnerable on the inside” (McLean, 2007). In any case, these theories characterize narcissists as individuals with a childhood history of inadequate social relationships who later as adults, possess grandiose views of themselves that set the precedence for an extremely contentious psychological dependence on others.

“Narcissists’ positive but insecure self-views lead them to be more attentive and reactive to feedback from other people. However, not just any response or feedback from others is important to narcissists; they are eager to learn that others admire and look up to them” (Rhodewalt, 2022). It is from this dichotomy of expression that the two primary subtypes of narcissism are classified: grandiose and vulnerable.

Sub-Types of Narcissism

Grandiose narcissism is characterized by extraversion (the tendency to focus on gratification obtained from outside the self), low neuroticism (the ability to withstand more stress than the average person without becoming depressed, anxious, or burned out), and overt expressions of superiority and entitlement, whereas vulnerable narcissism is exhibited by self-absorbedness (introspective), high neuroticism (having a poor response to environmental stress and interpreting ordinary situations as threatening), and oscillating between feelings of extreme pride and deep shame. Grandiose narcissism is one of the traits in the “dark triad” of personality, accompanying psychopathy and Machiavellianism; whereas vulnerable narcissism is far more subtle and harder to identify than it’s grandiose parallel.

“Vulnerable narcissism (VN) is characterized by introversion, negative emotions, interpersonal coldness, hostility, need for recognition, entitlement, and egocentricity. Grandiose narcissism (GN) is characterized by dominance, self-assurance, immodesty, exhibitionism, and aggression” (Miller et al., 2012). From an overarching trait perspective, both manifestations intersect in their use of antagonistic interpersonal strategies; however, there are some key distinctions to note here as well. Grandiose narcissism is more associated with traits such as deceitfulness, arrogance, and a refusal to comply with authority figures while vulnerable narcissism appears to be more related to an overall lack of trust, a hostile interpersonal style as a product of increased negative emotionality, problematic attachment styles, and childhood abuse/neglect. Another level of complexity is added when considering overt and covert expressions of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, “overt refers to experience and behavior shared with others, whereas covert refers to non-shared private experiences such as feelings, motives, and needs” (Koepernik et al., 2022).

Narcissism exists on a spectrum and one of the lesser known subtypes of overt or grandiose narcissism is antagonistic narcissism. “Antagonistic narcissism is characterized by manipulative and aggressive behavior with a penchant for exploiting others for their own gain” (Dorwart, 2022). Antagonistic narcissists are also highly competitive and demonstrate an insatiable need to be the center of attention. “The primary distinction between grandiose narcissism and antagonistic narcissism involves the motivation behind the behavior; grandiose narcissists are more concerned with establishing power and creating an accompanying commanding image whereas antagonistic narcissists are more

preoccupied with employing a “win at all costs, even at others’ expense” schema” (Dorwart, 2022). While all narcissists are overly anxious with how they appear to others, antagonistic narcissists are mostly concerned with “coming out on top” as this particular subtype of NPD is defined by a sense of arrogance, competitiveness, and rivalry. For example, a person with antagonistic narcissism “might try to exploit others to get ahead or start arguments to gain the upper hand or appear more dominant” (Dorwart, 2022).

Malignant narcissism, the concluding classification of the grandiose or overt subtype, is often perceived as the most severe or potentially abusive form of narcissistic personality disorder. A person exhibiting malignant narcissistic traits has the same egocentric self-absorption and superiority complex as other narcissists; however, they also demonstrate traits associated with antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) such as aggression, paranoia, and a lack of empathy. “Malignant narcissism is a personality type that causes extreme narcissism, aggression, and, sometimes, abuse of others. A person may use manipulative means or violence to enhance their own sense of wellbeing” (Medical News Today, 2022).

“Malignant narcissists purportedly gain a sense of satisfaction from hurting others and will often manipulate people, lie to gain money or garner attention, among other things they may yearn for” (Shafti, 2019). Malignant narcissism is considered the most severe type of grandiose narcissism as it is a combination of both narcissistic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder, the current official term for psychopathy; “narcissism and psychopathy have been linked in the literature already, as evidenced by research on the “dark triad” (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism”

(Shafti, 2019). The diagnosis most like psychopathy or sociopathy is antisocial personality disorder. “This disorder causes a person to disrespect the rights of others knowingly and sometimes happily, blatantly disregard people’s feelings and needs, and a lack empathy” (Shafti, 2019). Individuals with malignant narcissism share many traits with those with antisocial personality disorder, most marked, a lack of regard for other’s well-being.

People with this personality disorder allegedly acquire a sense of satisfaction from hurting others and may manipulate people or lie to gain money, praise or approval, and other things they desire by whatever means necessary. Because this malignant narcissism subtype factors in elements of antisocial personality disorder, it can cause a person to engage in harmful and sometimes criminal behavior. “Narcissists are great manipulators. They can spot the needs, emotions, and weaknesses in those around them and use this information to their advantage very quickly with no sense of regret. They do not have a conscience in this sense because they do not hold themselves responsible for the consequences of their actions; they simply worked with the information that was available” (Shafti, 2019).

As mentioned, narcissistic personality disorder is a multifaceted condition that exists on a spectrum, and certain traits manifest differently contingent upon the person and context. Communal narcissism is widely accepted as a grandiose manifestation of the NPD psychopathology as characteristics correspond with overt expressions including motives, feelings, and internal needs. “Communal narcissists tend to present with traits

that coincide with a marked over exaggeration of their knowledge and aptitude for their communal skills as well as their potential and capabilities” (Arzt, 2021).

Individuals with communal narcissism often assume that they are the best listeners, parents, or the most charitable people on Earth. According to Nicole Arzt, a licensed marriage and family therapist, communal narcissists “typically value having profound, important roles in society. They often want to “fix” things they deem as needing to be fixed” (Arzt, 2021). Communal narcissists experience an immense amount of validation from their collective endeavors and will often seek service oriented goals to fulfil their desire for power and admiration. A communal narcissist may, at first blush, appear to be selfless or even a martyr; however, their internal motivation relies heavily on their intrinsic need to earn praise, not help others.

Narcissism and Risk-Taking

There is a link correlating narcissism and risk-taking behaviors due to the shared characteristics that envelop the personality disorder including impulsivity, overconfidence, and sensation-seeking. Risk-taking behaviors (“any consciously or non-consciously controlled behavior with a perceived uncertainty about its outcome, and/or about its possible benefits or costs for the physical, economic or psycho-social well-being of oneself or others” (Advances in Psychology, 1994)), are a pattern of needlessly engaging in activities or behaviors that are dangerous or highly subject to chance and due to narcissists focus on reward or heightened benefit perception they are more prone to risky decision-making.

The concept of risk refers to ensuring oneself against possible loss and the most accurate calculation of the costs and benefits involved. Like rational choice theory, individuals rely on rational calculations to make rational choices that result in outcomes aligned with their best interests. Nevertheless, the concept of rationality and what elicits rational behaviors can certainly be open to interpretation and have varying definitions from person to person. The same holds true in respect to risk as different situations and perspectives often lead to different definitions of “risk-taking.” There is, however, a wealth of research that demonstrates narcissists take more risks than others because they tend to have inflated views of their own abilities and achievements. “Narcissists focus on the potential rewards and dismiss potential risks when deciding whether to engage in risky behaviors such as gambling. In other words, their myopic focus on reward is in part what makes narcissists prone to risk-taking behavior” (Foster et al., 2009).

There is some evidence supporting the contrary belief that not all narcissists are always risk takers. Amy Brunell, lead author of a study in which a series of three experiments were conducted, found that people who scored higher on measures of narcissism were no more likely than others to make risky choices. The discrepancy was believed to lie in self-report surveys, where narcissistic individuals reported that they took more risks in certain situations. However, self-report measures may not hold the most accurate information when it comes to these types of individuals as they may be manufacturing or contriving experiences or behaviors that do not support their claim for being risk-takers. “I thought that narcissists, given that they are impulsive and have high opinions of themselves, would take bigger risks. That’s what other research would have

suggested,” Brunell said. “But any association between narcissism and risk-taking that we found was very small and essentially meaningless” (Brunell, 2015).

Self-report measurements should always be taken with a grain of salt as they could very well depict inaccurate self-portrayals of the individuals that are tasked with carrying them out. Nevertheless, a more widely cited 2008 study conducted by a team of psychologists, concluded that narcissists are especially prone to accepting high-risk, high-reward bets –i.e., low probability, high value bets– over high probability, low value bets in their study of gambling. “We demonstrate that narcissism relates to greater self-reported gambling frequency and gambling-related monetary expenditures in two samples. We extend these initial findings in Study 2 by showing that narcissism predicts higher reports of gambling-related pathology, as measured with a DSM-IV-based pathological gambling (PG) screen” (Rose et al., 2008). More substantiated evidence appears to support this finding more so than the contrary; however, research on the subject matter continues to attract researchers and psychologists from varying degrees and viewpoints.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

In this literature review, qualitative comparative analysis will be applied as the primary research methodology to emphasize comparisons within and across contexts; in this case, across 5 research articles that examine the relationship between narcissism and economic risk taking behavior characterized by gambling/betting and oniomania (addictive shopping). QCA was selected as it was not feasible to undertake an experimental design due to the qualitative nature of this research study; thus, more

emphasis was placed on a need to explain and understand how particular features of narcissism within the contexts and parameters of the research articles can influence the success of a proposed intervention(s) or policy initiative(s). QCA offers valuable insight and information in tailoring interventions to support the intended outcomes of this research study—that grandiose narcissism and its varying subtypes, including antagonistic, malignant, and communal narcissism, will associate with betting and gambling while vulnerable narcissism will associate with oniomania (addictive shopping).

QCA will involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across these case studies that aim to examine the key evaluation questions (KEQs) such as: will narcissism associate with economic risk behaviors and if so, which of the contrasting subtypes (grandiose, vulnerable, antagonistic, malignant, and communal) will be significantly linked to gambling, oniomania or neither? Is there a relationship between higher rates of grandiose narcissism associated with risky gambling behaviors? Is vulnerable narcissism more likely to be related to addictive shopping, impulse buying, and overall compulsive buying disorder? The rationale for selecting the 5 prevailing research articles is directly linked to these KEQs and consequently, to what needs to be investigated.

The object of interest for this research study is economic risk behavior as outlined in the research topic section of betting/gambling and oniomania (addictive shopping). The unit of analysis will be directly focused on narcissists; the colloquial terminology for individuals who meet 5+ criterion per the DSM-5 for a diagnosis of narcissistic

personality disorder. The number of cases for this research study will be derived from five selected research articles to which the number of cases directly correspond with the number of narcissist sub types who are being investigated. An in-depth understanding of each case will be important in establishing the foundation that will be used in the cross-case comparison.

The first research article “Vulnerable narcissism and addiction: The Mediating Role of Shame” was selected as it focuses on examining the facilitating role of shame between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and addictive behaviors including both problem drinking and gambling. The second article selected for review, a 2018 study conducted by Rogier and Velotti, “Narcissistic Implications in Gambling Disorder: The Mediating Role of Emotion Dysregulation,” focuses on the relationship between gambling disorder and grandiose narcissism as well as vulnerable narcissism. What sets this research apart from similar studies replicated in the past is how the researchers derived their population sample; instead of using gambling self-report surveys, the researchers used clinically diagnosed gamblers.

The third article to be evaluated, a 2017 study titled "Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism, Materialism, Money Attitudes, and Consumption Preferences" and was selected because it focuses on both the grandiose and VN manifestations of NPD and their relationship involving both materialistic inclinations as well as money-related mindsets. The fourth article, a 2007 study led by Paul Rose, was selected because the association between narcissism and compulsive consumption was tested. In data obtained from a sample of undergraduate consumers with varying degrees of spending problems,

positive associations appeared between narcissism, materialism, and compulsive buying with impulse control being negatively correlated with each of these variables. The final article being assessed is a 2016 research study titled “The Mediating Role of Emptiness and Materialism in the Association Between Pathological Narcissism and Compulsive Buying” led by Gadi Zerach. This study was selected to be analyzed because it investigates the relationships between narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability, emptiness, materialism, and compulsive buying in adults.

The variables will be operationalized by cross referencing prevalence of narcissism, using data derived from the five selected research studies, while also comparing them to the two predominant economic risk behaviors. In other words, rates of narcissism will be assessed and evaluated in contrast to rates of economic risk-taking behaviors for a qualitative comparative analysis. Three scope conditions for this literature review are as follows: research and data acquisition on this topic will be obtained in the present day (21st century) within the parameters of the United States across types of cases between the ages of 18-50. Data in the present day was considered and chosen as a scope condition because of the “narcissistic epidemic” that has escalated within the past decades (Pierre, 2016). The United States was chosen as a scope condition to limit the amount of information that will be evaluated to provide a more accurate comparison between the variables in the research study.

Lastly, the scope condition involving ages between 18-50 years was included to account for confounding variables that may cause spurious associations between the variables being studied. The proposed hypothesis that grandiose narcissism and its sub

classifications will associate with betting/gambling while vulnerable narcissism will associate with addictive shopping is falsifiable as it can be tested against real world data to see if the hypothesis is supported with the research study design or whether the data analyzed within the literature review is not supportive of the hypothesis.

ANALYSIS

Looking at the various subtypes of narcissism, there is significant evidence that suggests that grandiose narcissism is associated more strongly with risk-taking behaviors of gambling and betting while vulnerable narcissism correlates with oniomania, and compulsive buying. Narcissists are more inclined to have gambling problems due in large part to their grandiosity and fundamental flaws in their decision-making.

The definition of gambling is to take risks in hopes of a desired outcome which directly lends itself to the narcissists' pathology as they are prone to acting carelessly in order to have their needs met. Narcissists, especially those of the grandiose variety, like to win at all costs; this drive to win far outweighs the potential loss the narcissist may incur. It does not matter if they spend more money than the actual pay out, if they are winning, in their minds, they are beating the game alongside other players. The cognitive bias the narcissist employs is that of overestimating themselves. Because they are overconfident, grandiose narcissists believe that they can ultimately do no wrong since they have more ability and aptitude over others, which in turn, bolsters their belief that they have power and control over chance situations. Grandiose narcissists and individuals afflicted with gambling disorders share some commonalities including pervasive impulsivity and a flagrant lack of self-control.

The main distinction between them is that the narcissist does not think anything bad will happen to them, more to the point, if something unfortunate did occur, the narcissist would readily employ one of the most useful coping strategies in their arsenal: externalizing. In other words, any problem the narcissist encounters are never their fault.

Authors Elena Bilevicius, et al., of the research article “Vulnerable narcissism and addiction: The Mediating Role of Shame” focuses on examining the facilitating role of shame between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and addictive behaviors including both problem drinking and gambling. According to the author’s, “evidence suggests vulnerable narcissism, but not grandiose narcissism, is associated with greater negative affect. Accordingly, shame, a potent social emotion could be a mediator in the narcissism-addiction pathway” (Bilevicius, et al., 2019). The author’s hypothesized that shame would play a mediating role between vulnerable narcissism and addictive behaviors and as predicted, the researchers found this to be the case when conducting their research study involving 497 participants through an online psychology participant pool. “Participants who were instructed to complete measures at time 1 were then asked to participate in a follow-up study one month later to observe the influence of shame-eliciting events during the interval on addictive behaviors” (Bilevicius, et al., 2019).

The researchers found that participants with elevated vulnerable narcissism at time 1 had increased levels of shame at time 2, which projected higher rates of problem drinking and gambling at time 2. The researchers also observed that this finding was isolated amongst vulnerable narcissists and did not appear to apply to its grandiose counterpart. The results of the research study suggest that “feelings of shame are essential

to understanding the vulnerable narcissism addiction pathway, an important consideration when designing clinical interventions for at-risk young adults” (Bilevicius, et al., 2019).

The second article under review, a 2018 study conducted by Rogier and Velotti, “Narcissistic Implications in Gambling Disorder: The Mediating Role of Emotion Dysregulation,” focuses on the relationship between gambling disorder and grandiose narcissism as well as vulnerable narcissism. What sets this research apart from similar studies replicated in the past is how the researchers derived their population sample; instead of using gambling self-report surveys, the researchers used clinically diagnosed gamblers. What’s more, in lieu of employing the NPI (narcissistic personality inventory), which has been shown to have significant limitations including disproportionately focusing on grandiose characteristics instead of representing the entire spectrum of pathological narcissism (Rogier & Velotti, 2018), the researchers opted to utilize the PNI (pathological narcissism inventory) allowing for more extensive results across various manifestations including covert and vulnerable narcissism.

The researchers evaluated adults with and without gambling disorders. Compared to adults without gambling disorder, addicted gamblers had more difficulties regulating their emotions and were also more likely to have grandiose narcissism. “Gambling disorder was associated with grandiose narcissism and an inability to regulate emotions. That is, addicted gamblers had higher levels of grandiose narcissism than the control group. In particular, they were more likely to present themselves as being concerned with others to support a grandiose self-image” (Rogier & Velotti, 2018).

The research results indicated that “addicted gamblers may exhibit higher levels of grandiose narcissism compared to a non-clinical population” (Velotti, 2018) which is congruent with previous research studies that show higher prevalence of NPD among addicted gamblers is typically correlated with more grandiose aspects of pathological narcissism, comprising of arrogance and entitlement. Grandiose narcissists thrive on instant gratification where they seek rewards that they feel they are entitled to and because of their distorted self-concept and lack of identity they incessantly pursue external stimulation as a way of “filling themselves up.” The grandiose narcissist also believes that to maintain their grandiose self-image they must be better than everyone else or at the very least, be the envy of their peers.

Vulnerable narcissism was also accounted for in the study. Researchers concluded that gambling disorder was not associated with vulnerable narcissism; however, the inability to regulate emotions was associated with both types of narcissism (grandiose and vulnerable). Interestingly, the findings also interpret the role of vulnerable narcissism stating “VN potentially accounts for the development and the maintenance of the disorder” (Rogier & Velotti, 2018). This noteworthy conclusion suggests that addicted gamblers possess VN characteristics and are highly susceptible to experiencing feelings of shame that coincide with their need to escape from their negative emotional states even while gambling.

The researchers also discuss the role played by emotion dysregulation by which shame leads to maladaptive behavior stating, “the association between VN and the use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies to suppress emotional states” (Rogier &

Velotti, 2018). In other words, shame was noted and related to the addicted gamblers expression and suppression of their own needs whereby they are unwilling to show others their faults. The researchers also suggest that addicted gamblers “show a lack of interest in others who do not support their need for admiration” (Rogier & Velotti, 2018). This finding is compatible with clinical literature that posits that the use of the devaluation mechanism (drastically reducing or underestimating the worth or importance of something) in addicted gamblers ultimately endeavors to stave off and defend against any kind of feelings of intimacy (Rosenthal, 1986). According to a study conducted by Di Trani, et al. circa 2017: “this idea is in line with results brought by the attachment research field, showing that addicted gamblers often have an insecure and avoidant attachment style.” Individuals with avoidant attachment styles hide or suppress their own needs because of a deep-seated fear of encountering interpersonal rejection while expressing any kind of vulnerability. “Supporting this idea, literature asserted that avoidance is a characteristic strategy of both vulnerable narcissism (Pimentel 2008; Lamkin, Clifton, Campbell and Miller 2014) and GD” (Riley 2012; Di Trani et al. 2017).

The researchers propose that it is possible that addicted gamblers find that the activity of gambling itself is a way to suppress emotional states such as shame but also endeavor to escape from personal needs that they are otherwise not able to express in their intimate relationships (Velotti, 2018). Another finding concluded by the researchers resulted in the relationship between emotion dysregulation and gambling disorder being supported by previous studies (Williams, et al., 2012) showing that addicted gamblers may have difficulty in regulating intense emotional states. “Data go in the direction of

theory of gambling disorder asserting that these individuals gamble in order to escape from negative emotional states because of a deficit in their emotion regulation capacities” (Rogier & Velotti, 2018). For all intents and purposes, the researchers found that emotion dysregulation was positively associated with all dimensions of pathological narcissism.

It is important to understand the link between shame and narcissism and how the former plays a role in shaping the narcissists’ personality. A narcissistic individual will exude a convincing façade of excessive self-worth to stave off unwanted feelings of inadequacy and to ultimately disguise their inner sense of vulnerability that is too shameful to reveal to others. As discussed in the sociological foreground section, the shame a narcissist harbors are concurrent with childhood trauma. To understand this more fully, a closer assessment of the narcissist’s childhood and their environment (i.e., family, school, etc.), riddled with incessant criticism and punishment, is as good a place as any to recognize how this negatively impacted the child and consequently, left them feeling worthless and helpless.

Research suggests that an internalized sense of shame affects the child's sense of being in such a way that leads them to foster the idea that “they are bad” as opposed to learning “I did something bad.” To wit, taking ownership and allowing space for healthy guilt to be experienced in lieu of toxic shame. To avoid these shameful feelings, the child looks for opportunities to gain some control over their lives including adopting behaviors of perfectionism, grandiosity, power, attention, etc., all of which leads to the manifestation of the narcissist’s most marked characteristic, a sense of superiority to everyone else.

A new study published in BMC Psychiatry, “Narcissistic traits in young people and how experiencing shame relates to current attachment challenges” identifies the role of shame in contributing to the negative outcomes associated with narcissism in young adults. The researchers found that youth who scored higher in vulnerable narcissism demonstrated greater shame, and interestingly, higher scores in preoccupied and fearful attachment. The former is characterized by the belief that an individual is not worthy of love but for the most part, feels that most people are loving and accepting. The latter is distinguished by the belief that an individual is not lovable and does not trust others to support and accept them because they feel they will be rejected; thus, resulting in a higher inclination to withdraw from relationships (Vinny, 2023). What’s more, the researchers also concluded, in a similar fashion to Bilevicius, et al., that shame did not mediate the relationship between grandiose narcissism nor any of the attachment styles. All of this inner turmoil related to shame links the pathological narcissist to a wide range of addictions and compulsions as a defense against shame (i.e., substances, food, sex, gambling, adrenaline, rage, narcissistic supply, attention, power, control, addiction to self, etc.).

Both studies emphasize the importance of underlying negative emotions and how they associate with addictive behaviors as well as attachment style; the mediating role of shame is the common denominator in both studies. Combating shame and other negative emotions, even for a neurotypical individual (personality disorder notwithstanding), can be difficult to navigate. This is especially true in the case of the narcissist, be it grandiose or vulnerable, as people with NPD are unlikely to seek to clinical treatment as they are

convinced that they do not have a problem and are often highly defensive about their narcissistic traits. Narcissists may also capitalize on the attention and admiration of their therapist to gain narcissistic supply, or they may blame others entirely for their issues which is why the solution does not lie within the clinical context, at least not exclusively.

Not all narcissists are going to express their superiority in grandiose ways as manifestations of the psychopathology present differently across the sub-types. A vulnerable narcissist is going to exhibit much more introverted behaviors than its grandiose counterpart but will be just as, if not more so, self-absorbed. Vulnerable narcissism is characterized by defensiveness, fragility, sensitivity to criticism, and social withdrawal. Evidence suggests that vulnerable narcissism, not grandiose narcissism, is associated with greater negative affect (higher levels of distress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction) where individuals tend to focus more on the unpleasant aspects of themselves, the world, the future, and other people, and evoke more negative life events and is often refereed by an overwhelming sense of shame. “Results suggest that feelings of shame are essential to understanding the vulnerable narcissism-addiction pathway, and an important consideration when designing clinical interventions for at-risk young adults” (Bilevicius et al., 2019).

Just as grandiose narcissists strive for thrills through overt avenues, vulnerable narcissists pursue other outlets to achieve the same kind of instant gratification highs by means of shopping addictions. “Their brains release endorphins and dopamine, and they ride the wave of shopping euphoria. The problem that arises is when over time these feelings become addictive. When shopping crosses the line, it can lead to feelings of guilt

and shame and even severe financial hardship” (Center for Professional Recovery, 2022). Shopping addiction is a type of behavioral addiction called oniomania and is marked by compulsive and impulsive buying.

The third article being evaluated, a 2017 study titled "Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism, Materialism, Money Attitudes, and Consumption Preferences” focuses on both the grandiose and VN manifestations of NPD and their relationship involving both materialistic inclinations as well as money-related mindsets. The researchers commence with the conceptualization of materialism and how it is defined through the lens of psychology stating it as “the importance people attach to worldly possessions, which take a central place in their lives and are expected to be the greatest source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction” (Belk, 1985). According to the study, material goods or possessions are the key components of a “social communication system” (Dittmar, 2007). In other words, through their possessions “people communicate their social status and prestige as well as their individual and unique qualities and obtain the same kind of information about others” (Pilch et al., 2017).

In our popular consumer culture, this language of materialism is a universal truth where possession of material goods or wealth sets the precedence for “standards of a perfect life and a perfect person” (Beggan, 1992; Kasser, 2002; Dittmar, 2007). The researchers measured narcissism using the NPI, materialism using the Material Value Scale (MVS; Richins & Dawson, 1992), and lastly, attitudes towards money and consumption by using a money attitude questionnaire as well as a self-report survey for consumer preferences.

The results of the study indicated that both GN and VN are equally associated with materialism and propensity to public consumption. Materialism was observed to mediate most of the relationships between narcissism, money attitudes, and consumption preferences; however, patterns did deviate across GN and VN subtypes. “Mutual suppression occurred when grandiose narcissism and materialism predicted anxiety associated with money and when VN and materialism predicted money perceived as a source of evil” (Pilch et al., 2017). The results suggest that both GN and VN may both be susceptible to excessive consumption which can be supported by their materialistic tendencies.

In the fourth article, a 2007 study led by Paul Rose, the association between narcissism and compulsive consumption was tested. In data obtained from a sample of undergraduate consumers with varying degrees of spending problems, positive associations appeared between narcissism, materialism, and compulsive buying with impulse control being negatively correlated with each of these variables. “Mediation tests revealed that both impulse control and materialism accounted for significant portions of the shared variance between narcissism and compulsive consumption. These findings highlight the importance of both personal values and impulse control as correlates of addictive buying” (Rose, 2007).

It is important to note that this study did not contend with the two sub-types of narcissistic personality disorder but more so generalized its findings to narcissism, therefore, it cannot be argued that this research is isolated to vulnerable narcissists alone. However, another study conducted by Neave et al., “How Conspicuous Consumption

Differs Between Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissists” did manage to conduct more exclusive research contingent on the two sub-types.

Researchers posited both narcissistic sub-types will engage in consumption but because the subtypes differ so deeply in their self-esteem regulation strategies, their motivations to consume will inevitably vary. Their findings determined that “both narcissistic subtypes consume conspicuously yet do so for different reasons. Grandiose narcissists engage in conspicuous consumption to establish their dissimilarity from others (i.e., their uniqueness) and vulnerable narcissists do so to obtain the approval from others” (Neave et al., 2020).

The final article being assessed is a 2016 research study titled “The Mediating Role of Emptiness and Materialism in the Association Between Pathological Narcissism and Compulsive Buying” led by Gadi Zerach. This study investigated the relationships between narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability, emptiness, materialism, and compulsive buying in adults. Zerach included 204 male participants who were asked to complete self-report surveys to measure pathological narcissism using the PNI, materialism by employing the previous mentioned MVS, emptiness by utilizing three self-report scales, and compulsive buying by applying the Compulsive Buying Scale (CBS; Faber & O’Guinn, 1992).

The findings of this study indicated that narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability were negatively related to compulsive buying. Materialism and emptiness were also negatively related to compulsive buying. According to Zerach, “emptiness mediated the relationships between CB, but not grandiosity while materialism mediated the

relationships between CB and grandiosity, but not vulnerability” (Zerach, 2016). This research finding is one of the first that successfully demonstrates the mediating role of emptiness in the relationship between narcissism and compulsive buying. “The findings of this study suggest that the two facets of pathological narcissism are related to the addictive behaviors of CB. Specifically, participants that are relatively more narcissistically vulnerable might be susceptible to experiences of emptiness that are also found to be related to CB” (Zerach, 2016). As the research suggests, both impulsivity as well as materialism mediate the correlation between narcissism and compulsive buying.

RESULTS

After reviewing and analyzing the five selected research articles using QCA to determine any differences, similarities, and patterns across the case studies to further investigate the various subtypes of narcissism and their relationship between economic risk behavior, several significant observations were made. There appears to be a consensus across all five articles that suggests NPD is strongly associated with economic risk behaviors of both gambling/betting and oniomania which is consistent with the primary hypothesis. According to the findings presented by both Bilevicius, et al., and Rogier and Velotti, gambling disorders and behaviors are strongly related to narcissism and mediated by both shame and emotional dysregulation.

There is contention between the two articles in determining whether increased gambling behaviors are more associated with GN or VN; however, it appears as though GN correlates significantly to gambling disorder whereas manifestations of VN, including shame and emotional dysregulation, seem to play a facilitating role. This result

was incongruent with the secondary hypothesis where it was proposed that GN would associate with economic risk behaviors of gambling/betting; in fact, both articles' findings lend support to the contrary. There appears to be compelling evidence that manifestations of VN play a much more prevalent role in these risk behaviors than anticipated. Both studies emphasize the importance of underlying negative emotions and how they associate with addictive behaviors as well as attachment style; the mediating role of shame is the common denominator in both studies.

The remaining three articles' results indicated a strong association between both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and oniomania with a mediating role of impulsivity, materialism, and emptiness. This finding does not support the secondary hypothesis as it appears that both grandiose narcissists and vulnerable narcissists are both susceptible to the economic risk behavior of compulsive buying. Although, the research is not mutually exclusive to vulnerable narcissism, the research still provides insight into the relationship between narcissism and addictive shopping or compulsive buying.

No research was found to support our hypothesis that a relationship exists between gambling/betting or oniomania and the varying subtypes of malignant, antagonistic, and communal narcissism. It is recommended that extensive research be conducted to further investigate these manifestations of narcissism to determine if there is any association with economic risk behaviors.

DISCUSSION

Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of gambling and addictive shopping are two things that need to be speculated on in further depth to understand if these risky behaviors have a more positive or undesirable effect on society. First, according to research conducted by Harper and others, “problems with gambling can lead to bankruptcy, crime, domestic abuse, and even suicide.” The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that gambling addictions cost the U.S. \$6.7 billion annually, and some experts believe that cost could be even higher. However, there are two sides to every issue and some experts argue that “gambling adds significant economic value to communities in the form of employment opportunities and higher tax revenue” (Harper et al., 2011).

It appears that gambling does have a positive effect as it helps to foster economic growth; however, as research suggests it may have a more damning impact on the individual’s personal and psychological well-being. Addictive shopping also bears some negative impacts on the individual at an intrapersonal level as a great deal of shopping addicts face financial problems, some may even become overwhelmed with debt. In some cases, people may simply max out their credit cards, but in more severe cases, they may take out a second mortgage on their home or charge purchases to their business credit card. Narcissism has also been linked to online betting and gambling, underscored by one study that concluded that “certain psychological characteristics such as aggression, self-control, and narcissistic personality traits may predispose some individuals to become addicted to online games” (Kim et al., 2007).

The United States has always had a contentious relationship with gambling and up until recently, most states had some form of restrictions; however, things appear to be

changing quickly on this front. Currently, there are no federal laws that make online gambling illegal although some states do have their own laws against it. There are few types of online betting that are illegal in the U.S. including online casinos, online poker, and online sports books. The Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act (UIGEA) was passed in 2006 and had a substantial impact on the online betting industry in the U.S. The act made it illegal for U.S. based companies to process payments related to online gambling. Despite this, the state of New York has recently legalized online betting, making it one of the few states in the US to do so. This move is likely to have a major impact on the sports betting industry in the state, as well as on the economy as a whole. “The economic impact of online betting will be felt not just in the sports betting industry, but also in other sectors such as tourism and hospitality” (KPVI, 2022).

Political Impacts

Other schools of thought suggest that narcissism is one of the primary causes of economic crisis on a much larger scale. Narcissists do not have any real values or principles, since the only real thing they value is receiving narcissistic “supply.” Narcissists, both grandiose and vulnerable alike, latch onto whatever people, things, values, or causes (like a parasite), that best provide them with this supply in any moment. Narcissists never hold onto values out of any sense of honor or principle and can change them at the drop of a hat if it serves their own interest and according to Colombo (2009), “it is the lack of moral values that cause economic crises.”

Economists have stressed the sovereignty and interests of the individual and presents individuals as rational beings that seek to maximize the benefits and who can

participate in economic decisions (Mastroianni, 2019). However, the narcissistic individual is in disparity between their wants and feelings and the reasons why they want them. “Lack of confidence creates unnecessary transaction tracking costs. A greater risk than necessary for people’s money (see the unethical and irresponsible behavior of banks) is undertaken, products that harm people are sold, and scams are increased” (Mastroianni, 2019).

Balancing creates what is called “a complete personality” that narcissists do not have. The attachment to the Ego makes narcissists incapable of showing solidarity to others or of taking care of the common good. “For some, narcissism is the result of capitalism, while for the advocates of capitalism, the free market system cannot function properly if those in charge of decision-making have no moral values beyond their technical knowledge” (Mastroianni, 2019).

Addressing the issue of narcissism cannot be viewed through the lens of one unilateral perspective. As the research suggests, during times of economic growth and stability, narcissism appears to grow alongside with it. The cause seems to be related to how success and affluence impacts people, how that then trickles down to more accommodating and nurturing parenting norms, which finally, influences how people are affected by urbanization and changes to family sizes and development.

Contrarywise, economic hardships seem to accomplish the opposite effect, where it tends to support non self-centered people by encouraging modesty and hard work. At any rate, there seems to be an inherent cyclical dimension between politics and narcissism as well as a dynamic between economic development and narcissism

attributed to an influx of societal egotism that lies at the heart of the cycle; a cycle that can only be corrected by undergoing economic crisis.

Sociological Impacts

Most people, save for individuals diagnosed with certain psychiatric conditions such as psychopathy, experience shame. Therefore, shame has a cultural component that helps maintain social norms by reinforcing that certain behaviors can harm and impact society in a negative way. Additionally, a study conducted by Philip Shaver and Cindy Hazen examined adult relationships through the lens of attachment styles and estimated that approximately 40% of people have an insecure attachment style of one type or another.

Working with non-profit organizations could be a significant way to communicate to the public about shame management, by means of mindfulness, self-compassion, and support as well as stressing the importance of how attachment styles play an integral role in shaping and fostering our adult relationships.

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