



## Replication Study

## Revisiting the unmitigated approach model of narcissism: Replication and extension



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## ABSTRACT

Foster, Misra, and Reidy (2009) found that general approach motivation mediated the positive relationship between narcissism and two distinct domains: friendship motivation and investment decision-making. Using more sophisticated statistical techniques, we not only replicate Foster et al's main findings, but extend their model in two ways: uncovering new effects and demonstrating it in a new domain, academic achievement.

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## 1. Introduction

The unmitigated approach model (UAM) maintains that trait narcissism is associated with strong approach and relatively weak avoidance motivation (Foster & Trimm, 2008). Those high in trait narcissism seek desirable outcomes and are less concerned with avoiding undesirable outcomes. Supporting the UAM, Foster, Misra, and Reidy (2009) show that approach motivation is linked to narcissists' behaviors in two distinct areas: investment strategies and friendship goals. Specifically, narcissists exhibited riskier investment strategies, mediated jointly by general approach and avoidance motivation, and reported more approach-oriented friendship goals (e.g., deepening relationships), also mediated by general approach motivation. Foster et al. concluded that narcissists are particularly motivated by rewards across life domains. Given the broad implications of their findings, the purpose of the current paper is to examine the replicability of their effects and extend them to another distinct domain, academic motivation.

The association between narcissism and risky financial decision-making should be robust because prior research demonstrates similar links with other behaviors. Narcissism is positively related to retrospective self-reports of frequency and amount of money wagered in gambling (Lakey, Rose, Campbell, & Goodie, 2008), and to choosing more volatile stocks (Foster, Reidy, Misra, & Goff, 2011). Notably, Foster, Shenese, and Goff (2009) also found

that the positive correlation between narcissism and a variety of self-reported risky behaviors was accounted for by heightened perceptions of the benefits of those behaviors, but unrelated to perceptions of riskiness. Thus, there is ample evidence linking narcissism and risky decisions, and we strongly expected to replicate Foster's findings.

In contrast, the positive correlation observed between narcissism and approach-oriented friendship goals is more novel, surprising, and less consistent with previous research. Relatively few studies have examined friendship motivation and narcissism, but many suggest that narcissists likely lack interest in developing high-quality friendships. Jonason and Schmitt (2012) found that narcissism was positively related to preferring agentic, competence-related qualities in friends, but unrelated to favoring communal, relationship-oriented qualities (e.g., kindness, trustworthiness), suggesting that narcissists have a more instrumental view of friendship. These findings are consistent with the agency model of narcissism (Campbell & Green, 2008), which maintains that narcissism is characterized by a focus on agentic over communal concerns and interpersonal self-regulation strategies focused on self-enhancement. Not only do narcissists avoid describing themselves with communal qualities (e.g., warm, caring; Miller, Price, Gentile, Lynam, & Campbell, 2012), they are more likely to be on the lookout for a better romantic partner to enhance their status (Campbell, 1999). Although narcissists clearly seek relationships in order to feel good about themselves, it seems less likely that they are interested in fostering high levels of intimacy described in the friendship-approach goals scale used by Foster et al. (e.g., "I am trying to deepen my relationships with my friends"; Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> For stylistic simplicity, we use the term "narcissist" to refer to individuals high in trait narcissism and the term "narcissism" to refer to trait narcissism.

**Table 1**  
Correlations and inter-item reliability for scales used in Study 1. Cronbach's alphas for each scale are reported in the diagonal in italics. Correlations from Foster et al. are reported above the diagonal. Below each correlation are 95% confidence intervals in italics and brackets. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory; BAS = Behavioral Activation Scale; BIS = Behavioral Inhibition Scale.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	NPI	BAS	BIS	Investment strategy
NPI	55.5 (6.37)	.82	.60	-.26	.22
BAS	41.2 (4.21)	.47 [.34, .59]	.74	–	.28
BIS	22.1 (3.41)	-.29 [-.42, -.16]	-.02 [-.16, .12]	.73	-.25
Investment strategy	.00 (2.72)	.23 [.10, .37]	.29 [.16, .42]	-.22 [-.36, -.09]	.61

To examine the reliability of the findings linking narcissism to disparate domains of investment strategy and friendship motivation, we conducted two studies replicating all aspects of Foster et al.'s methods and procedures. Additionally, we used more sophisticated statistical procedures to examine the mediating role of general approach/avoidance motivation. There is growing consensus that casual steps mediation analysis has clear limitations (Hayes, 2013; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Particularly relevant, it prohibits investigation of indirect effects between a predictor and criterion without a statistically significant zero-order correlation. Foster et al. found no correlation between narcissism and friendship-avoidance goals and, thus, did not investigate the possibility of an indirect link through general avoidance motivation. We employed ordinary least squares path analysis (e.g., Hayes, 2013) to examine these relationships and provide a more comprehensive test of Foster et al.'s hypotheses and the UAM.

## 2. Study 1: Investment strategies

This study replicated Foster et al.'s finding that general approach and avoidance motivation jointly mediate the positive relationship between narcissism and risky investment decisions using a larger sample.

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Participants, materials, and procedure

Introductory psychology students ( $N = 206$ ) from a private Midwestern university completed an online questionnaire for extra credit.<sup>2</sup> Our sample was 73% larger, somewhat younger ( $M = 18.9$ ;  $SD = 1.0$ )<sup>3</sup> and more female (69%) than Foster et al.'s, and identified as follows: White/Caucasian (75%), African-American (10%), Hispanic (5%), Asian (6%), Pacific Islander (1%), and "Other" (3%). Our sample size afforded us ample statistical power (89%) for detecting the correlation between narcissism and investment strategy ( $r = .22$ ).

Participants completed measures in the following order: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; 40 items; Raskin & Terry, 1988), Behavioral Approach System (BAS; 13 items), Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS; 7 items; Carver & White, 1994), and Foster et al.'s investment strategy items. All measures exhibited central tendencies, variability, and inter-item reliability similar to Foster et al.'s (Table 1).

### 2.2. Results and discussion

Narcissism was positively correlated with approach motivation ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but less than Foster et al.'s ( $r = .60$ ; Table 1). It was, however, similarly negatively correlated with avoidance motivation ( $r = -.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as Foster et al.'s ( $r = -.26$ ).

#### 2.2.1. Data reduction

The four investment strategy items were combined using Foster et al.'s factor-analytic approach with highly similar results: a single factor that explained 46.6% (Foster et al. = 53%) of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.86 (2.11), next highest eigenvalue .85, and factor loadings that ranged between .68 (.71) and .35 (.48). We also standardized and summed the items, yielding a similar range of scores, range =  $-6.06$ – $9.56$ ; ( $-7.17$ – $8.47$ ). Higher scores indicate more risky strategies.

#### 2.2.2. Hypothesis testing

The investment strategy index was similarly related to narcissism ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), approach motivation ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and avoidance motivation ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) as Foster et al.'s sample (Table 1).

To replicate Foster et al.'s mediational findings, we used ordinary least squares path analysis, utilizing bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples and reporting unstandardized coefficients (Hayes, 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Analysis of investment strategies yielded highly similar patterns between the variables (Table 1) and indicated that narcissism had an indirect effect on investment strategies through both the BAS and BIS scales. The confidence intervals for each indirect effect ( $NPI/BAS = .05$ ;  $NPI/BIS = .03$ ) were above zero (.03, .08 and .01, .05, respectively). Consistent with the UAM, comparing the ratio of each indirect effect to the total effect of narcissism on investment strategy indicated that the approach motivation indirect effect (.54; 95% CI: .24–1.33) was larger than the avoidance motivation indirect effect (.25; 95% CI: .06–.65). The estimate of the total effect of narcissism on investment strategies was non-zero (.09;  $p < .001$ ; CI [.04, .16]), however, there was no evidence of a direct effect of narcissism once motivation was controlled (.02,  $p = .54$ ; 95% CI [-.05, .08]).

Overall, we observed patterns highly similar to Foster et al. (2009). Although we found a weaker correlation between narcissism and approach motivation, we found a robust indirect effect of narcissism and investment strategy through both approach and avoidance motivation. Moreover, we demonstrated that the indirect effect through approach motivation was larger than through avoidance motivation.

## 3. Study 2: Friendship goals

We examined Foster et al.'s finding that general approach motivation mediates a positive relationship between narcissism and friendship-approach motivation. Because narcissism is not typically associated with valuing high quality interpersonal relationships, we did not anticipate replicating the positive correlation between narcissism and friendship-approach motivation. Regardless, we also investigated the indirect relationships between narcissism and friendship-approach and friendship-avoidance

<sup>2</sup> Procedures for Studies 1 and 2 conformed closely in content and procedure to Foster et al.'s (Foster, personal communication 8/15/13).

<sup>3</sup> Three participants indicated their age was  $>23$  but did not report it.

<sup>4</sup> A complete report of all estimates for full models with figures for both studies is available on-line [Insert URL].

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