Introduction

Hope Theory suggests variability in ability and motivation to cope with goal blockages (Snyder et al., 1991). As individuals age, hope may play an increasingly important role in well-being. Goal and pathway blockages may become more serious and frequent as individuals age (Kahle, Wimbush, & Snyder, 2005). Research has shown that older adults (age 54-64) were less hopeful than younger adults (age 18-54), and had more difficulty determining how they would reach their goals (Bailey & Snyder, 2007).

Similarly, grit influence perseverance and passion in striving towards goals. In the face of adversity, challenge, and failure, grittier individuals continue to stay on track by maintaining interest and effort. Over the course of years, grittier individuals do not change their trajectory or quit when becoming disappointed or bored, instead they approach new and difficult tasks with persistence and determination to avoid to overcome obstacles (Duckworth et al., 2007; Peterson & Kelly, 2003).

Hope and grit are psychological constructs that are theoretically associated with positive outcomes for individuals (Snyder et al., 1991; Kahle, Wimbush, & Snyder, 2005). Some empirical evidence supports these linkages. For example, hope has been associated with academic achievement, physical health, and psychological adjustment (Cary, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rhum, 1997; Selby, Derewczyk, Shaw, & Oliver, 2000), while grit has been linked to grade point average, educational attainment, and conscientiousness (Duckworth et al., 2007). Although both hope and grit may help people continue to pursue meaningful worthwhile tasks and to envision the likelihood of their eventual success, these same attitudes may undermine the continued pursuit of harmful behaviors.

Over the past 2 decades, the gaming industry has expanded throughout the United States (McNulty & Burke, 2000; Wieth & Côté, 2005). Due to the expansion, a number of public health concerns, such as problem and pathological gambling, are on the rise (Wolfe & Côté, 2005). Research has found an increase in prevalence over the past several decades in all age groups (Shaffer, Hall, & Vander Bilt, 1999).

Research also points out that there are serious underdoable psychological consequences to gambling for some individuals. Individuals who experience situations where adverse effects of gambling are not experienced or problematic (Shaffer, Hall, & Vander Bilt, 1999). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (1994), pathological gambling is a “persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior that disrupts personal, family, or vocational pursuits” (p.571).

Problem gambling has been primarily associated with cognitions that encourage continued gambling in the face of loss (Restrin, Hanlon, & Oken, 2006), which is the subject to both hope and grit. Thus, hope and grit may share some common characteristics with problematic gambling cognitions, and may also be associated with elevated levels of gambling. Thus, the present study was designed to examine these issues in a sample of middle-aged and older adults who gambled in the past year.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of a larger study examining intergenerational links between community satisfaction, personality, and risk behaviors. An anonymous survey and prepaid return envelope was mailed to a parent and a grandparent of a college student. Data from 129 upper Midwest participants ages 33 to 40 were used to create the present sample in Study 1, SD = 10.99, 20.8 older adults, 18 middle-aged adults between 33 and 65 years. Older adults were 69 and 65 years and older. Analyses were restricted to those participants who reported gambling in the past year.

Measures

Hope (Snyder et al., 1991): 16 items, the way individuals cope with goal blockages and are motivated to find and initiate routes to cope with the blockages (e.g., “I’ve been pretty successful in life”), 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). (α = .90).

Grit (Duckworth et al., 2007): 12 items, an individual’s perseverance and passion in striving towards goals (e.g., “I finished what I began”), 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate more frequent endorsement of gambling motivations, attitudes, and behaviors.

Gambling Motivations (C. Nicholas, personal communication, March 25, 2007): 16 items, assesses how often gambles were motivated to gamble for various reasons in the past 12 months or (e.g., “For money”, range 1 (never/almost never) to 5 (almost always)).

Gambling Cognitions (Strong, Breen, & Layor, 2004): 15 items, use to measure cognitive factors commonly associated with higher levels of gambling pathology and cognitive distortion among gamblers (e.g., “Gambling makes me feel alive”), 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of gambling cognitions.

Pathological Gambling (Lesieur & Blume, 1987): 6 items from the South Oaks Gambling Scale (SOGS) were used to measure factors commonly associated with pathological gambling (e.g., “Have people criticized you for your gambling?). Five items have response that are (yes) and 2 were recoded into dichotomous variables (1) and (0). One item’s response ranged from 1 (never/almost never) to 5 (always/very often) and 3 items were recoded so that responses of 0 or 2 were assigned a 0 (less than half of the time) and responses of 3 or 5 were assigned a 1 (at least half of the time); Higher scores indicate higher levels of pathological gambling.

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Pathological Gambling</th>
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Table 2

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<th>Pathological Gambling</th>
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Results

To determine the significant differences between middle-aged and older adults in any of the variables (data not shown).

Question 1

Correlation analyses at the bivariate level (see Table 1):

• Higher level of hope was associated with higher levels of grit and lower levels of pathological gambling.
• A higher level of grit was associated with lower frequent endorsement of gambling motivations, lower levels of gambling cognitions, and lower levels of pathological gambling.
• A more positive gambling attitude was associated with more frequent endorsement of gambling motivations and higher levels of gambling cognitions.
• A higher level of gambling cognitions was associated with higher levels of pathological gambling.

Regression analysis simultaneously including hope and grit as predictors (not shown):

• Gambling attitudes (data not shown): Age, grit, and hope were not significant predictors.

• Gambling motivations (see Table 3):
  • Age was not a significant predictor.
  • Higher level of grit predicted lower levels of gambling motivations.
  • Higher level of hope was not a significant predictor.

• Gambling cognitions (see Table 3):
  • Age was not a significant predictor.
  • Higher level of grit predicted lower levels of gambling cognitions.

• Pathological gambling (see Table 3):
  • Age was not a significant predictor.
  • Higher level of grit predicted lower levels of pathological gambling.

• There were no significant interactions.

Conclusions & Implications

The results suggest that research designed to understand the development of hope and grit, particularly grit, can play an important role in putting individuals on healthy life trajectories. Although hope and grit may play subtle part in predicting gambling-related variables for older adults; they were meaningful predictors for middle-aged adults. This may be due to different reasoning behind partaking in gambling. For instance, previous research has found that older adults used to gamble more often for the social reasons (e.g., social support and social activity) (Vander Bilt, Desou, Pantel, Shaffer, & Elinghi, 2004).

The present study had several limitations. Secondary data were used from a larger; convenience sample of participants who had a child or grandchild attending one college in the Midwest. The sample size for older adults was smaller than desirable. Additionally, the participants were predominantly from the Midwest. The small amount of variance accounted for in the regression analyses indicates that the inclusion of other variables would enhance predictive power. The cross sectional nature of the data does not allow for a test of the links between the variables across time or for an examination of reciprocal relations.

Although there were some limitations, this study had a number of strengths that enhance the contribution it makes. The sample consisted of community-dwelling adults, and high levels of grit–local sample, making the results more generalizable. This is the only known dataset to examine factors associated with problem gambling, hope, and grit. Furthermore, this is one of the first known studies to examine the relationship between hope and gambling.

Research literature examining the respective roles of hope and grit in promoting psychological cognitions related to gambling is nonexistent to date. The present study reports that personality variables play a small, but important role at some points in the lifetime. Future research is needed that explores links between hope and grit and other variables across time. Additional research should also explore whether hope and grit are appropriate targets for intervention.

Acknowledgments

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