



## Keep calm and don't worry: Different Dark Triad traits predict distinct coping preferences



Béla Birkás<sup>1</sup>, Boróka Gács, Árpád Csathó<sup>\*,1</sup>

*Institute of Behavioral Sciences, University of Pécs, Szigeti str. 12, Pécs 7624; Hungary*

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 10 November 2014

Received in revised form 28 August 2015

Accepted 3 September 2015

Available online 16 September 2015

### ABSTRACT

Studies on reactions to psychological stress suggest a strong association between personality traits and coping style. Despite of the many studies on this topic, there is a lack research that has examined whether the different social aversive personality traits are associated with different coping preferences. A personality framework dedicated specifically to the socially aversive traits is the Dark Triad Personality referring to Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Therefore, the current study was aimed at examining the association between Dark Triad personalities and coping strategies. Two hundred individuals (82 men) completed the short Dark Triad questionnaire and two different self-report coping scales (CISS, WCQ). Correlation and multiple regression analyses showed that the way how narcissists cope with psychological distress appear to be clearly distinct from the coping preferences associated with Machiavellianism and psychopathy. More specifically, Machiavellianism and psychopathy were negatively associated with task-oriented coping and positively with the emotional-oriented coping process suggesting a more emotional reaction to stress. In contrast, narcissism was found to be associated with task oriented and emotionally controlled coping.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

When facing psychological stress, the effect of stressors can be reduced by the use of effective coping strategies. The strategies preferred in a stressful situation might rely on many different factors including, for example, the appraisal of stress, age, and internal state of the person, as well as the conditions of the external environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). The reduction of the effect of stressors can be accomplished by various coping strategies. Thus, problem-focused coping involves efforts to change or eliminate the source of stress, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies tend to regulate the negative emotional consequences of the stressors (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). In addition, avoidance-focused coping reflects the persons' intent to avoid the stressful situation (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Eaton & Bradley, 2008). Individuals' preference for a specific coping strategy has, however, been linked to their subjective evaluation of the stressful situations suggesting strong associations between personality traits and coping strategy (Vollrath, 2001; Aneshensel, Rutter, & Lachenbruch, 1991; Watson, David, & Suls, 1999). The current study is addressed to explore these associations further by examining the association between coping

strategies and social aversive personality traits, represented in the Dark Triad.

#### 1.1. Coping and personality

A meta-analytic review implies that each of the BigFive personality factors might predict a specific coping strategy (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). Moreover, maladaptive personality traits (e.g., inflexible personalities related to coping with psychological distress) were found to be related to avoidant and emotional coping (Ireland, Brown, & Ballarini, 2006) suggesting that maladaptive or socially negative personality traits associate with specific stress related behavioral responses, or coping strategies (Tandon, Dariotis, Tucker, & Sonenstein, 2013). Thus, for example, subclinical, interpersonally adaptive, but social aversive personality traits, which are not comprehensively represented in the BigFive concept (e.g., Lee & Ashton, 2005; Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008; Veselka, Schermer, & Vernon, 2011), might possibly modulate individuals' behavioral reactions under stress (e.g., Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006). A personality framework dedicated specifically to the socially negative or hostile traits is the Dark Triad Personality referring to three interrelated constructs of Machiavellianism, subclinical psychopathy, and subclinical narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Several socially-averse features frame the common basis of the Dark Triad traits, like callousness, being manipulative (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), low Agreeableness, low Conscientiousness (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006), and the low level of honesty–humility (Lee & Ashton, 2005) Therefore Dark Triad might be

\* Corresponding author at: Institute of Behavioral Sciences, University of Pécs, Szigeti str. 12, Pécs 7624, Hungary.

E-mail address: [arpad.csatho@aok.pte.hu](mailto:arpad.csatho@aok.pte.hu) (Á. Csathó).

<sup>1</sup> The author's work was supported by the Grant of Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (Nr. 101.762).

an ideal candidate to specifically investigate how social aversive but interpersonally adaptive personality traits associate with the choice of strategies used to cope with stress.

### 1.2. The Dark Triad personality

Although Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism are inter-related personality constructs, there are many evidences from previous studies that each of these personalities represents a different aspect of the dark personality (Jonason, Koenig, & Tost, 2010; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). For example, recent studies revealed (Jonason & Tost, 2010; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013; Szijarto & Bereczkei, 2014) that narcissism can be characterized with a friendly dominant interpersonal style and a higher degree of self-control. In contrast, Machiavellianism has been found to be associated with a hostile-submissive interpersonal style and low self-control. Finally, psychopathy is a trait associated with a hostile dominant interpersonal style and low self-control.

Self-control, dominance, and hostile attitudes are known to affect coping strategies (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Englert, Bertrams, & Dickhäuser, 2011) suggesting that the different Dark Triad personalities might be associated with distinctive strategies of coping. In spite of the plausibility of this hypothesis, to our knowledge, no previous study has investigated the potential differences in coping strategy between the three members of the Dark Triad. More particular, only two studies have been addressed to a similar research issue but focusing only on one of the Dark Triad traits and its association with a specific coping strategy. First, Rim (1992) investigated coping behavior preferred by Machiavellian individuals but only in relation to the emotional coping strategies. Second, highly recently, focusing only on narcissism, Ng, Cheung, and Tam (2014) found, that individuals with grandiose narcissistic traits can be characterized with a better ability to adopt the suitable coping strategy in different stressful situations as compared to vulnerable narcissists. This better coping flexibility of the grandiose narcissistic individuals is suggested to be an important mediator between their life satisfaction, perceived levels of stress and narcissistic personality traits.

Although these studies clearly indicate the potential effects of Dark Triad traits on coping strategies they still leave open the question of which are the distinctive coping characteristics of the three Dark Triad members.

### 1.3. Aims of the current study

Considering the strong associations between personality traits and coping, and the lack of research on the potential coping differences between the Dark Triad traits, in the current study, we aimed at investigating the question whether the different members of Dark Triad (i.e. Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) are associated with different coping strategies. More specifically, in line with their self-controlled and friendly-dominant personality, we predicted a controlled, task-oriented coping strategy for narcissist individuals. For individuals higher on Machiavellianism and psychopathy, coping behavior is plausibly not executed through self-control, therefore they might tend to prefer either emotional oriented or avoidance oriented coping strategies. In the current study, these predictions were investigated by two self-report questionnaires assessing a high variety of coping strategies (e.g. task-oriented, emotion-focused, or avoidance).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 200 individuals (82 men) aged between 18 and 38 years ( $M = 26.43$ ,  $SD = 5.78$ ). As in most of the previous studies, all of the participants were under-, and postgraduate students. They

were naïve with regard to the purpose of the study and provided written consent.

### 2.2. Measures and procedure

The Short Dark Triad questionnaire (SD3) (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) was used to assess the Dark Triad construct. The SD3 is a 27-item self-report scale that measures Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism with 9 items for each subscale ranging from a minimum score of 9 to a maximum score of 45 (in this sample: Machiavellianism:  $M = 27.28$ ,  $SD = 6.21$ ; psychopathy:  $M = 20.92$ ,  $SD = 6.12$ ; narcissism:  $M = 24.61$ ,  $SD = 6.04$ ). All three subscales returned acceptable internal consistency in the current study (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : Machiavellianism = .75; psychopathy = .70; narcissism = .76).

To assess coping strategies, we used two different self-report scales: The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1990, 1999) and the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). The two scales rely on different concepts to assess the main aspects of coping strategies: While CISS is a dispositional scale referring to a general, situation independent coping strategy, WCQ is aimed at mapping coping in a more situation-oriented way. It measures coping processes, rather than coping strategies with identifying thoughts and actions used by individuals to cope with everyday stressors. Consequently, unlike CISS, WCQ can measure whether individuals use a variety of strategies across different situations or they are more rigid applicants of a few coping strategies. The detailed structures of the two scales are as follows.

CISS is a 48-item, five-point Likert-scale designed to assess three dimensions (task-oriented, emotional, and avoidant) of self-reported responses to stressful circumstances (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ,  $.76$  &  $.71$  respectively). According to Endler and Parker (1999), *Task-oriented coping* describes an active problem solving approach to stressful situations. In contrast, *Emotional coping* is characterized by engaging behaviors such as ruminating or becoming emotional in response to stress. Individuals who report a preference to avoid stressful situations have a predominantly *Avoidant coping* strategy.

The WCQ consists of 50 items with a four-point Likert scale format, for eight scales measuring 8 different coping processes (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lundqvist & Ahlström, 2006). *Planful Problem Solving*: Individuals high on this scale deliberate problem-focused efforts to alter the situation and to solve the problem (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ). *Seeking Social Support*: It refers to the seeking informational, emotional or tangible support (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). *Self-Control*: Individuals high on this scale make efforts to regulate their own feelings and actions (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ). *Confrontive Coping*: It describes the aggressive efforts to change the situation and may include some degree of hostility (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ). *Positive Reappraisal*: High scores on this scale reflects high efforts to create positive meaning of this situation by focusing on personal growth (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .65$ ). *Distancing*: cognitive efforts to detach oneself or minimizing the significance of the situation and to create a positive outlook (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ). *Accepting Responsibility*: the person acknowledges his/her own role in the problem (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ). Finally, *Escape Avoidance*: It refers to wishful thinking and attempts to escape or avoid the problem (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .68$ ).

The scores for the WCQ subscales can also be interpreted in accordance with the basic coping strategies. Thus, the subscales Self-Control, Confrontive Coping, Positive Reappraisal, Distancing and Accepting Responsibility can be defined as scales for emotion-focused coping processes (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Planful Problem Solving scale represents a task-oriented coping process, whereas Escape-Avoidance reflects avoidance orientation. In addition, the Seeking Social Support Scale has been suggested as a distinct coping dimension, because its' possible inter-correlations both with emotional-focused and problem-focused coping strategies (e.g. help from our friends

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889911>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889911>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)