



Normal personality traits, rumination and stress generation among early adolescent girls



Catherine B. Stroud^{a,*}, Effua E. Sosoo^{a,b}, Syla Wilson^c

^a Department of Psychology, Williams College, United States

^b Department of Psychology, Binghamton University, United States

^c Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 January 2015

Revised 9 May 2015

Accepted 13 May 2015

Available online 18 May 2015

Keywords:

Personality

Stress generation

Rumination

Negative emotionality

Positive emotionality

Constraint

ABSTRACT

This study examined associations between personality and stress generation. Expanding upon prior work, we examined (a) the role of Positive Emotionality (PE), Negative Emotionality (NE), and Constraint (CON), and their lower-order facets, as predictors of acute and chronic interpersonal stress generation; (b) whether personality moderated effects of rumination on stress generation; and (c) whether personality increased exposure to independent (uncontrollable) stress. These questions were examined in a one-year study of 126 adolescent girls (M age = 12.39 years) using contextual stress interviews. NE predicted increases in acute and chronic interpersonal stress generation, but not independent stress. NE, CON and affiliative PE each moderated the effect of rumination on chronic interpersonal stress generation. These effects were driven by particular lower-order traits.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Understanding the role of personality in determining the likelihood individuals will encounter stressful experiences has been of great interest to researchers. Central to this work is [Hammen's \(1991\)](#) stress generation model, which asserts that susceptible individuals actively contribute to the occurrence of stress in their lives ([Hammen, 2006](#)). Specifically, the model posits that individuals experience increased rates of stressful life events, especially interpersonal ones, that occur at least partially as a result of their individual characteristics, situation or behaviors (i.e., dependent interpersonal events, such as conflicts; [Hammen, 1991](#)). In addition, individuals select themselves into stressful interpersonal contexts that result in high levels of ongoing (i.e., chronic) interpersonal stress (e.g., dissatisfying relationships; [Hammen, 2006](#)). This model has accrued support among adolescents and adults, and research consistently demonstrates that personality, particularly neuroticism, predicts the generation of stressful life events ([Hammen, 2006](#); [Liu & Alloy, 2010](#)). Yet, significant gaps in our understanding of the role of personality in stress generation remain, particularly with regard to (a) the predictive effects of personality traits other than neuroticism; (b) the role of personality in predicting chronic stress generation; (c) whether personality moderates the effect of other predictors of stress generation; and (d)

whether personality predicts exposure to uncontrollable (i.e., independent) and non-interpersonal stress. The present study was designed to address these gaps.

One predominant approach to measuring personality is the Big Three hierarchical model ([Tellegen, 1985](#); [Watson & Clark, 1992](#)). This model includes three higher-order dimensions: Negative Emotionality (NE; including elements of the Five Factor Model [FFM] Neuroticism and Agreeableness [inversely]), Positive Emotionality (PE/Extraversion, including FFM Extraversion and achieving aspects of FFM Conscientiousness) and Constraint (CON, including controlled aspects of FFM Conscientiousness and elements of Openness to Experience), which are each marked by a series of lower-order traits.¹ These dimensions are recognized in various structural models of personality (e.g., [Clark & Watson, 1999](#); [Goldberg, 1993](#); [McCrae & Costa, 1990](#); [Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000](#)) and have broad implications for social, academic and occupational outcomes as well as risk for psychopathology ([Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000](#); [Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010](#); [Paunonen, 1998](#)). Despite this, no study of stress generation has examined the role of all 3 higher-order traits (or all 5 FFM traits). Moreover, little work has investigated associations between the lower-order traits and stress generation, despite

* Corresponding author at: Williams College, Bronfman Science Center, 18 Hoxsey St., Williamstown, MA 01267, United States.

E-mail address: Catherine.B.Stroud@williams.edu (C.B. Stroud).

¹ Among early adolescents, there is a similar relationship between the FFM and the Big Three, except that PE includes elements of Openness to Experience (instead of the achieving aspects of Conscientiousness) and CON also includes the affiliative aspects of Agreeableness ([Tackett et al., 2012](#)).

evidence that these traits account for substantial variance in behavioral and clinical outcomes, beyond that accounted for by the higher-order traits (Paunonen, 1998; Reynolds & Clark, 2001).

Most research examining personality and stress generation has focused narrowly on one trait—neuroticism. This work has consistently shown that individuals higher in neuroticism generate more stressful life events (e.g., Kendler, Gardner, & Prescott, 2003; Kercher, Rapee, & Schniering, 2009; Lakdawalla & Hankin, 2008). For example, Uliaszek et al. (2012) found that greater neuroticism predicted increases in dependent interpersonal stressful life events (i.e., acute interpersonal stress generation) and chronic interpersonal stress (i.e., chronic interpersonal stress generation) among a sample of late adolescents. Few studies have examined whether the findings for neuroticism are consistent with the higher-order trait NE. In exception, two investigations within the same sample of adolescents demonstrated that NE predicted increases in dependent events (Wetter & Hankin, 2009), including specifically interpersonal ones (Shapero, Hankin, & Barrocas, 2013). Moreover, other lower-order facets of NE (alienation, aggression) have received little empirical attention, with the exception of one daily diary study of young adults which found that alienation was not concurrently associated with, and did not predict changes in, stress over time (Hankin, 2010).

Prior work examining PE and CON, and their lower-order facets, is also scarce. In terms of PE, in a sample of adolescents, PE predicted increases in dependent interpersonal events when examined in isolation, but not when accounting for the effects of other predictors (e.g., NE, co-rumination; Shapero et al., 2013). Further, among older adolescents, the FFM trait Extraversion was associated with, but did not predict increases in, chronic interpersonal stress (Uliaszek et al., 2012). Similarly, social closeness, but not wellbeing, was associated with baseline stress, but did not predict changes in stress over time (Hankin, 2010). In terms of CON, prior work has not assessed the higher-order trait or its lower-order facets, but some work suggests that impulsivity or traits related to impulsivity may increase vulnerability for generating dependent events (Liu & Kleiman, 2012; Molz et al., 2013). Finally, Murphy, Miller, and Wrosch (2013) found that mid- to late-adolescents higher in the FFM trait Conscientiousness experienced fewer severe dependent events and lower levels of chronic interpersonal stress.

Despite support for the role of personality in stress generation, there are significant gaps in the literature. First, most prior work has utilized life-event checklists (for exceptions, see Hankin, 2010; Kendler et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2013; Uliaszek et al., 2012), despite evidence that checklists may be biased by individuals' perceptions and subjective interpretations, and as such, may be more prone to errors in identifying life events (Hammen, 2006; Monroe, 2008). This may be particularly important when examining neuroticism, as Espejo et al. (2011) showed that individuals higher in neuroticism appraised events as more subjectively stressful, but did not actually experience more severe events, when stress exposure and severity were based on objective contextual ratings. Second, little research has explored personality and chronic interpersonal stress generation, which represents a considerable gap in the literature (Liu & Alloy, 2010). Further, most prior work has not controlled for chronic stress when examining the link between personality and acute stress generation, despite evidence that different forms of stress co-occur (Hammen, Kim, Eberhart, & Brennan, 2009).

Third, more work is needed to evaluate whether personality places individuals at risk for generating stress, specifically interpersonal stress, or whether personality increases exposure to diverse forms of stress, including independent stress (Rudolph & Hammen, 1999). Limited prior work suggests that NE, PE/Extraversion and Conscientiousness do not predict exposure to independent events (Murphy et al., 2013; Shapero et al., 2013;

Uliaszek et al., 2012), consistent with the stress generation model. There is some evidence that personality plays a role in the generation of non-interpersonal acute (e.g., academic events; e.g., Shapero et al., 2013) and chronic (Murphy et al., 2013; Uliaszek et al., 2012) stress. However, research is limited because most prior work has not distinguished between independent (uncontrollable) and dependent events and/or explored effects for dependent stress including both interpersonal and non-interpersonal stressors (for exceptions, see Shapero et al., 2013; Uliaszek et al., 2012).

Fourth, prior work has not examined whether personality moderates the effect of other predictors on stress generation. In a prior study in this sample, rumination (the tendency to passively and repeatedly focus on one's distress and the associated causes and consequences; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008) predicted increases in acute and chronic interpersonal stress generation (Stroud, Sosoo, & Wilson, submitted for publication). Based on models that posit that personality traits serve to promote risk or resiliency in the presence of adversity (for a review, see Shiner & Caspi, 2003), we predicted that personality would moderate the effect of rumination on stress generation. Several lines of evidence indirectly support this prediction. First, personality shapes coping strategy selection (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). For instance, individuals higher in the FFM traits Extraversion and Conscientiousness use engagement strategies more frequently (e.g., problem-solving, distraction) whereas those higher in neuroticism use these strategies less frequently. The Response Styles Theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) asserts that distraction may allow individuals to disengage from rumination and then engage in problem-solving to address the source of their difficulties. This suggests that higher levels of CON or PE may interrupt the link between rumination and stress generation, whereas higher levels of NE may potentiate this effect. Second, research suggests that personality moderates the impact of coping strategies (e.g., Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). For example, disengagement strategies (e.g., avoidance, escape) are associated with reductions in negative affect among those high in neuroticism, but increases in negative affect among those low in neuroticism (e.g., Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). Third, personality shapes the quality of interpersonal relationships. For instance, the tendency of high PE individuals to have high quality relationships (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002) and to approach the environment (Clark & Watson, 1999) may protect them from generating interpersonal stress in the context of rumination. Similarly, higher levels of aspects of CON have been linked with fewer social difficulties (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2000), suggesting that CON may be similarly protective. In contrast, NE is negatively related to relationship quality (e.g., Caspi & Shiner, 2006; Kendler et al., 2003), which may amplify the predictive effect of NE on rumination.

Finally, little research has examined personality and stress generation among early adolescents. Moreover, of those studies that have included early adolescents (Kercher et al., 2009; Shapero et al., 2013; Wetter & Hankin, 2009), none have utilized contextual stress interviews. Given that disorders associated with personality, rumination and stress generation (e.g., depression) often emerge in mid-adolescence (Rohde, Beevers, Stice, & O'Neil, 2009), it is important to understand these associations during early adolescence. Moreover, as compared to early adolescent boys, early adolescent girls exhibit higher levels of rumination (Hampel & Petermann, 2005) and generate higher levels of interpersonal stress (Rudolph & Flynn, 2007; Rudolph & Hammen, 1999). Thus, it is particularly important to understand links between rumination, personality and stress generation among early adolescent girls, prior to the development of psychopathology.

To address these gaps, the present study examined the unique effects of higher- and lower-order traits on the generation of acute and chronic interpersonal stress. Moreover, we examined whether

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7326845>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7326845>

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