

THE EFFECT OF DEFENSE STYLES ON DARK TRIAD PERSONALITY TRAITS ACCORDING TO THE LEVELS OF EMOTION REGULATION DIFFICULTIES IN A NON-CLINICAL ADULT SAMPLE

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the types of defense as a predictor of the dark triad personality traits within the framework of emotion regulation difficulties in adults without a psychiatric diagnosis. 1395 people, 57.8% of whom were women, who were not diagnosed, participated in the study. Participants were chosen by convenience sampling method, and those who were diagnosed were excluded from the analysis. In the survey form the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40), the Short Dark Triad (SD3-T) scales and the demographic form were used. Emotion regulation difficulty levels were created to be one standard deviation above and below the mean of the total score of the DERS. According to these levels, whether machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism scores were predicted by the defense types were examined with the Multiple Linear Regression Model. Results have shown that the effects of defense types differ in the dark triad personality traits according to the levels of difficulty in emotion regulation.

Keywords: *Emotion dysregulation, defense mechanisms, dark triad, MLR.*

1. Introduction

As it can be understood from the example of DSM and ICD, the view that the use of a categorical approach may not be suitable for all psychiatric disorders in the classification of psychopathology (Fusar-Poli, 2019). It is emphasized that categorical models may cause difficulties in distinguishing between people with subclinical symptoms and those who fully meet these symptoms, and in this context, it is emphasized that although the groups may need different treatments, they may need similar treatments (Lyons, 2019). In response to this problem, it is recommended to adopt a transdiagnostic approach. The transdiagnostic approach, which originates from cognitive behavioral theory and treatments, assumes that similar causes may lie on the basis of different disorders and that these disorders may have similar etiologies and maintenance processes with some similar cognitive, affective, interpersonal and behavioral features (Hallam, 2013; Fusar-Poli et al., 2019). According to the transdiagnostic approach, disorders can be classified according to underlying mechanisms or disorders (such as attention functions, affect, emotion regulation, intolerance of uncertainty) (Sloan et al., 2017).

In this respect, emotion regulation is one of the concepts that has attracted great attention in the literature in recent years (Gross, 2014). According to the APA (2015), emotion regulation is a person's ability to modulate an emotion or a set of emotions. In other words, it is defined as the observation, evaluation and management of emotional experiences and expressions (Garofalo, Neumann, Kosson, Velotti, 2020). Difficulties related to emotions and emotion regulation seem to be present in at least one of the symptoms related to the disorders within the scope of DSM and in the majority of the diagnosis categories in general (Kring and Sloan, 2010).

It's assumed that the research on emotion regulation started with Freud's studies on defenses, then gained momentum with the studies of theorists such as Lazarus, Bowlby and Mischel on different subjects, and finally, with the introduction of the concept of emotion regulation in the 1990s, it gained its contemporary meaning (Gross, 2014).

The emphasis in the literature that studies on emotion regulation begin with the concept of defense mechanisms put forward by Freud (1894) is very important in that defense mechanisms can be considered as an emotion regulation tools and that these variables can be viewed as they are theoretically related. Also both structures can be considered as transdiagnostic structures (Babl et al., 2019).

Dark triad traits are defined as subclinical structures, which are composed of Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism are in between normal and abnormal dimensions of personality functionality (Grigoras, Wille, 2017). Machiavellianism refers to a person's thinking that it is beneficial to manipulate others and to exhibit a moral stance that prioritizes interests rather than principles (Miao, Humphrey, Qian, Pollack, 2019). Psychopathy is defined as a lack of remorse and guilt for hurting others, lack of empathy, impulsivity and indifference towards other people (Miao, Humphrey, Qian, Pollack, 2019). Finally, narcissism refers to excessive self-glorification and love, an exaggerated attitude in self-evaluation, and fantasies of control, admiration, and success (Miao, Humphrey, Qian, Pollack, 2019).

There are many studies reporting that there is a relationship between emotion regulation and personality traits (Garofalo, Neumann, Kosson, & Velotti, 2020; Richardson & Boag, 2016; Velotti & Garofalo, 2015; Pollock, McCabe, Southard, and Zeigler-Hill, 2016; Abdi, and Pak; 2019). Similarly, it has been reported that there is a relationship between immature defense mechanisms and dark triad personality traits (Richardson & Boag, 2016). Although the relationship between these variable pairs is studied, no study has been found which examines all three under a single model.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 1395 people between the ages of 18-65, of which 57,8% (806 people) were women and 42,2% (589 people) were men.

2.2. Instruments

The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) developed by Gratz and Roemer (2004) and adapted to Turkish by Rugancı and Gençöz (2010) and the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40) developed by Andrews, Singh and Bond (1993) and adapted to Turkish by Yılmaz, Gençöz and Ak (2007) and the Short Dark Triad (SD3-T) developed by Jones and Paulhus (2014) and adapted to Turkish by Özsoy, Rauthmann, Jonason and Ardiç (2017) were used.

2.3. Procedure

Emotion regulation difficulty levels were created to be one standard deviation ($sd= 20,68$) above and below the mean ($= 82,13$) of the total score of the DERS. It was observed that the distribution of the participants to the levels of emotion dysregulation was 285 (20,4%) for the lower level, 907 (65%) for the medium level, and 203 (14,6%) for the upper level.

3. Results

Multiple linear regression analysis results are shown in tables below (Table 1 for Machiavellianism, Table 2 for psychopathy and Table 3 for narcissism).

Table 1. Multiple linear regression analysis results of Machiavellism.

<i>Levels</i>	<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error for B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>Lower</i>	<i>Constant</i>	16,288	1,405	-	11,590***	0,178	61,477***
	<i>IMM</i>	0,136	0,017	0,422	7,841***		
<i>Medium</i>	<i>Constant</i>	18,553	1,026	-	18,083***	0,130	45,001***
	<i>IMM</i>	0,081	0,009	0,329	9,473***		
	<i>MAT</i>	0,083	0,023	0,132	3,660***		
	<i>NEU</i>	-0,055	0,023	-0,088	-2,395**		
<i>Upper</i>	<i>Constant</i>	15,554	1,891	-	8,220***	0,189	46,786***
	<i>IMM</i>	0,108	0,016	0,435	6,840***		

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$; IMM- Immature defenses, NEU- Neurotic defenses, MAT- Mature defenses

Table 2. Multiple linear regression analysis results of psychopathy.

<i>Levels</i>	<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error for B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>Lower</i>	<i>Constant</i>	13,452	1,414	-	9,515***	0,052	47,372***
	<i>IMM</i>	0,111	0,011	0,514	9,716***		
	<i>MAT</i>	-0,074	0,026	-0,148	-2,803**		
<i>Medium</i>	<i>Constant</i>	13,440	0,821	-	16,373***	0,085	113,72***
	<i>IMM</i>	0,114	0,008	0,490	15,030***		
	<i>NEU</i>	-0,097	0,019	-0,164	-5,021**		
<i>Upper</i>	<i>Constant</i>	13,864	1,933	-	7,171***	0,146	45,893***
	<i>IMM</i>	0,155	0,016	0,640	9,577***		
	<i>NEU</i>	-0,208	0,043	-0,322	-4,825***		

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$; IMM- Immature defenses, NEU- Neurotic defenses, MAT- Mature defenses

Table 3. Multiple linear regression analysis results for narcissism.

Levels	Independent Variables	B	Std. Error for B	Beta	t	R ²	F
Lower	Constant	22,399	1,198	-	18,699***	0,052	15,636***
	IMM	0,058	0,015	0,229	3,954***		
Medium	Constant	20,003	0,905	-	22,100***	0,085	28,087***
	IMM	0,051	0,008	0,242	6,795***		
	MAT	0,082	0,020	0,153	4,131***		
	NEU	-0,050	0,020	-0,093	-2,455*		
Upper	Constant	15,722	1,824	-	8,648***	0,146	17,094***
	IMM	0,056	0,017	0,259	3,335***		
	MAT	0,094	0,042	0,175	2,252*		

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$; IMM- Immature defenses, NEU- Neurotic defenses, MAT- Mature defenses

4. Discussion

The fact that the related structures are predicted by different variables at low, moderate and high levels of emotion dysregulation shows that emotion dysregulation have an effect on traits. Machiavellianism being predicted by immature defenses only in the low and high dysregulation groups and by all variables in the moderate emotion dysregulation group seems to distinguish Machiavellianism from psychopathy and narcissism. This finding is consistent with the literature. The fact that neurotic defenses have a negative effect in every model in which it is statistically significant can be explained by the fact that the use of neurotic defense is associated with partial insight preservation is in line with the literature. The negative effect of mature defenses in the low emotion dysregulation group in psychopathy is similarly consistent with the defense mechanisms literature. When the findings are examined, it can be interpreted that the predictive quality of mature defenses is incompatible with the literature, but this may be due to the suitability of the traits for dimensional evaluation. Similarly, it is confusing that both immature mechanisms and mature mechanisms have predictive effects in the same groups. This may also be due to the measurement tools used. When the literature is examined, it is seen that different measurement tools are used both for the dark triad traits and for the evaluation of defense mechanisms. Repeating the same study with different measurement tools can eliminate this confusion. When the results of the research are examined in general terms, it is thought that studies that model emotion regulation and defense mechanisms in particular for different personality traits and diagnosis groups will be important.

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