

PSYRGGU 2020

Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

THE ROLE OF NEGATIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION

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Abstract

This study is devoted to the analysis of the role of negative characteristics in a person's feeling of satisfaction with his life as an indicator of his psychological well-being. The study hypothesis suggests that negative personality traits do not always play a negative role in the psychological adaptation of an individual and in some cases they provide a person with a higher level of life satisfaction and the possibility of adequate and successful adaptation. The experimental sample included 401 people aged 18–78 years ($M=26.58$, $SD=12.91$, 55.9% women). The relationship between indicators of life satisfaction and a number of negative personality traits were analyzed (traits of the Dark Triad, authoritarianism, procrastination, loneliness, and perfectionism). The following methods were used: Satisfaction with Life Scale; The Short Dark Triad Questionnaire; a short questionnaire of authoritarianism; Differential perfectionism test; Procrastination Scale; Differential questionnaire of experiencing loneliness (version DOPO-3k). Statistical data processing methods included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and assessment of significance of group differences by the t-test, Cohen's d. It has been revealed that some negative personality traits (such as narcissism and authoritarianism) can, indeed, act as predictors of a sense of life satisfaction and provide a more successful psychological adaptation.

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Keywords: Authoritarianism, Dark Triad, life satisfaction, perfectionism, procrastination, psychological adaptation.



1. Introduction

In recent years much attention is paid to studies of factors related to the psychological well-being of an individual. Life satisfaction is a cognitive component of general psychological well-being (SWB) and is the most general subjective assessment (Diener et al., 1985). This means that, firstly, it reflects the global assessment of the respondent's life without any detail (that is, it does not enable to know whether family life was a success, whether children rejoice, whether the health is robust, or whether the promotion is continuing). Secondly, the evaluation criteria are not set by the interviewer, but are chosen by the respondent himself, and it remains unclear what standards the respondent is targeting, with whom he compares himself, and why his life pleases or, on the contrary, disappoints him.

2. Problem Statement

The degree of man's satisfaction with his life is connected with his sense of life well-being and is an important factor in social and psychological adaptation. In Russian and foreign studies, the factors are studied which determine the level of a person's satisfaction with his life. Both external and internal predictors of life satisfaction are analyzed (Argyle, 2013). Among the internal factors, subjective ones are of particular interest as they are related to the characteristics of the person himself (for example, Galiakhmetova, 2015; Smotrova & Gritsenko, 2017).

It is also demonstrated that the factors determining subjective well-being can be both positive and negative personal characteristics. For example, in Eremina's (2017) work, it was shown that subjective well-being is determined by the desire for dominance, adequate integration in society, external control, a comfortable emotional state, the desire to avoid problem solving and admission of responsibility by escaping from reality.

3. Research Questions

A number of studies conducted over the recent years of the role of personal characteristics in various indicators of life successfulness (stability of marriage, satisfaction with a profession, maintaining activity and interest in life in old age) also show that negative personality traits play, firstly, significant and secondly, not necessarily a negative role in different indicators of life satisfaction (Ashton, 2013; Furnham et al., 2014).

The absence of the destructive effect of negative traits is attributed by researchers as the fact that their destructiveness may have a greater impact on others than on the carriers of these traits themselves, or not be detected in some situations, or manifest themselves as the "bright side". The latter, the bright side of negative traits, is intensively analysed as a possible point of personal growth and as an important component of compensation of adverse consequences (Furnham et al., 2012; Kwapil et al., 2012).

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the role of negative characteristics in the psychological well-being of an individual. It can be assumed that negative personality traits do not always have a negative impact, in some cases they provide a person with opportunities for adequate and successful adaptation.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

The sample includes 401 respondents (55.88% of women; aged from 18 to 78 years, $M=26.58$, $SD=12.91$).

5.2. Methods

Life satisfaction: the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used (Diener et al., 1985). The questionnaire of E. Diener includes 5 statements aimed at assessing by the subjects of the quality of his life as a whole in relation to a certain ideal. In addition, the subject was asked to answer how satisfied he was with his career and personal life.

The Dark Triad: the Short Dark Triad Questionnaire (SD3) was used to diagnose three negative personality traits — Machiavellianism, non-clinical narcissism, and non-clinical psychopathy (Egorova et al., 2015; Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

Authoritarianism was assessed by the short questionnaire of authoritarianism obtained by adapting the right-wing authoritarianism questionnaire proposed by B. Altmeyer. The questionnaire enables, in addition to the general indicator of authoritarianism, also to obtain points on the subscales of authoritarian submission and aggression and conventionalism (as cited in Chertkova et al., 2017; Jost & Sidanius, 2004).

Perfectionism: the Differential perfectionism test was used (Zolotareva, 2013) suggesting the separation of normal and pathological types of perfectionism.

Procrastination was estimated using the brief version of Procrastination Scale, adapted for the Russian population (Lay, 1986).

Loneliness was diagnosed with the Differential Questionnaire of experiencing loneliness (version DOPO-3k), which evaluates three indicators - general loneliness, dependence on communication, and positive loneliness (Osin & Leontyev, 2013).

The subjects evaluated their agreement with the statements formulated in the questionnaires on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponded to “absolutely disagree”, and 5 implied “fully agree”.

Statistical data processing methods were selected depending on the tasks being solved and included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, assessment of significance of group differences by the t-test, Cohen's d, F-ratio. The results were processed using the R programming language (R-3.2.3 Wooden Christmas-Tree) and the statistical package Statistica 8.0.3.

6. Findings

In our study, the indicator of life satisfaction (LS) is considered as a characteristic of the person's experience of happiness and subjective well-being.

The subjects' self-assessment of the level of general life satisfaction on the E. Diener's scale ranges within 5 to 25 points, that is, it covers the whole range of possible values ($M=15.61$; $SD=4.45$). Evaluation of satisfaction with own personal life varied from 1 to 5 ($M=3.71$; $SD=1.33$), while satisfaction with career was also from 1 to 5 ($M=3.41$; $SD=1.26$). Estimates of the indicator of life satisfaction, satisfaction with personal life and career are related to each other, however the correlations between them are moderate (see Table 1).

Table 01. Interrelations of various indicators of life satisfaction (Spearman's rank-order correlation).

Indicators	Spearman's R	Significance
LS - satisfaction with personal life	0.427	0.000
LS - satisfaction with career	0.367	0.000
Satisfaction with personal life - satisfaction with career	0.375	0.000

The indicator of subjective well-being is more closely associated with satisfaction with personal life ($r=0.427$, $p<0.000$) than that with career ($r=0.367$, $p<0.000$).

To obtain a general idea of the contribution of negative characteristics to the SWB cognitive component, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed, where life satisfaction was a dependent variable. At the first stage, social and demographic indicators were independent variables. In this case, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was insignificant. Adding in the second step of negative personality traits as independent variables (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, loneliness, procrastination, normal and pathological perfectionism, authoritarian submission and aggression, conventionalism) enabled to explain 24.5% of the variance of the data on the general life satisfaction indicator. Significant predictors of life satisfaction are narcissism ($\beta=0.127$, $p<0.05$), general loneliness ($\beta=-0.131$, $p<0.01$), procrastination ($\beta=-0.171$, $p<0.01$), pathological perfectionism ($\beta=-0.163$, $p<0.01$), authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression ($\beta=0.221$, $p<0.001$).

Let us consider in more detail the characteristics that may have an adaptive value due to a positive contribution to psychological well-being.

6.1. The study of authoritarianism as a prominent representative of negative personal characteristics

It was revealed that authoritarianism tends to change nonlinearly with age (its indicators decrease from youth to middle age, reaching a minimum at the age of 31–40 years, and then begin to grow and reach a maximum by declining years).

Authoritarianism has gender differences. When comparing men and women, higher authoritarianism of men is demonstrated in all its indicators: in authoritarian submission and aggression, the average indicators of men and women are equal to 2.87 vs 2.50, respectively, $p<0.001$; according to conventionalism, they are 3.48 vs 3.20, $p<0.01$; and by the total indicator, they are 3.15 vs 2.83, $p<0.001$. The magnitude of the effect (Cohen's d), when comparing men and women, is at an average level and is equal to -0.43 for authoritarian submission and aggression, -0.30 for conventionalism and -0.42 for total points.

The indicators of correlation of life satisfaction with general authoritarianism, authoritarian submission and aggression and conventionalism are 0.28, 0.27 and 0.22, respectively, $p<0.001$ (see Table

2). These results indicate that people with high authoritarianism are generally more satisfied with life than people with low authoritarianism.

Table 02. Interrelations of various indicators of life satisfaction (Spearman's rank-order correlation).

Indicators	Submission and aggression	Conventionalism	Authoritarianism
Satisfaction with life	0.27***	0.22***	0.28***
Satisfaction with personal life	0.12**	0.09	0.13**
Satisfaction with career	0.15**	0.11*	0.15**

Notes: * - $p < 0.05$, ** - $p < 0.01$, *** - $p < 0.001$

The interrelationships of authoritarianism with two other indicators – personal satisfaction with life and satisfaction with career – are weaker; however, they reach a level of significance for two indicators of authoritarianism – general authoritarianism and authoritarian submission and aggression.

6.2. Life satisfaction and the Dark Triad personality traits

The correlation coefficients between narcissism and the three indicators of life satisfaction are significant ($p < 0.001$), although they are relatively low (r ranges from 0.18 to 0.20). These correlations, as could be expected, are positive, that is, people who feel superior to others, admire themselves, are prone to demonstrative behaviour, and are more satisfied with life in general and with its individual sides (work and personal life). The correlations of Machiavellianism, psychopathy and LS are close to 0 (see Table 3).

Table 03. The relationship of indicators of life satisfaction and the Dark Triad (Spearman's rank correlations)

Life satisfaction indicators	Dark Triad traits	Spearman's R	Significance
Satisfaction with life	Machiavellianism	0.073	0.164
	Narcissism	0.243	0.000
	Psychopathy	0.024	0.648
Satisfaction with personal life	Machiavellianism	0.004	0.934
	Narcissism	0.181	0.001
	Psychopathy	0.063	0.235
Satisfaction with career	Machiavellianism	-0.003	0.958
	Narcissism	0.200	0.000
	Psychopathy	0.008	0.887

6.3. Discussion

The results of our research demonstrate that narcissism and the various components of authoritarianism contribute to the formation of higher life satisfaction, while loneliness, perfectionism and procrastination, on the contrary, reduce it.

The core of the study of negative personality traits was authoritarianism which is a personality trait that reflects a predisposition to implicit submitting to power. Authoritarianism is based on three basic dispositions - authoritarian submission (inclination and desire to obey the public authorities and power structures), authoritarian aggression (the desire to punish those who recognize weaknesses in government

structures and do not want to obey implicitly what is “handed down”) and conventionalism (adherence to traditional views, acceptance of majority values, conformity).

Authoritarianism is a socially significant characteristic and has an impact on different spheres of life - from the style of raising children to electoral behaviour. In addition, this characteristic showed links, which are closer than other negative traits, with personal traits of different degrees of generalization, i.e. it is not isolated, but integrated into the general structure of personality traits.

The results obtained revealed that authoritarianism is not changed linearly with age. These results somewhat differ from the data obtained in a number of foreign works (in the Belgian, Polish and New Zealand samples), in which authoritarianism and its correlates demonstrate linear growth over the entire age range - from adolescence to old age (Cornelis et al., 2009; Ruffman et al., 2016; Truett, 1993). It can be assumed that the dynamics of age differences obtained in our study may be the result of instability typical for the post-Soviet period.

In general, our data suggest that authoritarian personalities are more satisfied with life than people with low authoritarianism. The result obtained is in complete consonance with the conclusion of previous studies: no matter how authoritarian personalities are destructive in interpersonal relations, they are in complete harmony with themselves (MacInnis et al., 2013; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008; Van Hiel & De Clercq, 2009; Van Hiel & Brebels, 2011). These data do not contradict the assumption that authoritarianism is a compensatory characteristic and, therefore, its connection with life satisfaction is due to the idea of controlling potentially dangerous and stressful situations (Brandt et al., 2015; Chertkova, 2017). In addition, authoritarian attitudes can lead to a demonstration of an overestimated level of life satisfaction, that is, to increase the social desirability of answers. There is also some evidence for this, for example, a mismatch between the assessment of life satisfaction (obtained from questionnaires) and real life indicators. Thus, people with conservative attitudes smile less, they have less cheerful and joyful messages on Facebook, etc. (Wojcik et al., 2015). Life satisfaction can also be a natural consequence of authoritarian attitudes, for example, accepting the norms of society, focusing on traditions, recognizing the inadmissibility of internal and, moreover, open conflicts with power structures, feeling oneself “like all decent people”. Owing to such attitudes and values, an authoritarian personality strives to maintain family relations and care for career progress more than a non-authoritarian one, and also has less doubt about the correctness of his own convictions. All this can actually increase the sense of satisfaction with life (Schlenker et al., 2012).

As it was shown in Western works, life satisfaction reveals relations with the Dark Triad of personality traits: as a rule, it has positive correlations with narcissism (at the level of 0.45) and low negative correlations with Machiavellianism and non-clinical psychopathy (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015). The results of our study were similar to foreign data.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the hypothesis of our study was confirmed to a large extent. Not all negative personality traits have a negative effect in human adaptation. A number of such characteristics, namely narcissism or some aspects of authoritarianism, turned out to be associated with a higher degree of life satisfaction and, therefore, significant for the purposes of successful and adequate psychological adaptation.

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