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Theories of Coping

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Basically, coping refers to an individual's attempt to tolerate or minimize the effect of the stress, whether it is the stressor or the experience of stress itself. Coping theories can be classified according to orientation or focus (trait-oriented or state-oriented) and approach (macroanalytic or microanalytic).

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Classification of Coping Theories

Coping theories have been divided into two different parameters:

1. Trait-Oriented Theories versus State-Oriented Theories
2. Microanalytic Approach versus Macroanalytic Approach

The trait-oriented theories focus on the early recognition of a person's resources and tendencies related to coping, while the state-oriented theories emphasizes the actual coping of an individual and the outcome of his application of coping methods or strategies.

On the other hand, the microanalytic approach studies a wide variety of specific and concrete coping strategies, while the macroanalytic approach concentrates on fundamental and abstract coping methodologies.

Macroanalytic, Trait-oriented Coping Theories

A. Repression–sensitization

This theory states that there is a bipolar dimension in which a person copes with the stress in only one of two opposite poles – repression or sensitization. People who tend to be repressors cope with the stress by means of denying or minimizing its existence. They use the avoidance coping mechanism such that they are unable to realize the potential negative outcomes of the stressful experience. In contrast to this, sensitizers tend to react to stress with rumination, excessive worrying and obsessive search for information on stress-related cues.

B. Monitoring and Blunting

According to Miller, monitoring and blunting is a construct that is based on the repression-sensitization theory due to the similarity in their nature as cognitive informational styles. However, this construct, particularly blunting, tells us that the impact of uncontrollable stressful cues can be reduced by the individual through the use of cognitive avoidance (e.g. denial, reinterpretation, distraction).

Under controllable stress, monitoring is said to be a more effective coping strategy, as it includes seeking information related to the stressor.

C. Model of Coping Modes (mcm)

This model originates from the monitoring-blunting construct, and is also related to the repression-sensitization conception, but expands concepts of vigilance and cognitive avoidance with an underpinning of cognitive motivational approach. It emphasizes that a person is stimulated to avert the situation and perceive the stressor in an ambiguous manner in the presence of the stressor.

Macroanalytic, State-Oriented Theories

The Defense Mechanisms constructs by Sigmund Freud in 1926 is one of the few macroanalytic, state-oriented theories of coping. A number of defense mechanisms were basically related to intellectualization and repression, the two basic forms that were emphasized by Freud in 1936.

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman proposed yet another theory of coping in a macroanalytic approach, concentrating on the coping strategies that are focused on emotion or on the problem itself, as well as the functions related to them.

While the theory of Lazarus and Folkman was macroanalytic [1] in its origin, it was expanded to the microanalytic approach, wherein Lazarus, et.al. was able to specify coping strategies and classify them into eight groups. These include self-controlling, confrontative coping, seeking social support, distancing, escape-avoidance, accepting responsibility, positive reappraisal and planful problem-solving.

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Links

[1] http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~schuez/foalien/Krohne_Stress.pdf