

Entrepreneurs' Threat Appraisal Effect on Coping Styles

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PSB3E-BT15: Bachelor Thesis

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Month 01, 2022

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Abstract

Next to successful business ideas, self-efficacy and independence, entrepreneurship comprises a high workload, long working hours and daily stressful work encounters which can be appraised as threatening. Therefore, coping plays an important role in an entrepreneur's life to overcome stressful events in order to lead a successful venture. Based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987), the purpose of this study was to investigate how entrepreneurs' threat appraisal of an adverse work event influenced their coping styles. It was predicted that threat appraisal was (a) positively related to problem-focused coping and (b) negatively related to emotion-focused coping. A cross-sectional research design was implemented and in total 136 entrepreneurs were recruited to fill out an online questionnaire. By using multiple linear regression, the main effects between threat appraisal on problem-focused coping and threat appraisal on emotion-focused coping revealed that entrepreneurs engaged in both coping styles when being threatened by an adverse work event. Gender was used as a moderator to analyze possible gender differences in relation to the main effects. Results showed that gender had no influence on how entrepreneurs appraised and coped with stressful encounters. Results are discussed in terms of functions of coping styles and gender equality in the entrepreneurial environment. In addition, an exploratory analysis laid focus on single coping strategies which make up the two main coping styles and showed that they highly differ in significance and function.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, threat appraisal, gender differences

Entrepreneurs' Threat Appraisal Effect on Coping Styles

Entrepreneurship contributes with its recurring innovative ideas of new goods and services to the economic world market. Behind each founded business, you find an entrepreneur who has the motivation and willingness to implement his or her concepts into reality (Przepiorka, 2016). Entrepreneurs need to be capable of taking in various individual occupational roles in order to lead a successful business. Moreover, they are the main decision-makers and are constantly exposed to new challenges (Przepiorka, 2016). These challenges and responsibilities can lead to stressful encounters for entrepreneurs. To overcome this work-related stress in order to efficiently continue their business and take care of their occupational health and well-being, entrepreneurs use coping as a stress-reduction strategy (Drnovšek, 2010).

Coping as a body of research has expanded over the past 20 years, yet not all interrelations and domains have been explored (Carver, 1997). Coping is a cognitive and behavioral strategy to overcome external or internal demands that are relative to the person experienced as stressful or taxing. There are various forms of coping strategies, however, research mostly distinguishes between two main styles. Problem-focused coping is applied to actively tackle and eventually reduce the issue at hand (Brown et al., 2005). Emotion-focused coping regulates and reduces the negative affect gained from stressful encounters (Brown et al., 2005). In the field of work- and organizational psychology, coping mechanisms and their relevance on work behavior have been of theoretical and practical interest as overcoming stress at work is crucial for people's well-being and job performance. Findings by Brown et al. (2005) amplified that effective coping strategies had a major impact on the relationship between affect and job performance.

According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987), the individual's threat appraisal of a stressful situation determined the coping style

that is being used. Threat appraisal served as an antecedent for coping and evaluated the anticipated harm that a stressful encounter may cause. To investigate how an entrepreneur's appraisal of threat of a negative work event influences their coping styles is crucial in understanding their ways of overcoming occupational-related problems to successfully continue their entrepreneurial activities.

A contemporary trend is increasing research on female entrepreneurial activity within the economic market, nevertheless male entrepreneur rates were still in the majority (Malach-Pines & Schwartz, 2008). Women and men shared similarities in entrepreneurial subjective perceptions, work characteristics and reasons for starting a business, however, men were more motivated to actually start a business (Malach-Pines & Schwartz, 2008). A general notion, investigated by Ptacek et al. (1994), showed that women and men are socialized differently when it comes to coping with stress. So far, there is little research done on gender differences in the entrepreneurial setting. Therefore, for this research it is interesting to investigate if male and female entrepreneurs differ in their ways of appraising a negative work event and coping with it. If gender differences are detectable, the individual entrepreneur can become aware of their gender role in coping with stressful encounters. This can support them to reflect which coping strategies suit them best, enhance their self-efficacy and which ones need to be modified to lead a successful business.

The aim of the present study is twofold. Firstly, to expand the research on entrepreneurial coping strategies as most research examined employee settings. Light is being shed on the unsought main effect of threat appraisal on coping styles in entrepreneurial settings. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) will be applied as a theoretical framework. Secondly, so far little attention has been devoted to entrepreneurial gender differences in threat appraisal and coping which is relevant for entrepreneurs' understanding of their gender role in the occupational setting, thus gender

differences will be examined as a moderation in relation to the main effects. This results in the following research question: What effect do entrepreneurs' threat appraisals have on coping styles after experiencing a negative work event, and how is this moderated by gender?

Literature Review

The Transactional Model Of Stress And Coping

Lazarus and Folkman (1987) introduced their model as an interplay between person and environment. External factors in the environment can elicit a feeling of distress and threat in a person. Stress is an undesirable state and the process of interpreting and overcoming it is explained with the transactional model. In the model, appraisal related to the interpretation of the given stressor always in relation to the individual's well-being. The theory categorizes appraisal as harmful, threatening or challenging. In this study, the focus is laid on threat appraisal which refers to foreseen harmful effects the stressor might elicit. One decides how threatening the stressor might be and how it might intervene with one's well-being. Next, to overcome the stressor Lazarus and Folkman (1987) defined two options of coping: problem-focused coping to actively minimize the stressor and emotion-focused coping to minimize emotional distress. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping finds general acknowledgment among researchers and practitioners (Goh et al., 2010). Nevertheless, little research has been devoted to applying the model to the occupational context, even more specifically to the entrepreneurial setting. As an example, the study by Li et al. (2017) hypothesized that depending on the appraisal of the stressor "reward" workers engage in different coping mechanisms. Results showed that workers who appraised the stressor as a threat engaged in emotional-focused coping, on the contrary, workers who appraised the stressor as a challenge engaged in problem-focused coping and additionally increased their occupational creativity. The Transactional Model is very versatile to adaptation. Applying the

model to an entrepreneurial context serves as a framework to understand an entrepreneur's encounter with stressful situations which is relevant in today's fast pasting work environment.

Theoretical Development And Hypotheses

The Role Of Appraisal On Coping Mechanisms In Entrepreneurial Settings

Universally speaking, entrepreneurship is one of the most stressful occupations as it involved risk-taking and long working hours. Moreover, it showed to have a substantial impact on one's physical and mental health (Cardon & Patel, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to broaden the research on coping mechanisms to find practical implications to support an entrepreneur's stress regulation. The outcome variable of this study is coping which was split into two distinct coping styles - problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Within the entrepreneurial setting, problem-focused coping would entail coming up with a plan of action to eliminate the source of stress, looking for instrumental support from experts in the field or simply focusing the attention away from other distracting activities. This style was used by entrepreneurs mostly to handle economic issues relating to financial aspects (Drnovšek, 2010). Here the focal point lies in tackling the problem at hand. In contrast, entrepreneurs who engaged in emotion-focused coping rather looked for a reduction of the negative affective reaction that came with the stressor. For instance, seeking social support from friends or family members, venting or engaging in other activities. Entrepreneurs used emotion-focused coping to deal with stressful work encounters which elicited negative feelings of frustration, anger or depression (Drnovšek, 2010). An important note here is that both coping styles can be adopted for the same stressor simultaneously or after one another (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987).

According to the founders of The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman stated "However, coping arises from an appraisal of harm, threat or challenge, and it can transform that appraisal and hence the emotional response."

(Lazarus and Folkman, 1987, p. 147). Put simply, in order to cope in different ways, we need an antecedent namely appraisal. Therefore, threat appraisal serves as the predictor variable for coping in this research. Threat appraisal plays a relevant role in the occupational context as it represented the worker's concerns over potential harm and loss in regard to their well-being or even financial existential fears (Fugate et al., 2010). The perception of threat appraisal is highly person-specific and depends on individual emotions and attitudes towards the stressor (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987). Investigating threat appraisal supported researchers in understanding how such cognitive mechanisms influence future behavior (Fugate et al., 2010).

Connecting threat appraisal to coping styles, findings by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) stated that people who were more convinced of their skills to solve certain problems appraised stressful situations as less threatening and therefore engaged in more active and effective strategies of coping. A previous study by Thompson et al. (2020) pointed in the opposite direction and stated that self-employed engaged in both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles when being stressed and threatened by general business affairs. However, Drnovšek (2010) concluded that entrepreneurs rather used problem-focused coping when they appraised a problem as controllable because they felt capable of taking direct steps to eliminate the issue. In contrast, entrepreneurs used emotion-focused coping when they appraised a work-related problem as less controllable to firstly eliminate the negative affect that was elicited by the stressful encounter. These findings suggested that the level of threat appraisal is relevant for the choice of coping strategy. Congruent with these findings, Dias et al. (2012) proposed that threat appraisal elicited rather emotion-focused coping instead of problem-focused coping. In contrast, experiencing lower levels of threat appraisal led to more problem-focused coping. They examined these findings in a sports setting. The goal is to explore the assumption that the higher the level of threat appraisal the more you need to firstly

regulate your emotional distress and engage in emotion-focused coping. On the contrary, if you do not appraise something as threatening you can fully concentrate on solving the problem at hand. To see if previous findings are translational to entrepreneurial settings, threat appraisal holds as the predictor variable for coping mechanisms in this study. In order to make entrepreneurs appraise something as threatening, a negative work event is implemented as a stressor. Based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987), the following hypothesis has been derived (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 1. Threat appraisal of an adverse work event is (a) positively related to entrepreneurs' emotion-focused coping, and (b) negatively related to problem-focused coping.

Gender Differences In Entrepreneurship And Coping

A research gap in work / organizational psychology is found to be gender differences in entrepreneurial settings. However, some findings showed that occupational stress, in general, is perceived differently by males and females (Chadwick & Raver, 2019). Female entrepreneurs are more exposed to stress in relation to role conflict and work overload which made them appraise these domains as more stressful than males did (Kariv, 2008). As compensation, findings by Ljunggren and Kolvereid (1996) and Kariv (2008) illustrated that females engaged in and appreciated social support, coined as emotion-focused coping, to balance out their stressful entrepreneurial activities. Contrary to entrepreneurial men, who to a large extent did not perceive social support as compensation for work stress. These findings supported the notion that women, in general, engaged in more emotion-focused coping like seeking social network support to recharge when facing a stressful experience.

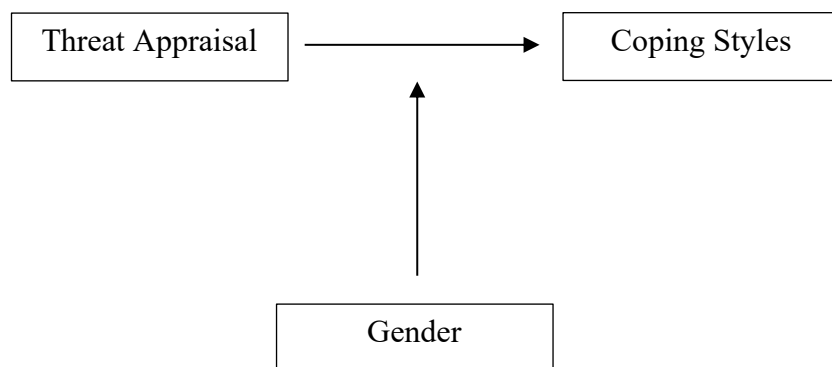
Interestingly, Ptacek et al. (1994) showed that when exposed to the same stressor, females and males had similar ways of appraising it but differed in the way of coping with it. They investigated this hypothesis in an academic-related setting by exposing males and females to an identical achievement-related stressor. Both males and females had similar

pulse rates and evaluated the lecture as equally stressful but were still distinct in coping styles. Women engaged in more emotional-focused coping with high rates in seeking social support. Whereas, males used problem-focused coping to a greater extent to overcome the stressful event. To see how gender differences in the entrepreneurial setting affect the main effect of threat appraisal of an adverse work event on coping styles (H1), gender is being used as a moderator (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 2. The link between threat appraisal and (a) emotion-focused coping is stronger among female entrepreneurs compared to male entrepreneurs, and (b) problem-focused coping is stronger among male entrepreneurs compared to female entrepreneurs.

Figure 1

Effect of Threat Appraisal on Coping Styles, moderated by Gender



Note. The figure is based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) in which threat appraisal predicts coping styles. Gender is added in this study as a moderator to expand research.

Method

Sample And Procedure

A cross-sectional study using a sample of entrepreneurs was conducted. This observational online field study was undertaken by students from the University of Groningen who took part in this Bachelor Thesis project. The sample was extended and reused by

previous Bachelor Thesis groups over the last years. Participants were recruited through spreading the online questionnaire among Bachelor Thesis student's acquaintances, social media accounts and incubation centers, making it an entrepreneur's convenience sample. Additionally, entrepreneurs who participated in an on-site training course about entrepreneurship at the University of Kashipur, India, were approached by one of the project collaborators and asked to participate in the research.

Originally, 204 entrepreneurs filled in the study but 68 of them were excluded because they did not experience a negative work event which is one of the primary requirements for the hypotheses. The final sample consisted of 136 entrepreneurs, 96 of them were male, 36 female, one indicated non-binary and three did not indicate their gender. Their ages ranged from 19 to 67 years.

Measures

Threat Appraisal

The independent variable threat appraisal combines three items to create a composite score for the analysis. The three items reflect threat appraisal by dealing with the evaluation of the entrepreneur's growth and well-being, goal-achievement and accomplishment in relation to the negative work event. The scale author for threat appraisal was LePine et al. (2016). To capture entrepreneurs' threat appraisal responses, a 5-Point Likert Scale (strongly disagree - strongly agree) was implemented for all three items. For example, "I feel that the event makes it harder to achieve my goals." was one of the items measuring threat appraisal that entrepreneurs had to evaluate. Cronbach's Alpha for all three items was .83.

Problem-Focused Coping

The first outcome variable put in relation to threat appraisal was problem-focused coping which had two items of each of the three coping styles (planning, active coping and instrumental support), in total six items. A composite score was formed out of the coping style

items for the analysis. The scale author for the problem-focused coping items was retrieved by Carver (1997). The responses were recorded on a 4-Point Likert Scale (not at all, a little, a moderate amount, a lot) including four options without a neutral choice. All the coping style items were formulated like a statement which entrepreneurs had to evaluate, for instance “I’ve been taking action to try to make the situation better.”, related to using active coping which was part of problem-focused coping. Cronbach’s Alpha for all six items was .81.

Emotion-Focused Coping

The second outcome variable put in relation to threat appraisal was emotion-focused coping which also had two items of each of the nine coping styles (self-blame, behavioral disengagement, venting, denial, self-distraction, using emotional support, humor, acceptance and positive reframing), in total eighteen items. A composite score was formed out of the coping style items for the later analysis. The scale author for the emotion-focused coping items was retrieved by Carver (1997). The responses were recorded on a 4-Point Likert Scale (not at all, a little, a moderate amount, a lot) including four options without a neutral choice. Also, in this case, the coping style items were formulated like a statement which was asked to be evaluated, for instance “I’ve been getting comfort and understanding from someone.”, related to using emotional support which was part of emotion-focused coping. Here, Cronbach’s Alpha was .73.

Gender

As a moderation variable, gender has been implemented. In the questionnaire, participants indicated their gender by ticking the box: male, female or otherwise identified. The decision was made that “otherwise identified” people are not included into the moderation analysis as only one person indicated this gender option and therefore the effect size would have been too little to record. Therefore, the final moderation analysis was conducted with males and females (coded: 0=male, 1=female).

Control Variables

In order to rule out possible confounders in the regression analyses, two variables that could have influenced the direct effects between threat appraisal and coping mechanisms were controlled for. Firstly, “age” because work experiences come with age and can influence the way of coping with economic stress (Rook et al., 1991). Secondly, “involvement in foundation of business” because self-employed founders tended to cope by confronting the problem, whereas, employees tended to rather avoid the problem making the two groups cope differently (Oren, 2011).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28) predictive analytics software. Two linear regression analyses were computed to check for the direct effects. One between threat appraisal and the outcome variable problem-focused coping and the other between threat appraisal and the outcome variable emotion-focused coping. In addition, control variables were included in the regression analyses.

As a next step, the moderator “gender” was dummy coded and an interaction term between the independent variable threat appraisal and gender was established to conduct moderation analyses for the two main effects.

Results

Preliminary Results

Assumption checks were implemented for the regression analysis of the two direct effects. The residuals of both direct effects were normally distributed which is depicted by histograms of standardized residuals (see Appendix, Figure A1+A2) and Cumulative Probability Plots of Residuals (P-P Plots) (see Appendix, Figure A3+A4). Also, homoscedasticity was checked for and in both regression analyses the variance of the

dependent variables is the same for all the data (see Appendix, Figure A5+A6). Moreover, Q-Q plots were established and showed that the data needed for the regression analysis was normally distributed for all variables (see Appendix, Figure A7+A8+A9).

To get an overview of the data output, pair-wise correlations and descriptive statistics were conducted for all relevant variables: threat appraisal (independent variable), problem-focused coping (dependent variable), emotion-focused coping (dependent variable) and gender (moderator) (see Table 1). All pair-wise correlations were significant.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	N	1	2
1. Threat Appraisal	8.5	3.7	132		
2. Problem-Focused Coping	17.8	4.0	134	.32**	
3. Emotion-Focused Coping	37.5	7.0	133	.27**	.24**
4. Gender	1.3	0.5	133		

Note. M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

**Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 proposed that threat appraisal of an adverse work event is (a) positively related to entrepreneurs' emotion-focused coping, and (b) negatively related to problem-focused coping. The hypothesis was supported for part (a) but not for part (b). The linear regression model for part (a) is significant and results of the analysis indicated that predictor threat appraisal explained about 6% of the variance in emotion-focused coping ($R_{adj}^2 = .06$, $F(1,131) = 9.80$, $p = .002$) (see Table 2). It was found that threat appraisal significantly predicted emotion-focused coping ($B = .50$, $p = .002$) (see Table 3). Therefore, part (a) is consistent with the hypothesis.

The results of the regression analysis for part (b) showed that the linear regression model is significant and the same predictor threat appraisal explains 10% of the variance in

problem-focused coping ($R_{adj}^2 = .10$, $F(1,131) = 15.22$, $p < .001$) (see Table 4). Threat appraisal significantly predicted problem-focused coping ($B = .36$, $p < .001$) (see Table 5). Contrary to the hypothesis, threat appraisal is positively related to problem-focused coping. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is only partially confirmed.

The results did not change with control variables added (see Appendix, Table A1+A2). However, one significant result was found. When controlling for involvement in foundation of business, while conducting the regression analysis between independent variable threat appraisal and outcome variable emotion-focused coping, involvement in foundation of business shows a significant effect ($B = 3.94$, $p = .039$) (see Appendix, Table A2). It can be concluded that involvement in foundation of business has a significant effect on emotion-focused coping.

Table 2

Regression Model Summary for Threat Appraisal predicting Emotion-Focused Coping

Model	Goodness-of-fit			Model Significance		
	<i>R</i>	R^2	R_{adj}^2	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1	.27	.07	.06	1,131	9.80	.002

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Emotion-Focused Coping. R_{adj}^2 represents adjusted R-squared. Degrees of Freedom (*df*) represents Regression (*df*) and Total (*df*), respectively.

Table 3

Regression Coefficient Analysis for Threat Appraisal predicting Emotion-Focused Coping

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95.0% Confidence Interval for <i>B</i>	
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	<i>beta</i>			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	33.27	1.49		22.37	<.001	30.32	36.21
Threat Appraisal	.50	.16	.27	3.13	.002	.19	.82

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Emotion-Focused Coping.

Table 4

Regression Model Summary for Threat Appraisal predicting Problem-Focused Coping

Model	Goodness-of-fit			Model Significance		
	<i>R</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1	.32	.11	.10	1,131	15.22	<.001

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Problem-Focused Coping. R^2_{adj} represents adjusted R-squared. Degrees of Freedom (*df*) represents Regression (*df*) and Total (*df*), respectively.

Table 5

Regression Coefficient Analysis for Threat Appraisal predicting Problem-Focused Coping

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95.0% Confidence Interval for <i>B</i>	
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	<i>beta</i>			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	14.83	.85		17.44	<.001	13.15	16.51
Threat Appraisal	.36	.09	.32	3.90	<.001	.18	.54

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Problem-Focused Coping.

Hypothesis 2

According to Hypothesis 2, the link between threat appraisal and (a) emotion-focused coping is stronger among female entrepreneurs compared to male entrepreneurs, and (b) problem-focused coping is stronger among male entrepreneurs compared to female entrepreneurs. Two moderation analyses were performed for part (a) and (b) with outcome variables emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping, respectively. The predictor variable for both analyses was threat appraisal. The moderator variable evaluated for both moderation analyses was gender (female, male).

The first moderation analysis with dependent variable emotion-focused coping indicated a collective significant effect between threat appraisal, gender, interaction and emotion-focused coping ($R^2_{adj} = .08$, $F(3,128) = 4.80$, $p = .003$) (see Table 6). However, the

interaction between independent variable threat appraisal and moderator gender was found to not be statistically significant ($B = .58, p = .110$) (see Table 7).

These findings go in line with the second moderation analysis with dependent variable problem-focused coping. Results showed a collective significant effect between threat appraisal, gender, interaction and problem-focused coping ($R^2_{adj} = .09, F(3,128) = 4.98, p = .003$) (see Table 8). Here, the interaction between independent variable threat appraisal and moderator gender was also found to not be statistically significant ($B = -.09, p = .676$) (Table 9).

It can be concluded that in both moderation analyses, gender does not serve as a moderating effect between threat appraisal and problem-focused coping as well as threat appraisal and emotion-focused coping. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 6

Moderation Model Summary for Threat Appraisal predicting Emotion-Focused Coping

Model	Goodness-of-fit			Model Significance		
	<i>R</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1	.32	.10	.08	3,128	4.80	.003

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Emotion-Focused Coping; Moderator: Gender; Interaction Variable: Threat Appraisal and Gender. R^2_{adj} represents adjusted R-squared. Degrees of Freedom (*df*) represents Regression (*df*) and Total (*df*), respectively.

Table 7

Moderation Coefficient Analysis for Threat Appraisal predicting Emotion-Focused Coping

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	<i>beta</i>		
Constant	36.97	.67		55.58	<.001
Threat Appraisal	.36	.18	.20	2.00	.048
Moderator	-2.844	3.17	-.19	-.90	.371
Interaction	.58	.36	.35	1.61	.110

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Emotion-Focused Coping; Moderator: Gender; Interaction Variable: Threat Appraisal and Gender.

Table 8

Moderation Model Summary for Threat Appraisal predicting Problem-Focused Coping

Model	Goodness-of-fit			Model Significance		
	<i>R</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1	.33	.11	.09	3,128	4.98	.003

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Problem-Focused Coping; Moderator: Gender; Interaction Variable: Threat Appraisal and Gender. R^2_{adj} represents adjusted R-squared. Degrees of Freedom (*df*) represents Regression (*df*) and Total (*df*), respectively.

Table 9

Moderation Coefficient Analysis for Threat Appraisal predicting Problem-Focused Coping

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	<i>beta</i>		
Constant	18.04	.40		44.65	<.001
Threat Appraisal	.37	.11	.33	3.37	.001
Moderation	.08	1.92	.01	.04	.966
Interaction	-.09	.22	-.09	-.42	.676

Note. Predictor: Threat Appraisal; Dependent Variable: Problem-Focused Coping; Moderator: Gender; Interaction Variable: Threat Appraisal and Gender.

Exploratory Analysis

Problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping are coping styles that consist out of a homogeneous set of coping strategies, e.g. planning, venting or humor. For the main analyses, composite scores out of the various coping strategies were formed to create the two coping styles. However, it is also worth looking at each single coping strategy as they differ highly in their intentions, mood and strategies (Stanislawski, 2019). Each coping strategy contributes a different strength to the related coping style and should therefore as well be taken into account as its own entity. To get a closer insight into each coping strategy, the regression analyses were conducted again with the independent variable threat appraisal but this time without the composite scores. Instead, each coping strategy served as a separate outcome variable to compare the strength that threat appraisal had on each one of them. Half

of the coping strategies that were implemented were not significantly related to threat appraisal (positive reframing, acceptance, humor, emotional support, distraction, blame) (see Appendix, Table A3). All of them belong to the emotion-focused coping style. The other half of the coping strategies were significantly positively related to threat appraisal. Threat appraisal had the strongest positive relation with venting ($B = .14, p < .001$), followed by active coping ($B = .13, p < .001$), instrumental support ($B = .12, p = .009$), planning ($B = .11, p = .007$), behavioral disengagement ($B = .07, p = .049$) and lastly, denial ($B = .06, p = .038$) (see Appendix, Table A3). These include all of the problem-focused coping strategies and some of the emotion-focused coping strategies that were used in the analyses.

Discussion

Based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987), the purpose of the study was to explore the influence that threat appraisal of an adverse work event had on two different coping styles, namely problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, within the entrepreneurial setting. It has been predicted that threat appraisal is (a) positively related to emotion-focused coping and (b) negatively related to problem-focused coping. The results showed that this hypothesis could only be partially confirmed. Threat appraisal is indeed positively related to emotion-focused coping, meaning that entrepreneurs with higher levels of threat appraisal of an adverse work event engaged in more emotion-focused coping strategies. However, results showed that threat appraisal is also positively related to problem-focused coping, hence entrepreneurs with higher levels of threat appraisal of an adverse work event also engaged in more problem-focused coping strategies. Put simple, the higher entrepreneur's threat appraisal, the more they engaged in coping strategies.

As a second hypothesis, this study examined if there is a given gender difference in relation to the first hypothesis. Hence, if the link between threat appraisal and (a) emotion-

focused coping is stronger among female entrepreneurs compared to male entrepreneurs, and (b) problem-focused coping is stronger among male entrepreneurs compared to female entrepreneurs. Analyzing the results, it became clear that there is no statistical evidence for this hypothesis and therefore, it has been concluded that gender did not influence the two main effects of threat appraisal on coping styles.

A negative work event can automatically elicit negative emotions like worry, anger or fear leading up to a cognitive threat appraisal of the situation (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987). According to the level of threat appraisal, entrepreneurs engaged in coping styles to deal with and overcome the negative work event. As hypothesized, findings implied that entrepreneurs engaged in emotion-focused coping when they appraised a negative work event as threatening. If entrepreneurs feel threatened, it is useful to engage in emotion-focused coping strategies to regulate their emotions in order to function effectively and adjust their threat level back to normal. Patzelt and Shepherd (2011) pointed out that especially in the self-employment setting, where social isolation due to long working hours and home offices are often the case, emotion-focused coping was effective to overcome feelings of loneliness which could lead to even more negative emotions. The more self-employed people engaged in these emotion-focused coping strategies, the more they eventually met their emotional needs and gained emotional stability to resist future stressors (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). These findings go along with a sports study by Dias et al. (2012) which established a relationship between threat appraisal and emotion-focused coping among athletes. Emotion-focused coping was assessed by asking athletes through a questionnaire how they dealt with stressful situations concerning their sports careers. The questionnaire was based on the "Brief COPE" assessment by Carver (1997). This illustrated that in various life domains where performance and self-expectations are demanded, researchers confirmed a relation between threat appraisal

and emotion-focused coping. This research also confirmed it within the entrepreneurial domain.

However, these findings revealed that entrepreneurs' threat appraisal is not only positively related to emotion-focused coping but also to problem-focused coping. Self-employed who successfully used problem-focused coping strategies believed that they managed the workload associated with self-employment (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Singh et al. (2007) stressed that entrepreneurs especially used problem-focused coping strategies when they appraised economic-related aspects as possible failures which are considered threatening. Dealing with financial problems almost forced them to engage in problem-focused coping strategies as they saw their responsibility to not lose their venture. This implies that high levels of threat appraisals drive entrepreneurs to act accordingly to eliminate the problem at hand.

Entrepreneurs engaged in more coping in general despite the type of coping style when evaluating a business situation as threatening. This insight has already been examined by previous studies. One cannot draw a clear distinction between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping when evaluating threatening events because threat appraisal is linked to a broad set of coping strategies (Carver & Scheier, 1994). Relating this assumption to the business environment, Thompson et al. (2020) pointed out that self-employed engaged in both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles when being threatened by general business affairs. Stanislawski (2019) added that most coping strategies served both, a problem- and emotion-focused function. For example, if you gained emotional support from a friend who at the same time is an expert in your work field, it's emotion-focused and problem-focused benefitting. This gives rise to the notion that entrepreneurs engage in both coping styles because they are effective and useful for different aspects of entrepreneurship. In the entrepreneurial environment, anxiety and threat are ultimately associated with the potential

failing of the own business or future goals. Therefore, especially entrepreneurs were capable and needed to handle threatening and anxious work events by adapting to various forms of emotion- and problem-focused coping strategies in order to lead a successful venture (Thompson et al., 2020).

As the results showed, gender differences have no influence on the main effects of threat appraisal on coping styles found in the entrepreneurial setting. This assumption goes against the stated hypothesis. Although, previous research amplified the notion that men and women did differ in their way of coping with stressful life events (Ptacek et al., 1994) and especially female entrepreneurs engage in more social support, which belongs to emotion-focused coping (Kariv, 2008).

According to Cohoon et al. (2010) in general there were little to no gender differences among today's entrepreneurs. Female and male entrepreneurs shared very similar motivations, have similar access to funding and both genders agreed on goals and challenges that come along with being an entrepreneur (Cohoon et al., 2010). Previous research also suggested that female and male entrepreneurs shared homogenous characteristics as being very high in need for achievement, high levels of frustration tolerance and flexibility (Harris et al., 1999). This allows assuming that nowadays, the stereotypical entrepreneur needs to have certain traits and coping mechanisms to manage a successful venture that go beyond gender categorization and are rather gender-neutral. These general similarities between male and female entrepreneurs might also be translatable to modern entrepreneurs' threat appraisal and coping strategies, although there is no further evidence found. One has to mention that women entrepreneurial research put in comparison with male entrepreneurial activity is understudied (Brush, 2009). This brings about that further evidence for gender differences on threat appraisal, coping and in general in the entrepreneurial setting has to be investigated in the future.

Exploratory Analysis

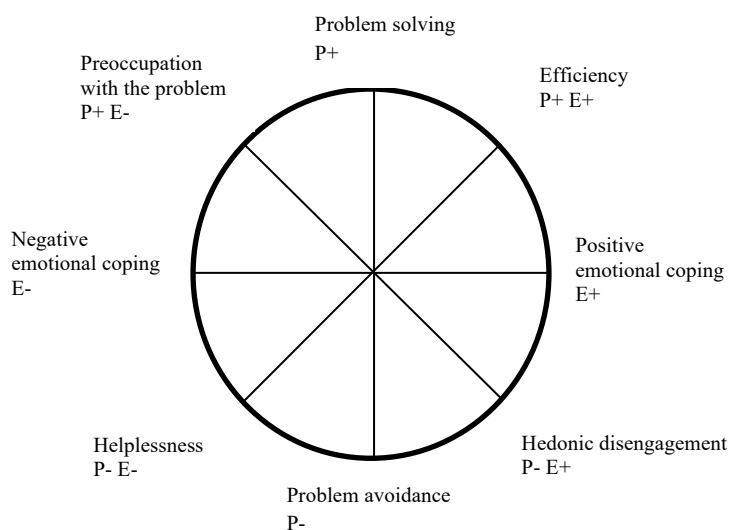
In 1989, Carver et al. (1989) released one of the first research papers on a clear categorization of coping strategies. They were categorized into either problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping or rather less useful coping. Thirty years later, Stanisławski (2019) published a new approach on coping processes namely “The Coping Circumplex Model” (see Figure 2). He pointed out that there should not be a strict partition between emotion- and problem-focused coping as each single coping strategy could entail parts of both coping characteristics. Moreover, each coping strategy served as its own entity with different functions, effectiveness and moods. Therefore, the Coping Circumplex Model included spectrums of problem-focused coping (problem-avoidance - problem-solving) and emotion-focused coping (negative emotional coping - positive emotional coping) where each strategy can be listed. In addition, more scales are implemented to represent further possible functions of coping strategies.

Relating this new insight to the results found in this research study, it is no surprise that although problem- and emotion-focused coping styles as a whole were both significant, the single coping strategies differed in significance, showing the diversity of coping processes. Within the problem-focused coping domain, all coping strategies (active coping, planning, instrumental support) were significant in relation to independent variable threat appraisal. This implies that entrepreneurs rely on problem-focused coping strategies when being threatened. Within the emotion-focused domain, only three out of nine coping strategies were significant when tested as outcome variables alone (venting, denial, behavioral disengagement) with independent variable threat appraisal. This showed that entrepreneurs did engage in emotion-focused coping strategies as the hypothesis predicted but certainly not in all of them that were presented. Entrepreneurs used both coping styles but highly varied in the use of the single coping strategies. In this sample, entrepreneurs used the emotion-focused

coping strategy venting the most, followed by all three types of problem-focused coping strategies. Interestingly, this exact outcome was already found by Čigarská & Birknerová, (2021) in their study with Slovak Republic entrepreneurs. This implies that entrepreneurs follow a similar pattern of coping strategies which can be detected across different nations. As next research steps, it would be of interest to investigate why especially venting is used the most among entrepreneurs even if it is known to be rather dysfunctional. Moreover, further research could combine the Coping Circumplex Model with this research and see where each coping strategy would be located on the spectrums to analyze entrepreneurs' coping mechanisms even more detailed.

Figure 2

The Coping Circumplex Model



Note. This model by Stanisławski (2019), p.7 shows the spectrums of problem- and emotion-focused coping.

Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical lens for the research study is the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987). The theory was one of the first theoretical frameworks for how people cope and is cited in various studies relating to coping processes.

Part of the theory explained that threat appraisal of a particularly stressful situation could elicit a coping response. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) differentiated between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Firstly, this research study supported the theory's assumption that threat appraisal of a stressful event influenced the coping style. The theory itself is addressed to the general public. However, this study advances the theory by translating it to an entrepreneurial setting and drawing attention to entrepreneurs' ways of coping with adverse work events.

Moreover, this research not only provides evidence for the relationship between threat appraisal and coping but also sheds light on which coping styles are used at what threat appraisal levels. Namely, higher levels of threat appraisal elicit more coping. So far, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping did not look at gender differences. What can be concluded is that within an entrepreneurial environment the main effect between threat appraisal and coping styles is gender-neutral. Meaning that this research study contributes to the notion that both male and female entrepreneurs engage in problem- and emotion-focused coping when feeling threatened by an adverse work event.

Practical Implications

Looking at practical manners, these research findings especially serve ongoing entrepreneurs or someone who wants to become an entrepreneur in the future. By realizing how adverse work events can elicit threat appraisal in entrepreneurs, they can become more aware of themselves and their daily approach to tackle stressful situations in their workspace. By distinguishing between problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies, entrepreneurs can decide for themselves which coping strategies they prefer to engage in to regulate their emotions and lastly eliminate the problem at hand. The findings showed that high levels of threat appraisal of an adverse work event elicited coping styles in entrepreneurs who showed them that they have a strong will to overcome the issue. At this

point, it would be effective to create a type of coping manual for entrepreneurs in order to give them an overview of which coping strategies are possible and guide them a way how to cope best in their individual manner to perform efficiently and create a good work-life balance. In terms of gender differences, it is of interest to point out that male and female entrepreneurs did not significantly differ in the way they appraised and coped with negative work events. This hints at the notion that there does not necessarily need to be any differentiation when it comes to gender-related decisions among entrepreneurial activity. This can give entrepreneurs a sense of unity and they can shift their minds away from gender roles as they primarily act as entrepreneurs and not as males or females per se.

Limitations And Future Research

To begin with, several methodological issues deserve mention. Firstly, the sample itself was a convenient sample, implying that no random sampling was conducted making the sample less internal reliable. Entrepreneurs are a specific sub-group which makes it not easy to recruit a large number of participants with the given university circumstances. Therefore, the sample size could have been larger to improve the power analysis. However, 136 participants are enough to draw statistical conclusions about the sample. Furthermore, some literature was applied from organizational-derived studies including employee samples on to the entrepreneurship domain because certain implications were not investigated among entrepreneurs yet. Coming on to temporal conditions, this study implemented a cross-sectional design with exactly one timepoint measuring the main effect between threat appraisal and coping styles. It did state that there is an evident relation between appraising some problem as threatening and therefore coping accordingly. However, this design did not show the long-term effects of coping. It was not investigated how people coped with the adverse work event after some more time passed. Possibly, then even a gender difference could have been detected of how males and females coped in the long run. The next steps

could be to analyze the same effect but this time with a longitudinal design with two or even three time points to see changing effects of coping. Moreover, participants had to report an adverse work event that happened over the course of the last week. When data are retrieved sometime after the stressful event has occurred, possible confounds in the perception of appraisal and even in coping could arise. Meaning that entrepreneurs may retrospectively appraise the event as more or less threatening and report using relatively more coping strategies which is bias for the analyses of coping processes. Possible solutions could be to develop an experiment in which entrepreneurs are exposed to the same stressor and appraise them right after to cope in their own manners. Moreover, the study does not give away how effective problem- or emotion-focused coping really was for entrepreneurial success. It did show that a coping response in entrepreneurs takes place which is important but this study did not analyze how coping effects further desirable outcomes like increasing productivity, work satisfaction or well-being which are important goals of a successful career. Future studies could definitely connect these variables to broaden entrepreneurial research.

In general, future research needs to take the entrepreneurial setting more into account, to give entrepreneurs and the general public the chance to understand their ways of working and coping with recurrent negative work events. Getting a better understanding of this would make the career field as an entrepreneur more attractive for future generations. Time has come to dive deeper into what self-regulatory functions are implicit in entrepreneurs coping efforts. It should be of use to probe specific relations of coping like further antecedents that may be important. For example, next to threat appraisal, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping defines two more appraisals, namely harm appraisal and challenge appraisal. For an entrepreneur, these could be of great interest as well, to get a more detailed understanding of their evaluation of stressful events and how to cope with them. The next research steps could

analyze which specific coping strategies fit which entrepreneur individually, to simplify their ways of coping to work effectively.

Research on gender differences in coping and in the entrepreneurial environment is outdated and not widely spread. Further empirical research on possible gender differences in the entrepreneurial setting could be replicated with similar controlled studies involving different experimental situations that include a wider range of coping responses. Looking more into these domains can clarify possible misconceptions about gender roles and form new and modern perspectives about gender equality within the occupational environment which can have an economic benefit for women in the long run.

Conclusion

Together with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987), this study showed that the relationship between threat appraisal and coping styles plays a major role in the career development of entrepreneurs as the more stressful they appraised a situation, the more both genders engaged in problem- and emotion-focused coping to overcome it. This cognitive-behavioral approach of threat appraisal and coping is crucial for an entrepreneur's personal well-being to evaluate possible stressful events and not drown in stress and overburdening when building up a successful business.

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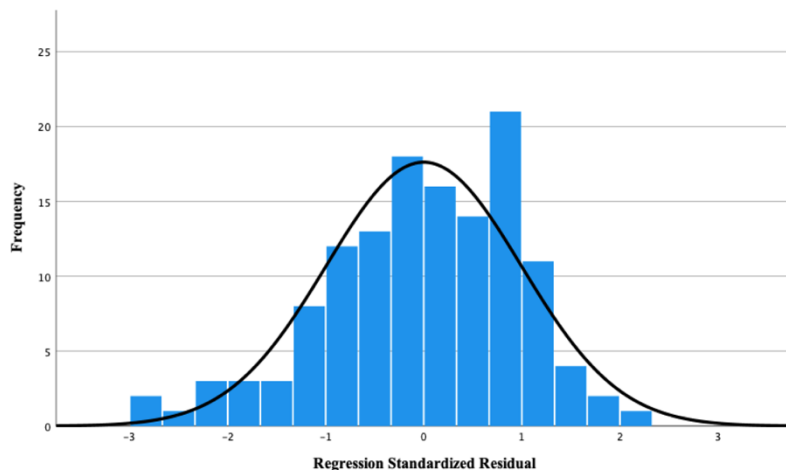
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Appendix A

Figure A1

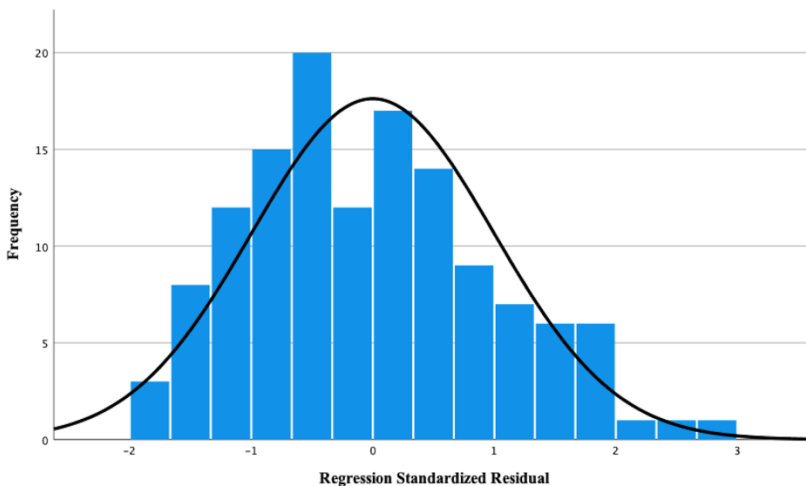
Histogram of Standardized Residuals for Threat Appraisal on Problem-Focused Coping



Note. The histogram of standardized residuals represents a normal distribution as it looks bell-shaped and symmetrical.

Figure A2

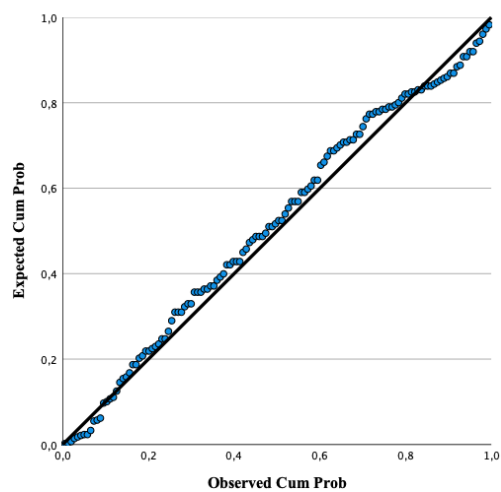
Histogram of Standardized Residuals for Threat Appraisal on Emotion-Focused Coping



Note. The histogram of standardized residuals represents a normal distribution as it looks bell-shaped and symmetrical.

Figure A3

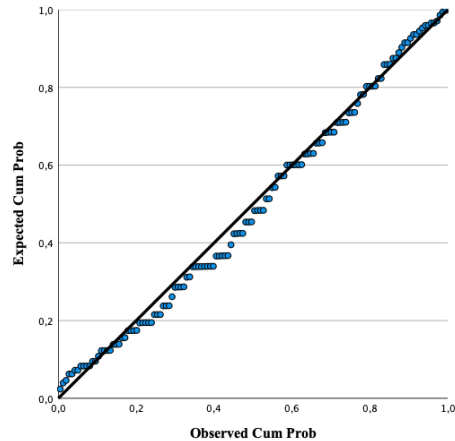
P-P Plot of Threat Appraisal predicting Problem-Focused Coping



Note. The scatter of the standardized residuals falls tightly to the normally distributed line indicating a normal distribution of residuals.

Figure A4

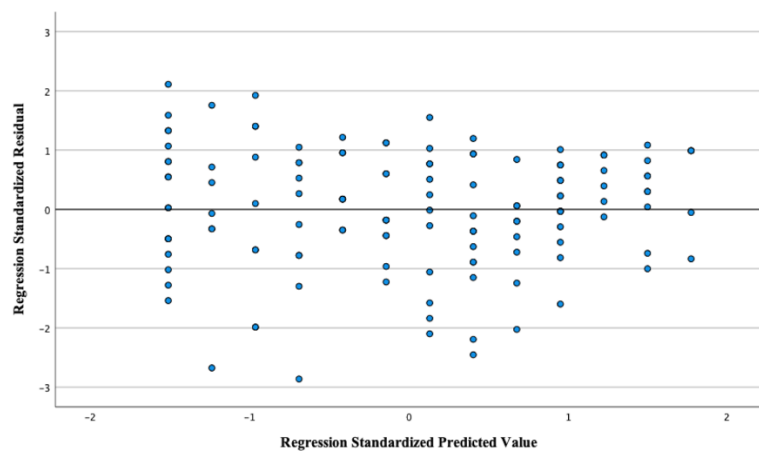
P-P Plot of Threat Appraisal predicting Emotion-Focused Coping



Note. The scatter of the standardized residuals falls tightly to the normally distributed line indicating a normal distribution of residuals.

Figure A5

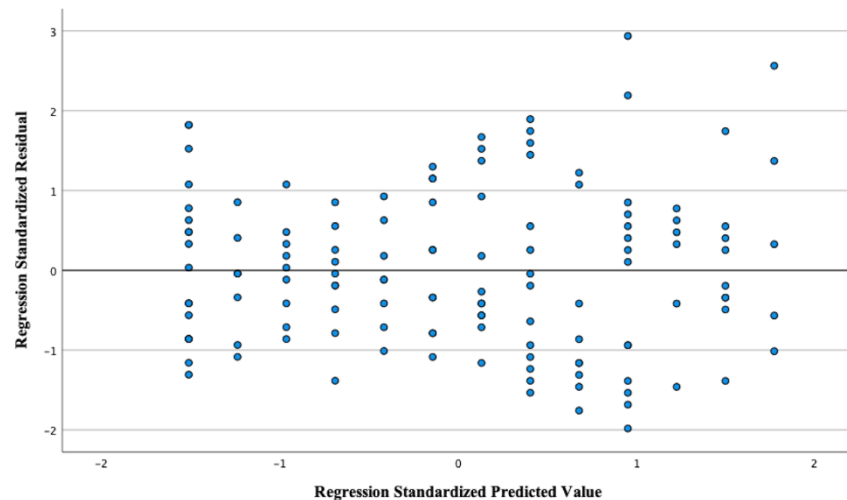
Residual Scatterplot of Dependent Variable Problem-Focused Coping



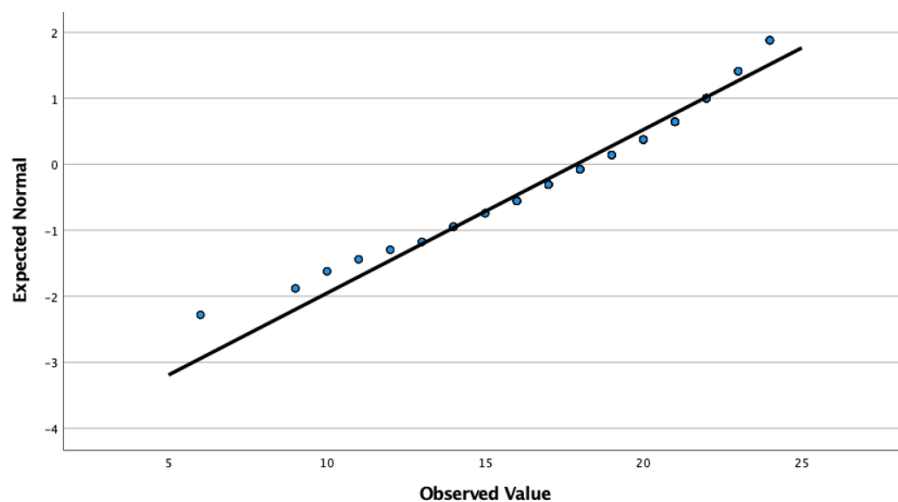
Note. Homoscedasticity is met at the points in the residual plot that are randomly scattered around the centered line.

Figure A6

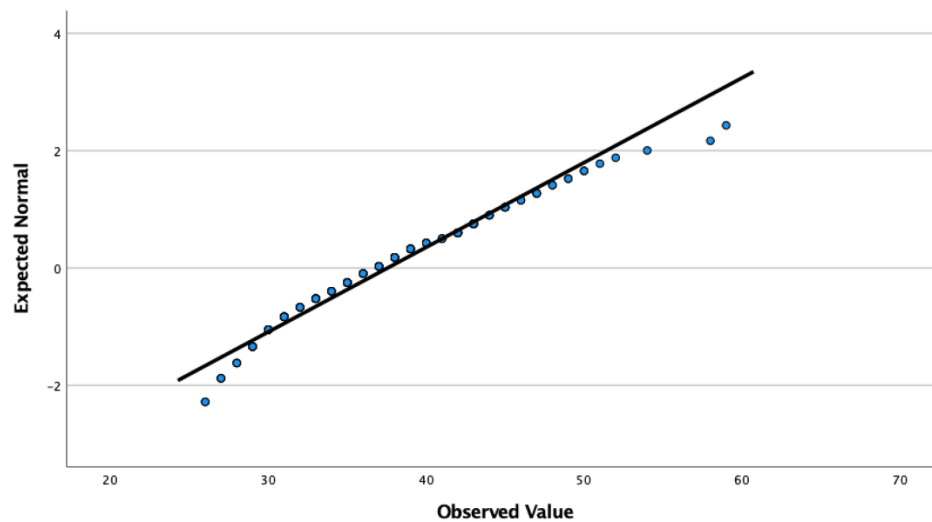
Scatterplot of Dependent Variable Emotion-Focused Coping



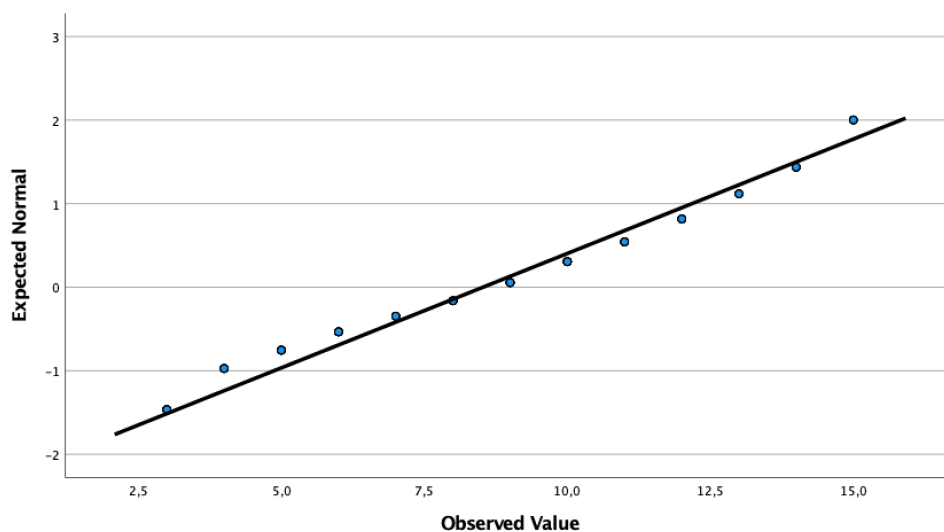
Note. Homoscedasticity is met at the points in the residual plot that are randomly scattered around the centered line.

Figure A7*Q-Q Plot for Variable Problem-Focused Coping*

Note. The Q-Q Plot shows that the variable problem-focused coping is normally distributed, indicating a straight light.

Figure A8*Q-Q Plot for Variable Emotion-Focused Coping*

Note. The Q-Q Plot shows that the variable emotion-focused coping is normally distributed, indicating a straight light.

Figure A9*Q-Q Plot for Variable Threat Appraisal*

Note. The Q-Q Plot shows that the variable threat appraisal is normally distributed, indicating a straight line.

Table A1*Regression Analysis for Control Variables on Problem-focused Coping*

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	15.36	1.62		9.49	<.001
Threat Appraisal	.36	.10	.32	3.81	<.001
Age	.04	.03	.12	1.38	.171
Involvement in Foundation of Business	-1.04	1.14	-.08	-	.603
				9.14	

Note. Control Variables: Age; Involvement in Foundation of Business.

Table A2*Regression Analysis for Control Variables on Emotion-focused Coping*

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	28.65	2.69		10.64	<.001
Threat Appraisal	.48	.15	.26	3.10	.002
Age	.03	.05	.04	.51	.607
Involvement in Foundation of Business	3.94	1.89	.18	2.09	.039

Note. Control Variables: Age; Involvement in Foundation of Business.

Table A3*Regression Analyses for Threat Appraisal predicting Coping Strategies*

Model (DV)	Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
		<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta		
Positive Reframing	Constant	5.50	.40		13.85	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.02	.04	.04	.42	.673
Acceptance	Constant	6.08	.35		17.28	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.00	.04	.00	.05	.962
Humor	Constant	3.86	.38		10.11	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	-.05	.4	-.10	-1.15	.254
Emotional Support	Constant	4.40	.41		10.65	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.09	.06	.16	1.90	.060
Distraction	Constant	3.91	.40		9.73	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.06	.04	.12	1.40	.164
Blame	Constant	2.70	2.17		1.25	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.01	.28	.03	.05	.964
Venting	Constant	2.50	.27		9.22	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.14	.03	.38	4.67	<.001
Active Coping	Constant	5.31	.33		16.17	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.13	.04	.31	3.75	<.001
Instrumental Support	Constant	4.13	.41		10.13	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.012	.04	.23	2.63	.009
Planning	Constant	5.38	.37		14.56	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.11	.04	.23	2.73	.007
Behavioral Disengagement	Constant	2.34	.32		7.28	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.07	.04	.17	1.99	.049
Denial	Constant	2.13	.26		8.30	<.001
	Threat Appraisal	.06	.03	.18	2.10	.038

Note. The table shows 12 different regression analyses with independent variable Threat Appraisal and dependent variables (DV) of coping strategies.