Assessing Avoidant Personality Disorder Using the Five-Factor Model

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Background
• Several researchers have suggested that personality disorders (PDs) might be best understood by reference to general models of personality functioning.
• While a pre-existing measure of general personality based on the FFM exists (the NEO PI-R), it was designed to measure a normal-range of personality traits unlike those which characterize PDs.
• We created an assessment of Avoidant Personality Disorder, the Elements of Avoidant Personality Disorder (EAP), intended to measure more extreme, maladaptive manifestations of personality trait elements from the FFM.
• A large sample of undergraduates was used to perform final item selection and to examine the relations between the new EAP scales and several extant AVD scales.

Method

Participants:
• 319 undergraduate introductory psychology students from Purdue University

Materials:
• NEO PI-R: self-report questionnaire assessing the FFM’s general personality dimensions across its five broad domains which are each broken down by six underlying facets.
• SCID-II & PDQI-IV: self-report questionnaires which assess Axis II Personality Disorders
• Social Phobia & Social Interaction Anxiety Scales: self-report questionnaires assessing aspects of social anxiety and fear
• Elements of Avoidant Personality Disorder: our new self-report questionnaire created to assess AVD appropriate to the FFM

Scale Development:
• Three methods were used to identify the basic personality trait elements (according to the facets of the FFM) of AVD most characteristic of the disorder.
  • Expert consensus: we referenced ratings experts in each of the 10 DSM-IV PDs provided of the prototypic case based on the 30 facets of the FFM (Lynam & Widiger, 2001).
  • Criteria-translation: translations of the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria as maladaptive extremes of the 30 facets of the FFM were referenced (Widiger, Trull, Clarkin, Sanderson, & Costa, 2002).
  • Empirical correlations: a meta-analytic review of facet-level analyses of PDs in which relationships were analyzed between PDs and the facets of the FFM was referenced (Samuel & Widiger, 2008).

• Together, the facets determined to be central to AVD according to any three of the above methods were anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, gregariousness, excitement seeking, positive emotions, openness to action, and modesty.

• Next, we wrote the items for our scale by referencing pre-existing AVD measures and understanding how basic AVD trait elements are exhibited in dysfunctional thoughts and behavior.

• We focused on writing items that were extreme variants of these maladaptive personality traits.
  • For example, an item for the Anxiety facet of Neuroticism from the NEO PI-R is, “I am not a worrier” (reverse-scored). We created a more maladaptive variant specific to the facet of Anxiety manifested in AVD: “I live in almost constant fear of making a mistake.”

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEO PI-R Facet</th>
<th>EAP Scale</th>
<th>IIC Range</th>
<th>Mean IIC</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Evaluation Apprehension</td>
<td>.24 to .50</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>.27 to .49</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Consciousness</td>
<td>Mortified</td>
<td>.20 to .48</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsiveness</td>
<td>Impulse Suppression</td>
<td>.15 to .58</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>Overcome</td>
<td>.19 to .48</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregariousness</td>
<td>Social Dread</td>
<td>.25 to .50</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Shriveling</td>
<td>.18 to .46</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement Seeking</td>
<td>Risk Averse</td>
<td>.21 to .48</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>Anhedonia</td>
<td>.29 to .48</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Rigidity</td>
<td>.05 to .34</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Timorous</td>
<td>.14 to .45</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• IIC refers to inter-item correlation
• Alphas range from .65 to .82 with a mean of .77, reflecting good reliability. The average IICs fall within the recommended guidelines of .15 to .50 (Clark & Watson, 1995).
• Each scale is most highly correlated with its home FFM domain, with the exception of Rigidity, demonstrating strong relations to the original FFM scales from which our scales were derived.

Conclusion

• By creating an assessment of Avoidant Personality Disorder based on basic units of personality, AVD can be examined on these elemental personality traits as opposed to the pre-existing scales which blend these elements.

• The Elements of Avoidant Personality assessment allows the factor structure of AVD to be highlighted as it is built from a bottom-up approach.