



Abstract

Comfort seeking is defined as the pursuit of physical, mental and social ease. A measure of comfort seeking would theoretically correlate positively with measures of dependent personality traits (Dependent Personal Questionnaire, DPQ), anxiety symptoms (Beck Anxiety Inventory, BAI) and somatization (Somatization Scale of the Brief Symptom Check List 90, SOM). It was also hypothesized that comfort seeking would be negatively correlated with openness to experience (Big Five Inventory—Openness to Experience scale, BFI-OE), conscientiousness and emotional stability (Ten Item Personality Inventory, TPI-C and TPI-ES, respectively). Our research group generated a pool of twenty-two items based on four theoretical comfort domains: general, physical, mental and interpersonal comfort. The items were administered along with the proposed personality correlates to 178 undergraduates. Only items that correlated in the hypothesized direction with at least two of the other administered measures were included in a factor analysis. A principle axis factors analysis yielded a one-factor solution accounting for 21.3% of the variance. The final seven-item Comfort Seeking Scale (CSS) correlated positively with SOM, DPQ and BAI. The scale also correlated negatively with BFI-OE, TPI-C, TPI-ES, and contrary to prediction, a measure of extraversion (TPI-EX). Higher scores on the CSS were found to be negatively associated with cumulative grade point average. Further development of the CSS is discussed.

Introduction

Is comfort seeking a psychological variable that is related to other personality constructs and human functioning?

Objective

To develop the first measure of the extent to which an individual engages in comfort-seeking thoughts and behaviors.

Comfort-seeking is defined as the pursuit of physical, mental, and social ease.

Theoretically associated constructs

Positive association with dependence. Comfort-seekers will be more likely to be subservient in order to avoid the discomfort of interpersonal strife (Tyrer, Morgan, & Cicchetti, 2009).

Positive association with clinical anxiety. Individuals who experiences frequent bouts of anxiety would engage in comfort-seeking behavior in order to soothe these feelings (Beck et al. 1988).

Positive association with somatization. Comfort-seekers will be more intensely focused on their level of physical, emotional, and mental comfort, and distressed by symptoms of discomfort. A person with somatization will be more likely to engage in comfort-seeking behavior in order to alleviate perceived feelings of discomfort. (Derogatis & Cleary, 1997)

Negative association with conscientiousness. Comfort seeking behavior and concerns will supersede the effort required for conscientious behaviors and self-discipline (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Negative association with emotional stability. Comfort seekers will be more likely to display tension and discontent when they perceive that their requirements for comfort are not being met (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Negative association with openness to experience. Comfort seekers will attempt to avoid risks and the stresses of unconventionality and curiosity (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Method

Participants

Participants were 178 college undergraduates at the University of the South and included 109 females and 69 males. Demographic items included an item for GPA and a Likert scale question on overweight status. Participants ranged in age from 18-22. 8.3% were African American, 3.9 % were Latino, 86.1% were Caucasian, 1.1% were Native American, 2.8% were Asian, and 1.1% were reported as other.

Measures

Dependent Personality Questionnaire (DPQ, Tyrer, Morgan, & Cicchetti, 2009) Comprised of eight items using a four point Likert Scale. $\alpha = .58$ in our sample. Item examples: "I prefer coping with problems on my own." Or "I am a self-confident person."

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI, Beck et al. 1988)

Comprised of twenty-one items using a four point Likert Scale. $\alpha = .88$ in our sample. Item examples: "Numbness or tingling." Or "Faint/Lightheaded"

Somatization Scale of the Brief Symptom Check List 90 (SOM, Derogatis and Melisaratos, 1983)

Comprised of seven items using a five point Likert Scale. $\alpha = .79$ in our sample. Item example: "Feeling weak in parts of your body." Or "Trouble getting your breath."

Big Five Inventory—Openness to Experience scale (BFI-OE, John et al. 1991)

Comprised of ten items using a five point Likert Scale. $\alpha = .76$ in our sample. Item examples: "Prefers work that is routine" or "Has few artistic interests."

Ten Item Personality Inventory—Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience and Extraversion Subscales (TPI-C, -ES, -OE & EX, Gosling et al. 2003)

Each subscale is comprised of two items, although one item of the TPI-ES items was inadvertently omitted. The reliabilities in our sample were as follows: TPI-C, $\alpha = .51$; TPI-ES (single item); TPI-OE $\alpha = .41$. Sample item: TPI-C-"Dependable, self-disciplined"; TPI-ES-"Anxious, easily upset"(reverse); TPI-OE-"Open to new experiences, complex"; TPI-EX-"Extraverted, enthusiastic."

Demographic Items Used in Analyses:

"What is your cumulative (overall) G.P.A.(circle one)?"

"Which of the following describes how you feel about your weight?"

Informed consent was obtained and a survey was administered in various classes on a volunteer basis. A short debriefing was given following the completion of the survey.

The Comfort Seeking Scale

Table 1.

Comfort Seeking Scale (CSS)

Item	Factor Loading
I won't go to events where I have to sit or stand for long periods of time.	.38
I would just as soon "let it go" than repair a conflict with someone.	.50
I would rather spend leisure time in activities like watching TV than items that make me think.	.39
Generally, I'll take comfort over quality.	.45
I avoid doing things that make me uncomfortable.	.45
If I feel sick at all, I'll take a complete break from school/work until I feel 100%.	.31
I find it easier to agree than to stand up for my point of view.	.35

Associations

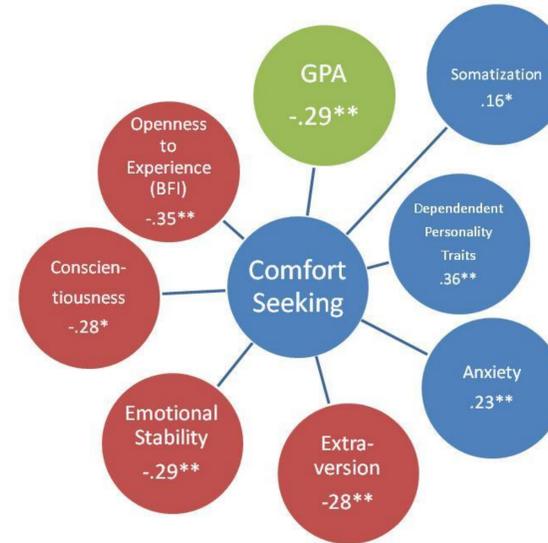


Figure 1. Closeness of association with Comfort Seeking. Red & blue indicate personality constructs, green indicates a demographic variable. Correlations (r) with other constructs, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Results

Our research group generated 75 items based on four comfort domains: general, interpersonal, mental and physical. Items were further reviewed by two researchers external to the study. Final selection resulted in a pool of twenty-two items that were administered in the survey.

Due to the heterogeneity of the content in the item pool, only items that significantly correlated with at least two of the validating measures were included for further analysis. This selection resulted in a pool of ten items to be included in a factor analysis. A principal factors analysis using principal axis factoring was conducted with a one-factor initial extraction. The single factor accounted for 21.3% of the variance. Items with factor loadings greater than .30 were kept. The resulting seven-item scale along with the item loadings is presented in Table 1. Scale reliability was .57.

This Comfort Seeking Scale (CSS) correlated positively with SOM ($r = .16, p < .05$), DPQ ($r = .36, p < .01$), and BAI ($r = .23, p < .01$). The CSS correlated negatively with OE ($r = -.35, p < .01$), TPI-C ($r = -.23, p < .01$), TPI-ES ($r = -.29, p < .01$), TPI-OE ($r = .29, p < .01$), and TPI-E ($r = -.28, p < .01$). The correlations are visually presented in Figure 1.

The CSS also correlated positively with reported cumulative grade point average, $r = .29, p < .01$. A trend toward significance was noted in the positive relationship between CSS scores and self reports of being overweight, $r = .14, p = .06$.

Discussion

Conclusions

In our study comfort seeking demonstrated validity as a construct, and as a seven item scale correlated with multiple measures in the hypothesized direction. Of these measures, the DPQ, SOM, and BAI demonstrated convergent validity, while the measurements of BFI-OE, TPI-C, TPI-ES and TPI-EX demonstrated divergent validity. Although not predicted, extroversion (TPI-EX) was inversely correlated with our scale suggesting that those who are introverted tend to be more comfort seeking than those who are extroverted. Perhaps people who are more generally comfort seeking are also more likely to seek the comforts of solitude.

We also found an inverse association with cumulative grade point average, indicating comfort seekers may be less likely to achieve academically. Furthermore, our results suggested that weight, specifically reporting being overweight, may ultimately prove to be associated with comfort seeking, if the trend toward significance is born out in further studies.

Limitations

The current measure of the construct of comfort seeking offers only adequate reliability and intra-scale validity as evidenced by the relatively low alpha and low accounting of variance by the factor analysis. Furthermore, the current sample is limited by its homogeneity. Moreover, a residential undergraduate college sample would theoretically be comprised mainly of people who have taken the risk of leaving home to further goals that are superordinate to comfort.

Further Development

Further development would focus on increasing the number of items to improve reliability and refining item content to solidify the variance accounted for by the current scale. Future research should also look into more heterogeneous populations in order to determine if there are additional correlates with CSS, which may not be detectable with a small, heterogeneous convenience sample.

References

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