The aim of the current research is to explore the hierarchical structure of intra- and interpersonal problems.

Introduction

The putative underlying structure of behavioral and emotional problems is based on Internalizing and Externalizing pathology. Interpersonal problems have been mapped on to the underlying dimensions of Dominance and Affiliation of the Interpersonal Circumplex. The purpose of the current research is to understand how specific problem behaviors emerge from these broad domains of Self and Interpersonal functioning.

Method

Participants
- 760 undergraduate participants (69% women)
- Average age was 19.4 (SD = 1.9; range = 18 to 42)
- Mixed ethnicity

Personality Problems
- 360 personality problems generated from several sources
- College students listed personal problems in an open-ended, free-response format across:
  - Interpersonal, intrapersonal, and occupational domains of functioning
  - Items were written to capture the content of these problems
- Items were then categorized into the NEO Problems in Living Checklist (NEO-PLC; McCrae & Costa, 2010) and California Adult Q-Set (CAQ; Block, 1961, 1968), and new items were written to cover gaps
- Additional items were written from the problem literature and personal observations

Procedure
- Goldberg’s (2006) top down method was used to estimate the hierarchical structure of intra- and interpersonal problems
- Each problem was rated as being characteristic of five independent raters
  - raters classified 224 problems as “intrapersonal” and 121 problems “interpersonal” (15 mixed problems)
- A one-factor PCA was estimated, followed by a series of Varimax rotated PCAs with two to five factors
- Regression-based factor scores were estimated for each solution and then correlated across adjoining levels of the hierarchy

Results and Discussion

Intrapersonal Problems
- The two-factor solution corresponds well with the structure of Internalizing and Externalizing dimensions of mental disorders (Achenbach, 1996; Krueger, 1999)
- A Motivational component emerged in the three-factor solution, reflecting a combination of Distractibility and Depressiveness
- The Internalizing component split to form separate components of Vulnerability, Low Self-Esteem, and Cautiousness, whereas the Externalizing component was primarily defined by Anti-Social/Sociopathic behavior

Intrapersonal Problems
- The two-factor solution resembles a rotation of the Control and Affiliation dimensions of the Interpersonal Circumplex (Wiggins, 1982)
- The Dominance component split to form Vindictive/Selfish, Overly Controlling, and Cold/Distant components, whereas the Inhibition component split to form Avoidant and Overly Nurturing/Exploitable components