



## Introduction

- The relationship between Openness to Experience and Depression is unclear.
- Previous research using the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) has yielded conflicting results:
  - Some research shows a negative relationship between the two constructs (more Openness is associated with less Depression), other research shows a positive relationship (more Openness is associated with more Depression).
- Some effective therapeutic techniques used in treating Depression include
  - teaching the patient creative and artistic activities
  - encouraging new hobbies and interests (Saulsman, Coall, & Nathan, 2006), which are all aspects of high Openness to Experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992).
- Psychiatric studies have shown that people with low Openness to Experience are more prone to suicidal depression (Duberstein, 1995).
- Famous creative people have often been depressed.
- Some research has pointed to negative facet-level relationships between Openness to Experience and Depression as a possible cause for the disparity, rather than focusing on the constructs as a whole (Bienvenu, Samuels, Costa, Reti, Eaton, & Nestadt, 2004).
- Openness to Experience is most commonly measured as part of the Big Five model of personality, which in turn is most commonly measured using the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992).
  - According to this model, an individual with high Openness to Experience
    - will possess characteristics such as curiosity, creativity, and imagination;
    - will be original and untraditional; and will have broad interests.
- An individual with low Openness to Experience
  - will be down-to-earth, conventional, unartistic, and unanalytical;
  - will have narrow interests.
- Psychiatric research shows that persons with low Openness to Experience are more likely to become depressed to the point of suicide due to “affective dampening, cognitive certainty, diminished behavioral repertoire, and rigidly defined self-concept” (Duberstein, 1995, p. 183)
  - This influences their willingness to make socially expected changes regarding interpersonal relationships, health, and social functions.
  - Therapeutic research shows that some of the most effective cognitive-behavioral treatments for Depression are to increase Openness to Experience by encouraging creative and artistic interests and hobbies (Saulsman et al., 2006).
- The aforementioned research appears to be contradicted by creative figures who have been depressed.
  - History has shown that individuals involved in creative, performance-driven careers are susceptible to Depression.
- Vincent Van Gogh, Marilyn Monroe, Kurt Cobain, and Ernest Hemmingway are some of the more notable celebrities who have suffered from Depression to the point of suicide.
  - Contemporary pop culture includes creative celebrities such as Brook Shields, Lorraine Bracco, Woody Allen, Alanis Morissette and Brittany Spears, who have suffered from Depression and other mood disorders.
  - Their creative endeavors imply a high level of Openness.
- Does Openness lead to Depression?
- Most previous research on the relationship between Openness and Depression has used the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992).
- The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between Openness and Depression using an alternative measure of Openness.
- This research may clarify the discrepancy between clinical research and the depression of creative figures.

## Abstract

Many people in artistic careers have become depressed. However, research has shown that teaching depressed individuals to engage in creative activities helps decrease Depression. The current study sought to resolve this apparent conflict. Creativity, adventurousness, and artistic interests are included in the personality trait of Openness to Experience. Because previous research on the relationship of Openness to Depression has primarily used one measure of Openness (the NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992), the current study sought to resolve the conflict between recent research and the Depression of artistic people using an alternative measure of Openness, the International Personality Item Pool (2007) Openness Scale. Although the overall relationship between Openness and Depression was non-significant, there was a large negative relationship between Adventurousness and Depression: People who like variety and change are less depressed. This research is consistent with previous studies that have shown that clinicians can successfully treat Depression by teaching people to be more creative, but contradicts some other research showing that Depression is positively related to some aspects of Openness. Finally, this research still leaves the question of why depression affects creative people like Vincent Van Gogh, Woody Allen, and Brittany Spears.

## Methods

**Participants** A total of 38 (17 female, 21 male) university students participated in return for course credit. The participants ages ranged from 18 to 56 (mean 22.13, SD 8.02). They identified themselves as 52.6% Caucasian, 21.1% Asian, 7.9% Hispanic, 7.9% Pacific Islander, 5.3% African American, 2.6% Native American participants, and 2.6% other.

**Measures** The International Personality Item Pool (IPIP, 2007) consists of over 1000 items. It includes measures of the lower-level facets of the Big Five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism). The IPIP and scoring keys are public domain and cost free (Goldberg, Johnson, Eber, Hogan, Ashton, Cloninger, & Gough, 2005). Participants indicate how well statements pertain to themselves on a five-point scale from 1 “very inaccurate” to 5 “very accurate” (IPIP, 2007). The Openness scale on the IPIP (2007) provides an overall Openness score as well as six 10-item facet scores: Emotionality, Adventurousness, Intellect, Artistic Interests, Imagination, and Liberalism (2007). Individuals who score high on Emotionality experience emotions intensely, feel others' emotions, are passionate about causes, enjoy examining themselves and their lives, and try to understand themselves. Individuals who score high on Adventurousness prefer variety to routine, like to visit new places, are interested in many things, and like to begin new things. High scorers on Intellect are open-minded to new and unusual ideas, like to debate intellectual issues, and play with riddles and puzzles. A person scoring high in Artistic Interests loves beauty in art and nature, and becomes easily absorbed in artistic and natural events. People who score high on Imagination think that the real world is often too plain and ordinary. High scorers on this scale use fantasy as a way of creating a richer, more interesting world. Finally, Liberalism refers to a readiness to challenge authority, convention, and traditional values. The six IPIP Openness facets correlate well with the corresponding NEO-PI-R facets (Goldberg et al., 2005). Depression was measured using the Depression facet from the IPIP Neuroticism scale (IPIP, 2007). The Depression measure consists of 10 items. Individuals who score high on this scale dislike themselves, are often down in the dumps, have a low opinion of themselves, have frequent mood swings, feel desperate, and feel that their lives lack direction. The IPIP Depression scale correlates well with the corresponding NEO-PI-R Depression scale (Goldberg et al., 2005).

# Predicting Depression from Openness

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Table 1

Correlations between Openness Facets and Depression

Openness Facet	Correlation
1. Imagination	.21
2. Artistic Interests	-.22
3. Emotionality	-.06
4. Adventurousness	-.62**
5. Intellect	-.09
6. Liberalism	.11

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Results

We correlated the IPIP Depression scale with the IPIP scales for Openness to Experience. First, we correlated Depression with the overall score for the Openness to Experience scale. The overall relationship was negative but non-significant ( $r(36) = -.22, p = .271$ ). Next, we correlated Depression with the six facet-level scores of Openness to Experience. Although five of these correlations were small and non-significant, one of the six Openness facets, Adventurousness, had a large significant correlation with Depression. See Table 1..

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between Openness and Depression, using the IPIP (2007) Openness scale. The fact that several notable creative figures have been depressed raised the issue of whether the relationship between Openness and Depression is positive or negative. Because previous research has almost always used the NEO-PI-R, we used an alternative measure of Openness to resolve this issue: the IPIP (2007) Openness Scale. Although the overall relationship between Openness and Depression was small and non-significant, one facet of Openness, Adventurousness, had a large negative relationship with Depression: people who enjoy variety are less depressed.

These findings are consistent with some previous research but contradict other research. This research is consistent with Duberstein's (1995) research, which showed a negative relationship between Openness and Depression. On the other hand, this research contradicts Wolfstein and Troll's (1997) finding that people with Depression have higher levels of two facets of Openness: the NEO-PI-R facets of Aesthetics and Feelings.

Additional research is needed to understand the relationship between Openness and Depression. This research should examine the relationship between Openness facets and Depression, because the relationship with Depression may vary depending upon the facet. As well, this current study leaves one question unanswered: why do artistic people (who would score high on Openness) often get depressed? Are they depressed because they are creative, or are they creative because they get depressed? Or is another explanation needed to explain their depression?

## References

For a complete list of references please read the accompanying handout.