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Title

Creating a Multidimensional Scale to Measure Existential Anxiety with Contingency Included

Abstract for

Short Communication

Abstract

Existential anxiety, a universal human experience, emerges as individuals confront fundamental life concerns such as meaning, freedom, mortality, and isolation—described by Yalom (1980) as the “givens” of existence. Life's givens have been described as inherently threatening to most individuals (Yalom, 1980) and often emerge as central themes in therapy, guiding meaningful exploration into clients' struggles. Indeed, literature shows a relationship between life's givens and depression, anxiety, traumatic stress (Weems et al., 2004), substance abuse, and lack of purpose in life (Moore & Goldner-Vukov, 2009). Despite their significance, most measures treat these existential givens separately, missing how intertwined they truly are. Thus, the current study sought to address this limitation by developing a 19-item scale that conceptualizes existential anxiety as a dynamic, multidimensional construct. To expand Yalom's framework, a fifth dimension—contingency—is introduced, capturing the anxiety provoked by encounters with diverse cultural perspectives. In an increasingly interconnected world, being confronted with alternative ways of living and thinking can destabilize one's sense of certainty and identity. Such cultural disruption may often evoke questions like, "What if my way of seeing the world isn't the only way—or even the best way?" Similar to other givens, contingency prompts reflection on personal meaning structures and challenges familiar assumptions, deepening our understanding of existential distress in a globalized society. To explore and validate these existential dimensions, we collected data from 484 participants. These participants were sampled from Amazon Mechanical Turk services who ranged in age from 18 to 79 ($M = 39.81$), and responded to a survey on existential anxiety with an initial pool of 63 items. Data supported a six-factor model via exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The finalized scale demonstrated strong reliability and validity, offering a valuable tool for exploring existential concerns in research and therapeutic contexts. Further details on the development process and findings will be elaborated during the conference.

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