Author's response to reviews

Title: Social inhibition as a mediator of neuroticism and depression in the elderly

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Re: Second manuscript revision, and submission of manuscript - version 3

Dear Editor

Below are our responses, point-by-point, to the reviewer’s comments on the second draft of our manuscript (dated 28th July 2011) entitled, ‘Social inhibition as a mediator of neuroticism and depression in the elderly’. We have also sent you a revised manuscript (version 3, dated 29th February 2012) for your consideration.

Editorial request
E1. Please remove the word 'title' from the title of your manuscript.
E1: We have removed the word ‘title’ from the title as suggested.

Reviewer1: Jennifer Morse
Major concerns:

A1 The paragraph about mediators is helpful but seems left hanging at the end. This paragraph could substantially build the authors’ argument for the study if a summary transition sentence or two was added at the end of the paragraph to articulate the logic of why they are interested in mediators.

The next paragraph is somewhat helpful. The authors refer to Beck and Blatt’s theories of personality styles creating vulnerability to depression. This is responsive to earlier concerns about a theoretical model to support their hypotheses. This section also articulates the authors’ conceptualization of the “time frame” and sensitivity to change of neuroticism, interpersonal problems and symptoms of depression. This too is helpful. Unfortunately however, this section does little to articulate the logic of why the authors are interested in social inhibition as a mediator. Out of the 8 IIP scales, why was social inhibition chosen? And finally, at the end of this paragraph, the reference to dependency and overly-accommodating is particularly confusing. The authors seem to be suggesting another analysis which is not conducted.
A1: We thank the reviewer for the suggestions. We have revised the ‘Background’ section and especially the paragraphs in red ink were added. We hope this adds a greater level of understanding why we are interested in mediators. Please refer to the ‘Background’.

A2 The discussion has been expanded but is confusing. In the paragraph about the mediating effect, I was confused about why the authors felt that Alden & Bieling’s finding that both autonomy and self-criticism could be placed in the interpersonal circumplex was relevant as it says nothing about mediation. Dunkley et al.’s finding may be more relevant, but in general it seems that this section of the discussion should focus on mediation. Conceptually, why should interpersonal problems – particularly social inhibition – mediate the relation between the personality trait of neuroticism and the symptoms of depression? I think, based on the next paragraph, that the authors are arguing that self-criticism is also part of the picture. Unfortunately this section is particularly confusing. Yes, self-criticism is more interpersonally complex than autonomy (Alden & Bieling’s finding), but I don’t understand the statement that social inhibition can be viewed as the interpersonal function of self-criticism. Also, octant location in the interpersonal circumplex says nothing about stability. If the authors could clarify these paragraphs of the discussion, that would be helpful.

A2: We thank the reviewer for the suggestion. We have revised the conceptual thoughts regarding mediation and try to explain this by rewriting the ‘Discussion’ section.

A3: Finally, I think the clinical implications of these findings are still weakly articulated. The authors encourage clinicians to attend to social inhibition, though they have previously argued that interpersonal problems still change slowly. Perhaps clinical implications might be considered from the patients’ perspective – that is, do the authors think that patients would be more willing to address interpersonal problems like social inhibition than personality traits like neuroticism?

A3: Regarding implications, we have added more text at the last part of the ‘Discussion’.

Minor essential concerns:

A-MEA1. In the paragraph in the background on mediators, it would be clearer if the authors consistently used the phrase “mediator” rather than “factor.

A-MEA1: Thank you for the suggestion. We have revised this point as advised.

A-MEA2. In the paragraph in the background that starts with Alden & Bieling’s findings, it would be more appropriate to cite Beck and Blatt (37 & 38) as suggesting that there are two styles creating vulnerability to depression (as is appropriately done in the discussion), before moving to Alden & Bieling’s empirical investigation of the conceptual differences between sociotropy-dependency and autonomy-self
criticism. And later in that paragraph, when the authors say “according to the items used”, I think they are referring to face validity. Perhaps this can be clarified.

A-MEA2: Thank you, but we have reorganized and rewritten the ‘Background’ section.

A-MEA3. Throughout the manuscript the sentences are often very long. This makes them harder to read. Breaking long sentences into shorter sentences will improve the readability of the manuscript.

A-MEA3: Thanks and done with revisions.

A-MEA4: In the paragraph about Participants, “convenient” sampling should be “convenience” sampling and throughout the Instruments section, self-reporting should be self-report.

A-MEA4: Thank you for pointing out these errors. We have corrected them.

A-MEA5. In the Discussion, Alden & Bieling is cited as #12, but earlier it is cited as #9.

A-MEA5: Thank you. We have revised the references.

Reviewer 2: Julie Wetherell

B1. Abstract: "The variables found to be significantly associated with depression were younger age, lower levels of reasoning skills, social inhibition, and lack of emotional stability (neuroticism)." Also, "Lack of emotional stability is, along with younger age, the strongest predictor of depressive symptoms, but it can be mediated by social inhibition."

B1: We have revised the Conclusion section of the Abstract.

B2. In general - use the same word or phrase for constructs consistently. For example, "reasoning skills" (which I prefer to "intellect") and "lack of emotional stability" or "emotional instability", both of which I prefer to "(inversed) emotional stability". Also, "socially inhibited interpersonal problem" seems to conflate two ideas: social inhibition, and interpersonal problems. The former is a personality trait, that latter is a situation. Better to rephrase as "social inhibition" or "socially inhibited interpersonal style," or "interpersonal problems caused by social inhibition", depending on what is meant (choose one and use it throughout the paper).

B2: Thank you. They are all replaced.
B3. More information is still needed on the sample. It is now described as a "convenient sample", but does that mean participants responded to newspaper ads, or to flyers posted in social clubs, or by being approached in their doctors' waiting rooms, or what exactly? How many participants were invited, vs. how many refused?

B3: We have added the phrase ‘by announcing in communities’. The participants were approached by the research team at their community centres. Our research assistants asked for permission from the village heads to announce the project.

**Reviewer 3: Jeremy Miles**

**Minor essential revisions:**

C-ME1. What does VZ mean?

C-ME1: VZ is the name of my computer (Sony Vaio Z). We resubmitted the version 2 of the manuscript with the mark up of the track changes and comment boxes.

C-ME2. There appear to be some negative values for R-squared, e.g. in the abstract and Page 9.

C-ME2: Thank you for pointing out the errors. They are all corrected.

C-ME3. I would remove the Durbin Watson test, it’s not really relevant for this sort of data (and doesn’t demonstrate independence).

C-ME3: We have removed the test as suggested.

C-ME4. 2 (or maybe 3) decimal places on a fit statistic is enough.

C-ME4: Thank you. They were all checked.

We hope that the above revisions satisfy the reviewers and the editorial team. All authors read the final manuscript prior to this submission. We thank you for your patience and your positive attitude in considering our paper. Please feel free to get back to me if needed. We look forward to your responses.

Regards,

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