Reviewer's report

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

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 19 August 2011  

**Reviewer:** Jennifer Morse

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MS: 1196102254476586  
Title: Social inhibition as a mediator of neuroticism and depression in the elderly

The authors have addressed many of the concerns raised in the initial review; however significant concerns about the background and the discussion remain. While the authors have added text to both sections, the additions seem to confuse rather than clarify.

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

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.

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.

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?

Minor Essential revisions

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

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.

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.

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

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

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests