

Test Review and Critique

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In the field of clinical psychology, accurate and reliable psychological assessments are fundamental to understanding a client's unique needs, creating treatment plans, and monitoring progress. These assessments provide a structured framework for exploring constructs like depression, hope, and personality. As counselors in training we are taught to understand that assessments are not simply the scores they produce, but a tool to understand the client. This paper will critique three widely used psychological assessments including the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Hope Index (HI), and the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R). Through examination of these assessment's strengths and weaknesses, this critique will demonstrate how, when used appropriately, these instruments can inform both the clinician and client, providing a comprehensive and holistic approach to mental health care.

Critique of the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)

The Beck Depression Inventory is a common psychological assessment, known for its versatility and utility in measuring the severity of depressive symptoms. The BDI-II demonstrates strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability, providing a consistent and reliable measure for clinical and research applications. For example, a study examining caregivers of children with chronic diseases found the BDI-II to have adequate reliability and evidence of validity, as its factors positively correlated with anxiety, caregiver burden, and parental stress (Toledano-Toledano & Contreras-Valdez, 2018). It is also a fairly simple test to administer, which makes it a practical screening tool, allowing clinicians to quickly get a gauge of where the client is at.

As with any self-reporting measure, the BDI has its limitations. A key concern is that it primarily assesses the symptoms of depression rather than the underlying causes, such as trauma, life stressors, or biological factors. Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding its use in diverse populations, as some of the questions may be interpreted differently across cultures. Many professionals assume the assessment is invariant across groups, but these assumptions have not always been verified (Nascimento et al., 2023). These cautions highlight the importance of using the BDI as a supplementary tool, rather than a standalone diagnostic measure.

The BDI can give counselors a better understanding of the depressive symptoms of clients coming into the session, and help track those symptoms over time. By taking the BDI multiple times at given intervals, both the counselor and the client are able to track the symptoms. This can help clients connect patterns in their own symptoms which make it easier for the counselor and client to identify where coping strategies are needed. It can also help both counselor and client track the effectiveness of proposed coping strategies and treatment plans.

Critique of the Hope Index

The Hope Index, based on C.R. Snyder's Hope Theory, assesses a client's hope and interprets it into perceived ambition and motivation. This interpretation sets the HI apart from other assessments because it provides a lens for evaluating goal-directed thinking and the client's sense of agency for achieving their goals. This strengths-based approach can be incredibly empowering for clients, as it highlights their resilience and potential for positive change. Research has also shown that the Hope Index demonstrates good consistency. A study measuring the cognitive aspects of hope, in regards to particular events and outcomes, found that the Hope Index was reliable across cultures and has fair to good internal consistency (Staats & Stassen, 1985).

That being said, a primary weakness of the HI is the abstract nature of what it measures. The interpretation of "hope" can be deeply influenced by cultural context, as well as experience, which means that the interpretation of hope can be different from person to person and therefore hard to measure. I personally felt that my own hope index score was misleading because my mindset is more acceptance based than it is hopeful. Interpretations of HI results by counselors have also been variable, which goes to show the complexities that come with assessing for an abstract concept. Concerns have been raised around future hope research, drawing attention to differences in conceptualization and measurement (Ong et al., 2022).

In the clinical setting, the Hope Index can be a powerful tool for promoting self-discovery and guiding treatment. Counselors can use a low hope score to identify specific barriers that are preventing a client from seeing pathways to their goals. For example, some versions of the Hope Index include the subsection of pathways. If a client scores low on the "pathways" subscale, the counselor can work with them to break down an overwhelming goal, like "getting healthy", into specific manageable steps like "walking for 15 minutes a day" or "cooking one healthy meal a week". For the client, seeing their own hope score can serve as a validation of their struggles while simultaneously providing a framework to work through them. By understanding their own levels of hope and agency, clients can begin to see that even when they feel stuck, they still possess the internal capacity for change, which can be the first step toward taking action.

Review of the NEO-PI-R

Developed by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae, the Revised NEO Personality Inventory was created to understand personality by categorizing it into domains. The NEO-PI-R is a revision of the original NEO-PI which included the domains that measured Neuroticism,

Extraversion, and Openness. The NEO-PI-R was created to reflect the Five-Factor Model, also known as the big five, which include: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Vassend & Skrondal, 2011). In the NEO-PI-R Costa and McCrae consider the big five as the “domains” which are classified by collections of facets within a person that can be grouped in different ways. “Facets” are used to refer to the traits that are in each of these domains; each domain has six facets each. Recently Costa and McCrae, came out with their new theory on “nuances” which are sub-traits existing within facets. Together these variables combine to investigate the stability and structure of personality, its influence on life events, and its connection to mental and physical health (Costa & McCrae, 2008).

The NEO-PI-R is regarded as a dependable assessment, as it has been found to have high internal consistency and good test-retest stability. For example, its factor structure has been replicated across many different cultures and languages, providing evidence for its cross-cultural validity and broad applicability (McCrae et al., 2005). The inventory also has strong validity, with extensive evidence supporting its predictive relationship with other behavioral measures (Soto & John, 2017). However, a key area of critique has been the potential for response distortion, such as when clients attempt to present themselves in an overly positive or negative light. This distortion is especially common when individuals are under pressure, or in the clinical setting. This concern has led to research on the development of validity scales to detect such biases. For example, a study by Young & Schinka (2001) examined the Negative and Positive Presentation Management scales within a clinical sample, finding that these scales had satisfactory internal consistency and effectively identified individuals who were deliberately distorting their responses, thereby strengthening the tool's overall utility in clinical settings.

Critiques of the NEO-PI-R

Although the NEO-PI-R is widely tested and fairly accurate at identifying deliberately distorted results, it still has its draw-backs. One of the biggest critiques of the NEO-PI-R is its length. The assessment consists of 240 items and taking it can be a time-consuming and potentially overwhelming task for some clients. This can be demotivating and lead to a higher potential for a lack of focus or disengagement. As someone with a mind that struggles to stop analyzing, I enjoy long assessments because they disorient me which makes me focus on the questions instead of trying to break down how the question applies to my results as I am taking the assessment. Additionally, while the five factor model is well known, its focus on global traits may not fully capture the nuances of a person's behavior in specific situations or social contexts. For example, a person's level of agreeableness might fluctuate significantly depending on whether they are at work or with family, a subtlety that a broad trait measure may overlook (Hudson & Roberts, 2015).

Like the other assessments discussed in this paper, the NEO-PI-R can be an asset for informing both the clinician and the client in the clinical setting. For the counselor, the results provide a roadmap of the client's personality, which can help increase the accuracy and effectiveness of treatment planning. For instance, a client who scores high in extraversion may be more sociable, prompting the counselor to consider incorporating group therapy or community engagement strategies into their treatment plan. Counselors can also use the NEO-PI-R to empower clients with a new language for self-exploration. When clients see their scores, they gain a deeper self-understanding of themselves. With this understanding and the exploration that comes with it, clients can learn to recognize their typical patterns of thinking and behavior. These patterns can help the client normalize their traits, which can soften defenses and allow for

conversations that are more open and productive when exploring how their personality may be impacting their personal life.

Conclusion

Overall, the critique of the Beck Depression Inventory, the Hope Index, and the NEO-PI-R reveals that each assessment offers a unique lens for understanding clients in the clinical setting. The BDI excels as a reliable, symptom-focused tool for gauging the severity of depression over time, while the Hope Index provides a valuable strengths-based perspective on a client's resilience and goal-directed thinking. The NEO-PI-R, in turn, provides insight into a client's core personality structure. Although each assessment has its own set of limitations, they can be mitigated with a competent counselor who has adequate training on the given assessment and uses assessments in tandem with other counseling methods in a multidimensional approach. This holistic perspective not only results in a more accurate and comprehensive understanding for the clinician, but also empowers the client to explore their own autonomy and take control of their mental health journey.

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