Abstract

Alexithymia is a clinical condition in which people have difficulty describing their emotions (Nemiah & Sniffes, 1976). People with Alexithymia are unable to distinguish between similar emotions, rarely reflect upon their emotions, and tend to describe external circumstances when asked about their emotions (Lesser, 1981). The most commonly used measure of Alexithymia is the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994). It consists of 20 self-report items, which are divided into three subscales: Difficulty Identifying Feelings, Difficulty Describing Feelings, and Externally Oriented Thinking. Some researchers have criticized the validity of the TAS-20 (Kooiman, Spinhow, & Trijburg, 2001). The purpose of this study was to examine the convergent validity of the three subscales with the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS). In particular, Externally Oriented Thinking had a strong negative correlation with the tendency to pay attention to one’s own emotions; and Difficulty Identifying Feelings and Difficulty Describing Feelings both had strong negative correlations with the tendency to be able to describe one’s emotions clearly. Regardless of previous claims that some aspects of Alexithymia may not be adequately represented on the TAS-20 (Kooiman et al., 2001), this study provides evidence for the convergent validity of the three scales that are currently a part of the TAS-20. Future research should consider expanding the aspects of Alexithymia that are measured by the TAS-20.

Method

Participants

A total of 217 undergraduate students (149 females, 68 males) completed this study in exchange for course credit. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 46 (mean = 22.66, SD = 6.20) and identified themselves as follows: 58.5% Caucasian, 9.2% Hispanic, 15.2% Asian, 10.1% African American, 0.5% Native American, and 6.5% other.

Measures

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby et al., 1994)

The TAS-20 has 20 items, five of which are reverse-scored (items 4, 5, 10, 18, and 19). It has three subscales: Difficulty Identifying Feelings, Difficulty Describing Feelings, and Externally Oriented Thinking. Some researchers have criticized the validity of the TAS-20 because its three factor structure is stable and is able to be replicated in both populations. (1994), however, stated that the TAS-20 has 20 items, five of which are reverse-scored (items 4, 5, 10, 18, and 19). It has three subscales: Difficulty Identifying Feelings, Difficulty Describing Feelings, and Externally Oriented Thinking. Some researchers have criticized the validity of the TAS-20 because its three factor structure is stable and is able to be replicated in both populations.

Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, & Goldsmith, 1995)

The TMMS has 30 items divided among three subscales: Attention, Clarity, and Repair. Attention is the tendency to pay attention to one’s emotions. Clarity is the ability to distinguish between feelings and other somatic sensations. Difficulty Describing Feelings measures how difficult it is for an individual to describe their emotions. Externally Oriented Thinking measures the tendency to focus upon external circumstances rather than internal emotions.

Results

The correlations between Alexithymia and meta-mood were all negative and statistically significant (see Table 1). Most correlations were small. However, three correlations were large: the correlations the TAS-20 Difficulty Identifying Feelings and Difficulty Describing Feelings scales with TMMS Clarity, and the correlation between TAS-20 Externally Oriented Thinking and TMMS Attention.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations between TAS-20 Subscales and TMMS Scales</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAS-20 Subscales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Identifying Feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty Describing Feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Externally Oriented Thinking</td>
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Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the convergent validity of the three subscales of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20). As expected, the TAS-20 scales had strong correlations with the most similar subscales from the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS). In particular, Externally Oriented Thinking had a strong negative correlation with the tendency to pay attention to one’s own emotions; and Difficulty Identifying Feelings and Difficulty Describing Feelings both had strong negative correlations with the tendency to be able to describe one’s emotions clearly. Regardless of previous claims that some aspects of Alexithymia may not be adequately represented on the TAS-20 (Kooiman et al., 2001), this study provides evidence for the convergent validity of the three scales that are currently a part of the TAS-20. Future research should consider expanding the aspects of Alexithymia that are measured by the TAS-20.

References


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