



Two behavioural indicators of dependency and the Five-Factor Model of personality

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Residence with parents and unemployment during studies were chosen as the two behavioural indicators of dependency among 601 undergraduate students. Students completed a demographic questionnaire, Costa and McCrae's (1992) NEO-FFI and Beck, Davis, and Freeman's (1990) Typical Beliefs of DPD. Unemployed students, living with their parents, were found to be significantly more dependent, neurotic and agreeable and less extraverted, conscientious and open than employed students who did not reside with their parents. Residing with parents during one's studies was the strongest predictor of dependency and neuroticism, followed by unemployment. Unemployed male students, who resided with their parents, were the most dependent, neurotic and agreeable and the least open, extraverted and conscientious group. The relationship between dependency and the Big Five is also discussed.

Numerous attempts have been made to specify the constellation of traits that combine to make up the dependent personality (Bornstein, 1992, 1993). Following Freud's (1905/1953) seminal formulations with regard to oral fixation and dependency, early psychoanalytic theorists argued that dependent individuals are characterized by passivity, pessimism, self-doubt, fear of abandonment and insecurity (Abraham, 1927). The most influential behavioural model of dependency was developed by Heathers (1955) and conceptualized dependency in terms of two factors, one instrumental and one emotional. Subsequent studies have generally supported this view (Bornstein, 1996; Masling, 1983). A proposal for delineating the fundamental aspects of the dependent personality orientation was laid out in the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality (Blatt, Zohar, Quinlan, Zuroff, & Mongrain, 1995; Pincus & Gurtman, 1995; Shopshire & Craik, 1994). A meta-analysis of studies, assessing the relation between interpersonal dependency and the traits specified by the FFM, revealed that dependency is positively related with neuroticism (N) and agreeableness (A) and negatively related with extraversion (E), openness (O) and conscientiousness (C) (Bornstein & Cecero, 2000). Pincus (2002) suggests that objective biographical details and external influences should be

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taken into account in any consideration of dependency. Researchers have explored the instrumental-emotional dependency distinction in children (Flanders, Anderson, & Amidon, 1960), adolescents (Ainsworth, 1989) and adults (Birtchnell, 1988). Gradually, efforts to understand the components of dependency within the confines of a single theoretical framework have given way to more eclectic, integrative analyses (e.g. Ainsworth, 1989; Birtchnell, 1988). Bornstein (1993), for instance, proposed that dependency could be conceptualized in terms of four personality domains:

- (1) *Motivational domain*: a marked need for support, guidance and approval from others.
- (2) *Cognitive domain*: a perception of oneself as powerless and ineffectual.
- (3) *Affective domain*: a tendency to become anxious when required to function autonomously.
- (4) *Behavioural domain*: a tendency to seek help and reassurance from others and to yield to others in interpersonal interactions.

The objective of this study is to integrate behavioural indicators of dependency (residing with their parents and unemployment) with the FFM traits. Unlike their counterparts in the USA and Europe, undergraduate students in Israel have usually completed a 2-3 year army service by the time they reach university. This experience is assumed to accelerate development from adolescence to early adulthood. During the early adult years, people commit themselves to an occupation, and marry or become involved in other intimate relationships. Erikson (1963) saw identity as a precursor to intimacy and believed that adolescents, who have not yet consolidated their identities, will find it difficult to become involved in intimate, mutually satisfying relationships because their preoccupation with themselves makes it difficult to attend to another person's needs. According to Sullivan (1953), however, adolescence begins with the need for intimacy rather than with a search for identity, and the ability to establish an identity is facilitated by participation in intimate interpersonal relations. Either way, some degree of independence is expected during early adulthood. (In Israel the expressions of this independence include leaving one's parents' home and getting a job, part-time at least, while studying.)

On the basis of the above-reviewed literature, in general, and Bornstein and Cecero's (2000) meta-analysis on the relation between interpersonal dependency and the FFM, in particular, it is hypothesized that: (a) students who reside with their parents, will be found to be more dependent, neurotic, agreeable and less open, conscientious and extraverted than students who do not reside with their parents; (b) unemployed students will be found to be more dependent, neurotic, and agreeable and less open, conscientious and extraverted than their employed counterparts; (c) unemployed students who reside with their parents, will show the highest levels of D, N and A and the lowest levels of O and C, followed by unemployed students who reside with their parents, employed students who do not reside with their parents, and finally, employed students who reside with their parents; (d) female students will be more dependent, neurotic and agreeable than male students (based on a previous study of the Big Five among Israeli students; Rubinstein, 2005).

Method

Subjects

A total of 601 Israeli Jewish undergraduate students (287 male and 314 female) from four universities and two colleges (mean age = 23.55 with a standard deviation of 2.88 years) participated in the study. Of the students, 191 were enrolled in the hard and life sciences, 326 were in the social sciences and 84 studied humanities. The vast majority (68.4%) defined themselves as secular, 26.1% saw themselves as traditional and 5.5% specified that they were religious. Sixty per cent of the students resided with their parents. The remainder resided either alone, with room- or flat-mates or with partners.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire

This consisted of questions about gender, age, country of birth, year of immigration to Israel, parents' country of birth, faculty, family status, religion and degree of observance (subjects' self-definition as secular, traditional, orthodox or ultra-orthodox), residential arrangements, employment, salary and army service.

NEO-FFI

Costa and McCrae's (1992) shortened version of the NEO-FFI consists of 60 items, 12 of each of the Big Five, with which subjects express agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). Half of the items in each subscale are worded in one direction and the other half in the opposite direction to avoid a response set bias. The items of the different subscales are mixed, so that every sixth item represents one of the Big Five. The Hebrew version of the NEO-FFI was found to be valid and reliable in a previous study (Rubinstein, 2005). Cronbach's α in the present study were .85 for N, .86 for E, .83 for O, .82 for A and .89 for C (which are higher than those reported in Costa and McCrae's manual).

Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD): Typical beliefs

Although a dependent personality orientation can be identified using the FFM, Beck *et al.* (1990) nine typical beliefs of DPD were used as an additional measure of dependency. This measure was selected for its brevity, given that the NEO-FFI already includes 60 items. Beck *et al.*'s beliefs were translated into Hebrew, randomly incorporated into the NEO-FFI items, and rated by subjects on the same five-point Likert-type scale. Cronbach's α for this measure was .84.

Procedure

The research forms were administered during classes in the presence of the instructors and two research assistants. Response rate was 100%. All the forms were collected immediately after their completion.

Results

D is negatively related to O, C and E, and positively related to N and A, as was also found in Bornstein and Cecero's (2000) meta-analysis.

Residence, employment and gender effects

Six three-way ANCOVAs were conducted to test hypotheses (b) and (c), with residence, employment and gender as the independent variables, and D and the Big Five as the dependent variables. Pearson coefficients were computed between the demographic and the dependent variables in order to determine which variables should be used as covariates: age was negatively related to D ($r = -.12, p < .01$) and N ($r = -.11, p < .01$); religiosity was negatively related to O ($r = -.20, p < .01$) but positively related to A ($r = .13, p < .01$) and N ($r = .08, p < .05$); salary was negatively related to D ($r = -.25, p < .01$), A ($r = -.14, p < .01$) and N ($r = -.27, p < .01$) and positively related to O ($r = .18, p < .01$), C ($r = .27, p < .01$) and E ($r = .23, p < .01$); and finally, army rank was positively related to D ($r = .09, p < .05$) and negatively related to A ($r = -.15, p < .01$). The means of the dependent variables by residence, employment and gender are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) of dependency (D) and the Big Five among students by residence, employment and gender

	N	D	O	C	E	A	N
		M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD
Residing with parents	359	2.81 _a 0.64	3.00 _a 0.75	3.36 _a 0.90	3.14 _a 0.82	3.54 _b 0.60	3.07 _a 0.77
Employed	165	2.56 _a 0.65	3.17 _b 0.57	3.68 _b 0.64	3.43 _b 0.59	3.50 _b 0.53	2.85 _c 0.63
Men	50	2.64 0.69	2.59 _a 0.95	3.73 0.63	3.39 _b 0.62	3.44 _b 0.54	2.79 _b 0.68
Women	115	2.52 _a 0.64	3.14 _b 0.54	3.73 0.63	3.45 _b 0.59	3.53 _b 0.51	2.88 _b 0.61
Unemployed	194	3.02 0.93	2.85 _a 0.56	3.08 _a 0.99	2.90 _a 0.90	3.57 _b 0.66	3.25 _a 0.82
Men	100	3.25 _b 1.06	2.59 _a 0.95	2.78 _a 1.08	2.64 _a 0.97	3.69 _a 0.73	3.41 _a 0.94
Women	94	2.77 0.69	3.13 _b 0.63	3.40 0.78	3.17 _b 0.73	3.45 _b 0.54	3.07 _c 0.64
Not residing with parents	242	2.39 _b 0.63	3.41 _b 0.56	3.60 _b 0.57	3.43 _b 0.55	3.24 _a 0.66	2.70 _b 0.63
Employed	147	2.30 _b 0.61	3.44 0.49	3.68 _b 0.52	3.50 _b 0.55	3.50 _b 0.53	2.57 _b 0.58
Men	84	2.24 _b 0.60	3.54 0.49	3.68 0.54	3.57 _b 0.50	3.44 _b 0.54	2.44 _b 0.55
Women	63	2.38 _b 0.62	3.31 0.48	3.69 0.49	3.41 _b 0.61	3.38 _b 0.59	2.75 _c 0.57
Unemployed	95	2.53 0.64	3.36 _b 0.65	3.46 _b 0.63	3.33 _b 0.54	3.34 _a 0.50	2.90 _c 0.65
Men	53	2.49 _b 0.67	3.31 0.55	3.49 0.64	3.28 0.57	3.27 _a 0.53	2.84 _c 0.59
Women	42	2.58 _b 0.60	3.43 0.76	3.43 0.61	3.40 0.51	3.42 0.49	2.98 _c 0.72

Note. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$, according to Scheffe test.

Dependency

An ANCOVA of D by residence, employment and gender - with age, salary and army rank as covariates - yielded a main effect of residence, indicating that the D level of students who reside with their parents, is higher than that of those who do not, $F(1, 590) = 29.92, p < .001$, and a main effect of employment, indicating that the D level of unemployed students is higher than that of their employed counterparts, $F(1, 590) = 5.87, p < .05$, as hypothesized. A residence \times employment interaction was found to be significant only at the $p < .10$ level, but unemployed students who reside with their parents, were indeed the most dependent, followed by employed students who also reside with their parents, unemployed students who do not reside with their parents, and finally, employed students who do not reside with their parents. According to a Scheffe test, unemployed students who reside with their parents were found to be significantly more dependent than employed students who do not reside with their parents, findings which partly support Hypothesis (b). No significant D gender differences were found, as predicted, but a residence \times employment \times gender interaction, $F(1, 590) = 10.42, p < .001$, indicates that unemployed male students who reside with their parents, are significantly more dependent than all other groups. None of the covariates in this analysis was found to be significant.

Openness

An ANCOVA of O by residence, employment and gender - with religiosity and salary as covariates - yielded a main effect of residence, indicating that the O level of students who reside with their parents is lower than that of those who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 591) = 37.29, p < .001$, and a main effect of employment, indicating that the O level of unemployed students is lower than that of their employed counterparts, $F(1, 591) = 4.51, p < .05$, findings, hypothesized. A residence \times employment interaction, $F(1, 591) = 5.60, p < .05$, indicates that employed students who reside with their parents, are significantly more open than their unemployed counterparts, whereas such significant differences were not found between unemployed and employed students who do not reside with their parents, a finding which partly supports our prediction. No gender main effect, as predicted, was found, but a gender \times employment interaction, $F(1, 591) = 17.12, p < .001$, indicates that unemployed female students are significantly more open than their male counterparts, whereas so significant a gender difference was not found among employed students. A gender \times residence interaction, $F(1, 591) = 5.61, p < .05$, indicates that female students who reside with their parents are significantly more open than their male counterparts, whereas so significant a gender difference was not found among students who do not reside with their parents. Religiosity, as a covariate in this analysis, has a negative effect on O, $F(1, 591) = 14.16, p < .001$, whereas the effect of salary is non-significant.

Conscientiousness

An ANCOVA of C by residence, employment and gender - with religiosity and salary as covariates - yielded a main effect of residence, indicating that the C level of students who reside with their parents is lower than that of those who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 592) = 8.28, p < .005$, and a main effect of employment, indicating that the C level of unemployed students is lower than that of their employed counterparts,

$F(1, 592) = 8.37, p < .005$, as hypothesized. A significant residence \times employment interaction, $F(1, 592) = 8.84, p < .005$, indicates that unemployed students who reside with their parents are significantly less conscientious than their employed counterparts, and than both employed and unemployed students who do not reside with their parents, a finding which partly supports our prediction. A significant gender effect indicates that female students are more conscientious than their male counterparts, $F(1, 592) = 9.05, p < .005$; a gender \times residence effect indicates that female students who reside with their parents, are more conscientious than their male counterparts, whereas gender differences of this kind were not found among students who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 592) = 10.39, p < .001$. A gender \times employment interaction indicates that unemployed female students are more conscientious than their male counterparts, whereas gender differences of this kind were not found among employed students, $F(1, 592) = 4.33, p < .05$. Finally, salary - as a covariate in this analysis - has a significant positive effect on C, $F(1, 592) = 3.75, p < .05$.

Extraversion

An ANCOVA of E by residence, employment, and gender - with salary as a covariate - yielded a main effect of residence, indicating that the E level of students who reside with their parents is lower than that of those who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 592) = 17.60, p < .001$, and a main effect of employment, indicating that the E level of unemployed students is lower than that of their employed counterparts, $F(1, 592) = 13.35, p < .001$, as hypothesized. A residence \times employment interaction, $F(1, 592) = 9.37, p < .005$, indicates that unemployed students who reside with their parents are less extraverted than their employed counterparts and than both employed and unemployed students who do not reside with their parents, a finding which partly supports our prediction. A gender main effect indicates that female students are significantly more extraverted than their male counterparts, $F(1, 592) = 5.67, p < .05$; a gender \times residence interaction indicates that female students who reside with their parents are more extraverted than their male counterparts, whereas gender differences were not found among students who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 592) = 6.95, p < .01$; and a gender \times employment interaction indicates that unemployed female students are more extraverted than their male counterparts, whereas gender differences were not found among the employed students, $F(1, 592) = 9.92, p < .005$. Finally, the effect of salary, as a covariate in this analysis, is non-significant.

Agreeableness

An ANCOVA of A by residence, employment and gender - with salary, religiosity and army rank as covariates - yielded a main effect of residence, indicating that the A level of students who reside with their parents is higher than of those who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 590) = 15.20, p < .001$, and a main effect of employment, indicating that the A level of unemployed students is lower than that of their employed counterparts, $F(1, 592) = 13.35, p < .001$, as hypothesized. The residence \times employment interaction is non-significant, a finding which does not support our prediction. No significant main effect of gender was found, but a significant gender \times work interaction indicates that employed female students are more agreeable than their male counterparts, whereas a significant gender difference of this kind was not found among the unemployed students, $F(1, 590) = 5.89, p < .05$, and

a gender \times residence \times employment interaction indicates that male unemployed students who reside with their parents are more agreeable than other students, $F(1, 590) = 9.19, p < .005$. Finally, as far as the covariates are concerned, religiosity is positively related to A, $F(1, 590) = 7.37, p < .01$, army rank is negatively associated with A, $F(1, 590) = 20.41, p < .001$, and the effect of salary is non-significant.

Neuroticism

An ANCOVA of N by residence, employment and gender - with salary, religiosity and age as covariates - revealed a main effect of residence, indicating that the N level of students who reside with their parents is higher than that of those who do not reside with their parents, $F(1, 590) = 19.80, p < .001$, and a main effect of employment, indicating that the N level of unemployed students is lower than that of their employed counterparts, $F(1, 590) = 10.71, p < .001$, as hypothesized. A residence \times employment interaction was found to be non-significant, a finding which does not support our prediction. No significant gender main effect was found, but a gender \times employment interaction suggests that employed female students are more neurotic than their male counterparts, whereas the reverse is suggested with regard to unemployed students, $F(1, 590) = 6.33, p < .05$. A significant gender \times residence \times employment interaction indicates that among students *who reside with their parents*, male unemployed students are more neurotic than their female counterparts, while no significant N difference was found among the employed students. Among students who do not reside with their parents, unemployed female students were found to be more neurotic than their male counterparts, with no such difference evident among the unemployed students, $F(1, 590) = 8.25, p < .005$. Finally, none of the covariates had a significant effect on this analysis.

Discussion

Western psychologies have traditionally given greater importance to self-development than to interpersonal relatedness, stressing the development of autonomy, independence and identity as central factors in the mature personality (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). The characteristics of dependent personality disorder demonstrate how dependency can be problematic: encouraging or allowing others to make most of one's important life decisions; subordination of one's own needs to those of others on whom one is dependent, and undue compliance with their wishes; unwillingness to make even reasonable demands on the people one depends on; feeling uncomfortable or helpless when alone, because of exaggerated fears of inability to care for oneself; preoccupation with fears of being abandoned by a person with whom one has a close relationship, and of being left to care for oneself; limited capacity to make everyday decisions without an excessive amount of advice and reassurance from others (World Health Organization, 1992).

The high correlation between D and N ($r = .80$) is supported by the conclusions of Bornstein and Cecero's (2000) meta-analysis, in which it was argued that D should show a large positive correlation with N because of common high levels of anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity and vulnerability, the only N facet that would negatively correlate with D being hostility. D is also strongly and negatively associated with C, the latter being, indeed, a good predictor of occupational success (Howard & Howard, 2001), which is an expression of independence.

Notwithstanding Freud's (1905/1953) allegation that love and work are the cornerstones of humanity (Erikson, 1963), with respect to most of the dependent variables (primarily D and N), far more significant differences were found between students who reside with their parents as opposed to those who do not, than between employed as opposed to unemployed students. Students who reside with their parents were found to be far more dependent, neurotic and agreeable, and less open, conscientious and extraverted than students who do not reside with their parents. Most Israeli students do not live with their parents during their army service; hence returning to live at home during undergraduate studies might be considered a developmental regression. Indeed, 57.8% of students who did not serve in the army and 77.8% of those who dropped out of the army, still reside with their parents, $\chi^2(5, N = 601) = 18.98, p < .005$.

Employed students are significantly less neurotic and dependent and more open, conscientious and extraverted than their unemployed counterparts, but less significantly so than students who reside with their parents as opposed to those who do not. Interestingly enough, gender differences *per se* were not found with respect to most of the dependent variables (notwithstanding the findings of a recent study among Israeli students; Rubinstein, 2005). Nonetheless, male unemployed students who reside with their parents seem to be the most maladjusted group, with the highest levels of D, N and A and the lowest levels of O, C and E. This particular group is in acute violation of gender expectations. While men are expected to be more independent and less neurotic than women, at least according to traditional stereotypes, these men are dependent on their parents with respect to both residence and livelihood.

The findings of this study would be incomplete without consideration of the parents of the students who live at home. Factor analyses, carried out by Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, and Widaman (2001), for example, revealed that the factors - anxiety about adolescent distancing and comfort with secure base role - both presented distinctive patterns of change in accordance with the age of their child. Parent reports indicated that healthy adult attachment styles were associated with lower anxiety and higher comfort scores; children of parents who had higher anxiety scores reported lower quality of attachment to both mothers and fathers. In yet another study it was found that dependent traits were uniquely associated with the onset of an anxiety disorder before a first episode of depression. Lack of parental care was associated with self-critical traits, and higher levels of these traits were associated with personality dysfunction, which in turn was associated with depression (Whiffen, Parker, Wilhelm, Mitchell, & Malhi, 2003). Sometimes adjustment comes at the price of conflictual independence from one's parents: Haemmerlie, Steen, and Benedicto (1994) found that greater alcohol use was associated with having achieved less conflictual independence from parents; the most frequent and strongest relationships occurred with respect to the mother-student relationship. A recent study among 115 late-adolescent Jewish women revealed that attachment to parents, separation from parents and Jewish identity collectively accounted for variance in psychological distress, as measured by anxiety, depression, self-esteem problems and interpersonal problems (Goldberg & O'Brien, 2005). A closely related study revealed that dependency would be more predictive of distress for children at sleep-away camp than at day camp. The specificity of dependency as a vulnerability factor during attachment-related transitions was supported by showing that children's level of self-criticism was not differentially related to distress for the three groups of campers (Fichman, Koestner, & Zuroff, 1997). In another study, late-adolescent eating disordered women reported significantly higher levels of maternal over-protectiveness during childhood and had significantly higher

levels of separation anxiety and lower healthy separation scores than non-eating disordered students (Rhodes & Kroger, 1992). Dependency was also found to be related to favourable representation of parents for friendly and submissive situations (Morgrain, 1998). It is therefore suggested that future research should focus on the personality and psychopathology of parents, whose early-adult offspring continue to reside at home, in order to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of this symbiotic parent-child relationship.

Clinical and theoretical implications

The identification of behavioural indicators of dependency may have theoretical, as well as clinical, implications regarding how we intervene with dependent clients. Implementing behavioural techniques simultaneously or even before psychodynamic techniques may be helpful with such young adults who still reside with their parents. Psychodynamic interpretation of the parent-child relationship may remain intellectual, rather than emotionally internalized, as long as the young adult still resides with his or her parents and/or still does not earn his or her living. Some circumstances, such as residing with parents at a certain age or completely relying on them financially, may prevent any progress towards independence, no matter how valuable the insights gained in therapy may be. The therapist should play the role of the dependent client's ally in his or her struggle for independence, which may mean, in some cases, joining the client side against an anxious, over-protective, independence-limiting parent and playing the role of an alternative, supportive and yet independence-facilitating parent.

Methodological limitations

The present study used a cross-sectional, correlational design, hence it does not elucidate the mechanisms behind problematic dependency. Longitudinal studies, targeted at the detection of the parent-offspring relationship, may reveal more subtle issues regarding dependency. Such longitudinal studies may also explore specific defence mechanisms of parents who limit the autonomy of their offsprings.

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