



# A test of the trait-interpersonal model of suicide proneness in emerging adults



Robert J. Cramer<sup>a,\*</sup>, Claire E. Moore<sup>b</sup>, Claire N. Bryson<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Old Dominion University, United States

<sup>b</sup> University of Alabama, United States

<sup>c</sup> Sam Houston State University, United States

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 5 November 2015

Received in revised form 27 June 2016

Accepted 11 July 2016

Available online 20 July 2016

### Keywords:

Suicide

Perceived burdensomeness

Thwarted belonging

Big 5

Neuroticism

Extraversion

Emerging adults

Trait-interpersonal

## ABSTRACT

The present study tests the trait-interpersonal model of suicide, an approach integrating both the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality and Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTs). Survey data in an emerging adult sample ( $n = 572$ ) yielded the following prominent predictors of elevated suicide proneness: (1) neuroticism (positively) and openness (positively) predicted suicide proneness (accounting for the IPTs and trait-interpersonal pathways), (2) neuroticism-perceived burdensomeness/thwarted belonging/acquired capability mediation pathways were observed, (3) an extraversion-thwarted belonging pathway emerged, (4) an openness-acquired capability emerged, (5) agreeableness-perceived burdensomeness/thwarted belonging/acquired capability pathways emerged, and (6) conscientiousness-thwarted belonging/perceived burdensomeness pathways were observed. Findings are discussed with regard to trait-interpersonal literature, and public health and clinical suicide prevention strategies.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young adults in the United States (World Health Organization, 2012). Moreover, a one year prevalence estimate showed that 9.3 million adults aged 18 and older claimed to have suicidal thoughts (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Emerging adults, defined as those 18 to 25 years of age (Arnett, 2000), may be at specifically high risk; within emerging adult samples, one study found that 90% of young adults who had contemplated suicide had also considered various methods for killing themselves (Drum, Brownson, Burton Denmark, & Smith, 2009). Furthermore, 37% of those students made preparations such as writing a suicide note, or practicing committing suicide (Drum et al., 2009). From a cross cultural perspective, Saito, Klibert, and Langhinrichsen-Rohling (2013) found suicide proneness was prevalent in both Japanese and American emerging adults. Given that emerging adulthood is comprised of many transitory periods that can contribute to stress and exacerbate underlying psychiatric disorders (Blanco et al., 2008), it makes sense that this group may be at elevated risk for suicide proneness, defined in this instance as the propensity to experience past, present or future suicidal ideation and/or attempt (Osman et al., 2001). A review of population-specific risk factors include, but is not limited to,

difficulties with romantic relationships, friends, and family, and the desire to escape emotional and physical pain (e.g., Drum et al., 2009).

In light of the social and emotional risk factors, the present study examines suicide proneness among emerging adults through the lens of an integrated trait-interpersonal perspective. In doing so, we review both the Five-Factor Model of personality (FFM; McCrae & Costa) and the Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (Joiner, 2005; Van Orden et al., 2010) as independent predictive theoretical frameworks for suicide proneness. We then survey the limited trait-interpersonal literature to test empirically- and theoretically-supported trait-interpersonal mediation pathways to suicide proneness.

### 1.1. The Five-Factor Model and suicide

One way of understanding suicide among young adults is to investigate individual differences in personality and social-cognition. The FFM consists of five dimensions of personality: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1995; McCrae & John, 1998). Previous research suggests these personality traits can predispose individuals to engage in various health-related behaviors (e.g., eating behavior, Scoffier-Mériaux, Falzon, Lewton-Brain, Filaire, & d'Arripe-Longueville, 2015; substance use, Flory, Lynam, Milich, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2002) and/or maladaptive thinking styles (e.g., irrational beliefs, Sava, 2009). On the other hand, prominent characteristic thoughts and adaptations

\* Corresponding author at: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, United States.  
E-mail address: [rcramer@odu.edu](mailto:rcramer@odu.edu) (R.J. Cramer).

(e.g., thinking about death, attempting suicide) can also have a feedback loop-type influence on personality (McCrae & Costa, 2003); this may be especially true for emerging adults given that personality is very malleable during this time period (Noftle & Fleeson, 2010). Although research investigating FFM personality dimensions and emerging adults is limited, several studies have identified certain traits associated with suicide.

The predominant traits associated with elevated suicidal ideation or attempt likelihood in emerging adults are high neuroticism and low extraversion (Beautrais, Joyce, & Mulder, 1999; Chioqueta & Stiles, 2005; DeShong, Tucker, O'Keefe, Mullins-Sweatt, & Wingate, 2015; Fergusson, Woodward, & Horwood, 2000). For instance, DeShong et al. (2015) demonstrated that a current suicidal ideation (SI) group was distinguished from others by higher levels of angry hostility, depressiveness, self-consciousness, and vulnerability (i.e., components of neuroticism) and lower levels of excitement seeking and positive emotions (i.e., facets of introversion). Chioqueta and Stiles (2005) reported similar findings insofar as neuroticism was positively correlated with SI, whereas extraversion was negatively correlated with SI. Kerby (2003) also found that higher neuroticism and lower extraversion contributed to SI. His findings also suggested that low agreeableness and low conscientiousness are associated with SI (Kerby, 2003). However, Velting (1999) noted that neuroticism only predicted SI in females, whereas conscientiousness only predicted SI in males.

While emerging adulthood literature is rather clear in indicating neuroticism and extraversion in suicide proneness, general adult literature may also be informative. For example, in a study of sexual minority adults, accounting for a variety of demographics and interactions with faith, neuroticism was positively associated with suicide proneness (Stroud, Cramer, LaGaurdia, Crosby, & Henderson, 2015). Indeed, much of the general adult literature echoes the primacy of high neuroticism and low extraversion in identifying elevated risk for suicide ideation and attempt (e.g., O'Boyle & Brandon, 1998). Other traits have been implicated in varying ways; among lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons, conscientiousness was found to be inversely related to suicide proneness (Stroud et al., 2015). Similarly, another study found that individuals who have lower scores of neuroticism and higher scores of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience are less likely to commit suicide (Livingston et al., 2015). Given the inconsistent associations of certain FFM traits with suicide indicators, an aim of the present study was to statistically assess the relative contributions of FFM traits in predicting suicide proneness within the broader test of the trait-interpersonal model.

### 1.2. *The Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide*

The Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTS) explains suicidal in terms of three components: thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, and acquired capability (Joiner, 2005; Van Orden et al., 2010). Joiner (2005) developed this theoretical framework based largely on observations of attempted and completed suicides. The IPTS posits that all three components exist on dimensional spectrums (Van Orden et al., 2010).

Thwarted belonging and perceived burdensomeness are thought to be cognitive styles or patterns characteristic of depressive thinking (Joiner, 2005). Defining features of thwarted belongingness include expressing that one is lonely (e.g., disrupted family life) or feeling one has a lack of reciprocal care (e.g., no one to rely on during stressful life events; Van Orden et al., 2010). Individuals experiencing perceived burdensomeness (e.g., self-hatred) may believe they are an inconvenience to family members, friends and society as a whole. Both of these interpersonal constructs are thought to enhance the cognitive desire to die by suicide. The last component, acquired capability, is comprised of habituation to death and pain (e.g., via child abuse, combat exposure) that prepare an individual for the behavioral act of suicide attempt (Van Orden et al., 2010). In total, the IPTS maintains that those who experience elevated levels of all three constructs are at the greatest

risk for lethal suicide attempt, whereas suicidal ideation is driven by a combination of high perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belonging.

Empirical data has shown that thwarted belongingness alone does not predict suicidal ideation, whereas perceived burdensomeness on its own had a positive relationship with suicidal ideation (O'Keefe et al., 2014; Van Orden, Witte, Gordon, Bender, & Joiner, 2008). However, Van Orden et al. (2008) found that those who experience both thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness are at greater risk for suicidal ideation. In terms of acquired capability, components such as impulsivity raise the possibility that emerging adults may be at specific risk for increased acquired capability, as college students more frequently engage in impulsive behavior such as binge drinking (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Kazemi, Wagenfeld, Van Horn, Levine, & Dmochowski, 2011).

### 1.3. *Trait-interpersonal model literature*

Two studies (DeShong et al., 2015; Ireland & York, 2012) have examined basic associations between FFM traits and IPTS constructs. Most germane to the present study, in a sample of emerging adults, DeShong et al. (2015) demonstrated the following associations of FFM traits with IPTS constructs: (1) neuroticism (depressiveness and self-consciousness facets) positively predicted thwarted belonging, (2) extraversion (gregariousness, excitement-seeking, and positive emotions facets) negatively predicted thwarted belongingness, (3) agreeableness (trust, compliance and altruism facets) negatively predicted thwarted belongingness, (4) neuroticism (depressiveness, self-consciousness, and vulnerability facets) positively predicted perceived burdensomeness, and (5) extraversion (positive emotions) positively predicted perceived burdensomeness. Limitations of this study included mistakenly asserting the novelty of trait-IPTS analyses (see Cramer, Stroud, Fraser, & Graham, 2014; Cramer et al., 2012), failing to incorporate acquired capability, and neglecting to examine potentially mediating pathways from FFM traits to suicide via the IPTS. In their testing of IPTS constructs on suicidal ideation in female prisoners, Ireland and York (2012) noted that specific acquired capability aspects (i.e., drug abuse, reckless driving, and history of self-harm) were associated with elevated suicidal desire. Moreover, they reported a pattern of elevated extraversion associated with increased risk for self-injury (including suicidal desire; Ireland & York, 2012).

Consistent with this small body of literature, Cramer et al. (2012, 2014) have put forth a trait-interpersonal model of suicide proneness. Some of the key theoretical tenets preserved from FFM and IPTS literatures include: (1) examination of all FFM traits is advantageous in order to capture a comprehensive picture of traits (as some may demonstrate population or situationally-specific associations with suicide), (2) the Five-Factor Theory (FFT McCrae & Costa, 2003) concept of characteristic adaptations holds in that IPTS constructs reflect social-cognitive (i.e., perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness) and emotional/behavioral (i.e., acquired capability) manifestations of personality. The trait-interpersonal model digresses from traditional FFM and IPTS literatures, however, in important ways. Most importantly, contrary to the IPTS (an interactive/moderation model) the trait-interpersonal model posits that individual IPTS constructs can serve as indirect or mediating pathways to elevated suicide risk (Cramer et al., 2014). That is, high levels of both cognitions (for suicidal desire) and all three IPTS constructs (for suicide attempt) do not need to be present for increased suicide risk to occur. The trait-interpersonal perspective also departs from the IPTS in that its pathways will vary by population (due to situationally unique stressors or unique trait manifestations for a respective population).

Indeed, the limited trait-interpersonal empirical literature bears out population specific differences. In a sample of Australian male pre-incarcerated offenders, Cramer et al. (2012) tested each IPTS variable as a mediator of the neuroticism-suicide proneness and extraversion-proneness associations. The following indirect trait-interpersonal

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889680>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889680>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)