

Is Reassurance Seeking Specific to Depression?

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The current study examined the psychometrics of a measure of Anxious Reassurance Seeking. Joiner and colleagues (1995) define Excessive Reassurance Seeking as a relatively stable tendency to frequently elicit reassurance about one's worth from close others despite previously receiving this reassurance. They further hypothesized that Excessive Reassurance Seeking is specific to depression. In contrast, Anxious Reassurance Seeking may be defined as a tendency to ask for reassurance based on apprehension about the future, worries, and decision-making. Although long discussed as a clinical phenomenon related to anxiety disorders, no one has systematically defined or measured it. In this study we developed and examined the psychometric properties of a self-report measure of Anxious Reassurance Seeking. One hundred and seven participants completed an anonymous online survey comprised of 11 self-report measures. The validity, reliability, and factor structure were examined. It was found to be highly reliable and contained two factors: Facet 1 (engaging in reassurance seeking behavior) and Facet 2 (close-other annoyance with the reassurance seeking behavior). Both facets were highly correlated with worry. We also investigated whether Excessive Reassurance Seeking is specific to depressive symptoms or if previously neglected variables, like worry or Intolerance of Uncertainty, are better predictors. When worry was added to the model, depressive symptoms no longer significantly correlated with Excessive Reassurance Seeking. Then when Intolerance of Uncertainty was examined, it significantly correlated with Excessive Reassurance Seeking and depressive symptoms were no longer significantly associated. Taken together, these results suggest that reassurance seeking is not specific to depression as previously believed. Reassurance seeking extends beyond seeking confirmation of worth and approval to seeking assurance about worries. Moreover, even the association between depressed mood and reassurance seeking about one's worth and approval appear to be largely shared with worry and Intolerance of Uncertainty.