
The relationship between experiential avoidance, experiential avoidance in demanding and daily situations and depression within the Twente region in the Netherlands.

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Abstract

Orientation: It is already known, that experiential avoidance in the long-term predicts depression. However, when experiential avoidance is regarded in the short-term context of daily, demanding situations, it might initially be negatively related to depression as it avoids negative affect of this situation.

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between experiential avoidance, experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression within the Twente region in the Netherlands.

Motivation for the study: This study was conducted in order to specify the effect that experiential avoidance has on depression, depending on the context where it is used. When experiential avoidance is applied to one demanding, daily situation, there exist no research about its relation to depression. In this paper this relation is examined.

Research method: A exploratory and descriptive, cross-sectional design was employed with electronic-based online surveys. In order to determine the relationship between the variables, the Pearson Correlation coefficients were computed and a linear regression was conducted.

Main findings: It was found that both, experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations, are positively related to depression. Also experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations are positively related to each other.

Practical implications: As experiential avoidance is an important construct in therapy, for example in ACT, more research should be done on its occurrence in daily life.

Contribution: This study contributes to clinical Psychology through investigating in the relations between experiential avoidance, experiential avoidance in a demanding, daily situation and depression.

Abstract

Oriëntatie: Het is als bekend, dat experientele vermijding in het long-termijn depressie voorspeld. Als experientele vermijding wordt geobserveerd in een korte-termijn in het context van dagelijkse, uitdagende situaties, het kan ten eerst negatief gerelateerd zijn aan depressie omdat het het negatief affectie van de situatie vermijdt.

Onderzoeksdoel: Het doel was het onderzoeken van het relatie tussen experientele vermijding, experientele vermijding in uitdagende, dagelijkse situaties and depressie in de Twente regio in de Nederlands.

Motivatie voor het onderzoek: Het onderzoek werd gedaan om het effect van experientele vermijding op depressie te specificeren, met betrekking tot de context waarin het is gebruikt. Als experientele vermijding wordt gebruikt in een uitdagende, dagelijkse situatie, er is geen onderzoek gedaan over het relatie met depressie.

Onderzoeksmethode: Een exploratief end beschrijvend, cross-sectional onderzoeksdesign weer toegepast, met elektronisch-gebaseerd online vragenlijsten. Om het relatie tussen de variabelen te onderzoeken, de Pearson Coefficient werd berekend en een linker regressie analyse werd uitgevoerd.

Praktische implicaties: Omdat experientele vermijding een belangrijk construct voor therapie is, bijvoorbeeld in ACT, er zou meer onderzoek gedaan worden naar zijn incident in dagelijks leven.

Contributie: Deze onderzoek draagt bij aan de klinische psychologie door onderzoek naar de relatie van experientele vermijding, experientele vermijding in uitdagende, dagelijkse situaties and depressie.

Introduction

Depression is ranked among the most momentous, serious and most frequent mental diseases (Busch, Maske, Ryl, Schlack, Hapke, 2013). According to estimations from the Global Burden Disease Study from the WHO, depression is a major cause for disability due to disease (Vos et al., 2013) and is responsible for a great amount of the global disease burden (Murray et al., 2013). There are many possible reasons and risk factors that can explain why people develop depression. They can range from genetic factors or personality traits to traumatic events (Bouteyre, Maurel & Bernaud, 2007). Another cause for the development of depression can emerge through engaging in the wrong coping behavior (Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth & Steger, 2006). Especially experiential avoidance as coping behavior can have negative effects on the psychological health, even though people initially use it in order to avoid negative experiences. This leads to a temporary decrease in negative affect, but is counterproductive in the long-term (Kashdan et al., 2006). Experiential avoidance is associated with a more frequent experience of negative life events and negative affect and also with reduced frequency of positive events and positive affect (Kashdan et al., 2006). Therefore it can be highly associated with the development of depression. In fact, using experiential avoidance as a coping strategy, is the strongest predictor for emotional distress like depression (Kashdan et al., 2006; Seiffge-Krenkel & Klessinger, 2000).

People are thus using experiential avoidance as a strategy for avoiding any kind of negative affect. Negative affect can arise out of a lot of reasons, for instance a major life event or even a traumatic event. Concerning these events, a lot of investigation is already done and associates them with the development of depression (Chapman, Gratz & Brown, 2006). However, people are more regular confronted with negative affect through daily, demanding situations instead of traumatic events. These situations are less severe than traumatic events, but occur regularly in life. In this research they are defined as „demanding and daily situations“ and were perceived as stressful, challenging or unpleasant by the participants. As experiential avoidance indeed offers a temporary decrease of negative affect, this effect might be able to observe when the use of experiential avoidance is regarded in a more concrete situation like this. This is why this paper aims to measure the extent of experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and examines its relationship with depression.

Literature Review

Experiential avoidance

As the avoidance of harmful and dangerous events originally serves the survival, avoidant behavior is a comprehensible and natural reaction towards the experience of negative affect (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). All animals and humans are engaging in this behavior to a certain degree (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). From the evolutionary perspective the avoidant behavior is reduced to negative external cues, for instance loud distressing noises or smoke (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). Smoke represents a warning for possible danger and humans would run away from it. However, humans do not only reduce their avoidant behavior to external cues, but engage in avoidant behavior also when exposed to private internal events, like emotions or thoughts (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). This raises the question: why are humans also avoiding internal cues, that normally do not warn for emerging danger?

According to Hayes and colleagues, (1996) this phenomenon is interrelated with humans' usage of language. The verbal expression of negative experiences or feelings can lead to the reexperience of them, which motivates people to also avoid these internal cues of negative affect. Actually, it is rather paradoxical that the avoidance of negative affect leads to a more frequent and/or higher intensity of experiencing it (Kashdan et al., 2006). This phenomenon can be explained through the Relational Frame Theory (Hayes, 2016). This theory implies that things, events or emotions people are afraid of and want to avoid deliberately, take much more space in their minds and thoughts. This phenomenon is a consequence of human language and cognition, which is responsible for the ability to relate things to arbitrary contexts. Arbitrary relations can only be made by humans because they are able to abstract attributions of a relation and integrate them into a context. Arbitrary relations have the consequence that people learn relations between things and events that originally were not related. Relations are formed by humans on basis of arbitrary cues through verbal or cognitive activities that are related to events or things. All things that are related to an event or situation are called the „frame“ of such a situation (Hayes, 2016). For instance, when experiencing pain regularly, people get afraid of this experience and will try to avoid it. Thereby they concentrate on details and possible triggers while experiencing pain, much more than a person would do who does not experience pain that regularly. All these recognized details, possible triggers and cues are then related to the context of experiencing the pain which make the „frame“

grow. As consequence, the fear of the pain can emerge through everything that belongs to its frame and is experienced more frequently and intensive (Hayes, Levin, Plung-Vilardaga, Vilatte & Pistorello, 2013).

The crucial outcome of the Relational Framework Theory and all the processes that were described, is, that regarding the long-term effect, the fear and avoidance of experiencing negative events is related to the development of psychopathologies or the maintenance of them (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). In fact the use of experiential avoidance contributes more to psychopathology than the intensity, frequency or negative valance of the actual emotional experience which is avoided (Hayes et al., 1999). It is thus important which coping style is used from people, in order to deal with depressive feelings. In the study of Seiffge-Krenke¹ and Klessinger (2000) it was found, that adolescents who engage in avoidant coping, suffer significantly more from depression than those who engage in approach-oriented coping, like approaching the problem and figuring out a solution. Similar results provide the research from Mellick, Vanwoerden & Sharp, (2017) and Bouteyre and colleagues, (2007). So essentially humans are exacerbating their negative experience through engaging in the wrong coping behavior. In contrast to that, based on the Relational Framework Theory and its working mechanism, it can be concluded, that avoidant behavior reduces negative experiences in short-term, because the triggers of negative experience are avoided (Boulanger, Hayes, & Pistorello, 2010; Kashdan et al., 2006 & Chapman et al., 2006). That is why the usage of experiential avoidance as a coping strategy in long-term should be distinguished from the usage in short-term, which is done in this paper.

Experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situation

Events that require the use of coping strategies are not only major events in life, like a diagnosis of a serious disease. A demanding situation in daily life might be sufficient to elicit that people react with avoidant coping behavior. Research indicates that daily, stressing situations, are quite strongly related to depression (Bouteyre et al., 2007; Vinkers et al., 2014; Weinstein et al., 2004), which is why coping strategies that are applied in these situation are important for the prevention of depression. Experiential avoidance seems to be interesting to regard in demanding, daily situations, as its effect on depression might be negative in this contest. Engaging in experiential avoidance reduces the discomfort of a situation, which

should lead to less depression (Boulanger et al., 2010). In contrast it is known, that the general tendency to cope avoidant is related positively with depression (e.g. Kashdan et al., 2006). Experiential avoidance thus might have a different influence on depression, depending on whether it is regarded as a general tendency or in a concrete demanding, daily situation (Kashdan et al., 2006 & Chapman et al., 2006). One further reason to assume that experiential avoidance might initially inhibit depression arises from the fact that it is a basic instinct that originally served the survival (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). Experiential avoidance was thus something that was necessary in order to survive, which gives reason to assume that it not only has negative influence on humans.

Until now, research concerning experiential avoidance is reduced on measuring a general tendency of its use. It appears that there exists no research that focuses on people's avoidant behavior in demanding, daily situations and its relation to depression. This paper introduces the term „experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations“. In this study, the participants were asked to relive the most recent situation in their daily life that has been stressful, challenging or unpleasant. According to this, the construct „experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations“ is defined in this paper as the extent of experiential avoidance that is used on the last stressful, challenging or unpleasant situation in daily life.

Depression

With 6 % prevalence globally, depression is one of the most occurring mental diseases (Penninx, Milaneschi, Lamers & Vogelzangs, 2013). Referring to the population of Germany, where most of the participants from the current study came from, the prevalence of depression in adults is at 6.4% (Luck et al., 2017).

When referring to depression, this paper refers to major depression. This is defined from the National Institute of Mental Health as experiencing symptoms of depression most of the day and nearly every day for two weeks, while they interfere with the normal daily and social life (National Institute for Mental Health, 2016). Depression is accompanied by many symptoms, like for example a loss of interest in one's appearance or their social environment, loss of enjoyment in activities and feelings of gloom (Penninx et al., 2013). Furthermore, fatigue, a feeling of restlessness, difficulties with sleeping and concentrating and appetite and weight changes are common symptoms (National Institute for Mental Health, 2016). When

suffering from strong depression also thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts accompany the disease (National Institute for Mental Health, 2016).

When people undergo a difficult phase in life, for instance, dealing with somebody's death, the experience of depression is a normal reaction (Penninx et al., 2013). However, when it develops into a chronic experience that disturbs daily life and reduces the quality of life, people might suffer from major depression (Penninx et al., 2013). Further risk factors for the development of a major depression are a family history of depression, major life changes or traumas and physical diseases and medications. Furthermore, also stress in daily life can have a strong impact on depression (Vinkers et al., 2014, Weinstein et al., 2004; Bouteyre et al., 2007).

Current research

The aim of this study is to examine what effect the use of experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situation have on depression. Furthermore, it is investigated in the relationship between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and experiential avoidance. For this purpose, based on literature, the following research questions are stated:

1. What is the relationship between experiential avoidance, experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression?
2. What effect does experiential avoidance have on depression?

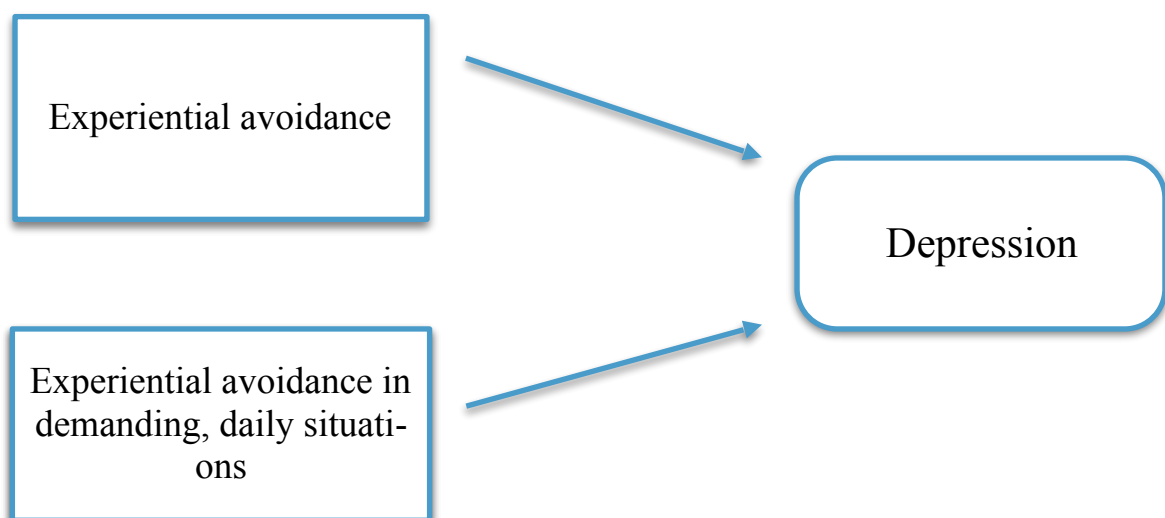


Figure 1. Conceptual research model for this paper

Based on the research questions the following hypothesis are stated:

H1_a: Experiential avoidance is positively related with the extent of depression.

H1_b: Experiential avoidance in a demanding, daily situation is negatively related with the extent of depression.

H1_c : Experiential avoidance in a demanding, daily situation is positively related with experiential avoidance.

H2: Experiential avoidance predicts depression.

Methods

Design

A descriptive, cross-sectional and electronic-based survey design was employed to gather data about the relations between experiential avoidance, experiential avoidance in a demanding, daily situations and depression.

Participants

A convenience sampling strategy was employed ($n = 131$) to select a sample of individuals from the Twente region in the Netherlands. Over a period of four weeks, participants were recruited via the social networks WhatsApp and Facebook. Respondents that were younger than 18 could not participate in the survey. The majority of the participants were single (45.9%) German speaking (92.5%) females (67.2%) between the ages of 18 and 30 years old (68.2%). The highest educational status the majority of the participants have is the Higher Secondary Education (58.6 %).

Table 1

Demographic variables (n=131)

Variable	Category	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	88	67.2
	Male	43	32.8

Variable	Category	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percentage (%)
Age	18 - 30	88	68.2
	31-40	14	10.9
	41-50	19	14.7
	51-60	6	4.7
	61-70	1	.8
	71-80	1	.8
Nationality	German	123	92.5
	Dutch	3	2.3
	English	1	.8
	Others	6	4.5
Educational Status	Vocational Education	2	1.5
		10	7.5
	Secondary Education	78	58.6
	Higher Secondary Education	21	15.8
		21	15.8
	Bachelor's degree	1	.8
	Master's degree Doctorate Degree		
Marital Status	Single	61	45.9
	With partner	51	38.3
	Married/registered partnership	21	15.8

Instruments

All instruments that were used are to be found in the Appendix A.

Self-developed demographic questionnaire. At the begin of the survey, a self-developed biographic questionnaire had to be fulfilled. The 5 questions shortly retrieved gender, age, nationality, educational status and marital status from the participants.

Experiential Avoidance. In order to measure the extent of experiential avoidance the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (AAQ II) is used (Hayes, Strosahl, Wilson, Bissett, 2004). This questionnaire measures a construct that is mutable referred to as acceptance, experiential avoidance and psychological inflexibility. It is composed out of 10 items and constituted as a 7 point Likert scale, ranging from 1= never true to 7= always true. One example of one item is: *I'm afraid of my feelings*. One example of an reversed item is: *It's okay if I re-*

member something unpleasant. That the AAQ II possesses adequate reliability and validity can be seen by the 3- and 12-month test-retest reliability that is .81 or .79 (Bond et al., 2011). Additionally, the cronbach's alpha from this sample is .83, which is also a satisfactory value.

Experiential Avoidance in demanding, daily situations. An adapted version of the 10 item AAQ II, developed by the researcher of this study (2017), was employed to measure experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations. In contrast to the original questionnaire, the adapted version asks about the same feelings of avoidance as the original version, just applied to a concrete situation. Therefore an introduction text was added, that constructed the participant to relive a certain situation and answer the questions always with regard to it. Items were rated on a 6 point Likert Scale Ranging from 1= Agree to 6 = Disagree. Referring to the examples named before the new item that referred to a demanding, daily situation was: *I was afraid of my feelings in this situation.* The example of the reversed item became to *It's okay to remember this unpleasant situation.* The 3- and 12-month test-retest reliability of the original questionnaire is .81 and .79 and the mean cronbach's alpha was .84 (Bond et al., 2011). The high reliability of this questionnaire was not changed in this sample ($\alpha = .84$).

Depression. For measuring the score of depression people exhibit, the depression sub scale of the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), developed by Zigmond & Snaith (1983) was used. It is a self-assessment scale and detects states of emotional distress characterized by anxiety and depression (Snell et al., 1995). For this research, only the questions that are relevant for detecting depression were used. The items describe an internal state of feeling and the participant has to choose the answer that describes his feelings in the past week. The 4-point Likert Scale ranges from very often (0) to not at all (3). An example for a depression item states: *I can laugh and see the funny side of things.* The internal consistency of the depression sub scale is acceptable with a Cronbach's alpha of .77 (Crawford, Henry, Crombie & Taylor, 2001), which was also the calculated alpha value of the scale in this study.

Procedure

Since this study makes part of a larger data collection, 4 other researchers were involved in collecting the data. According to that, the full questionnaire is composed out of several different questionnaires, of which the relevant questionnaires for this study are mentioned in this paper. After finishing the compilation of the questionnaires with the program 'Qualtrics',

every group member asked about 30 people to fill them in. The period of the data collection lasted from the April 6th to the May 3rd. The people were sampled through the convenience sampling method in the Twente region of Enschede, Netherlands. The respondents were contacted via Facebook or WhatsApp, and were free to answer the questionnaire. At the beginning of the survey the respondents were informed about the nature of the study. They were told that the questionnaire is carried out within the framework of the Bachelor Thesis in Psychology of the University of Twente. Furthermore, the participants were told that the research project examines how people cope on different ways with difficult or aversive situations and what factors are related to these coping styles. After informing the participants about the content of the study, they received the instruction for participating in the study. The investigation took about 30 minutes to complete. The respondents were instructed that it always comes to the feelings of them and that there are no right or wrong answers. Further they were informed that the research results are used exclusively for the scientific work and the data will be fully anonymized. Finally, the participants were told that their participation is voluntary and that they may stop at any time with the questionnaire survey. In the case of further questions or notes, contacts were deposited which the respondents could use. After the instructions, participants were able to answer the questions by selecting the answer possibility that fits the best to them. For every question, an answer had to be given in order to be able to go to the next question. With this option, it was ensured that every question was answered. Within a period of four weeks the data was collected and stored. In order to begin with the statistical analysis on SPSS, the data set was exported with legacy format as a SPSS data set.

Data analyse

Data was processed through the use of SPSS v 24 (IBM, 2015). First, Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis and Cronbach's Alphas) were used to obtain an overview of the data and to test for normality. The normality of the data is given when Skewness and Kurtosis are > -1 and < 1 . The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the measures and was regarded as acceptable when $\alpha > 0.7$. Second, Pearson Correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the nature of the relationship among the study variables. The effect sizes for the correlations ranged from 0.3 (medium) and 0.5 (large) and statistical significance was set at cut off score $p < .05$ (Field,

2009). Third, a linear regression was used to assess the individual contribution from experiential avoidance on depression.

Results

First, the results of the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha are represented. Second, the Pearson's Correlation Coefficients are given and finally, the results of the linear regression.

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas and correlations

The mean score of Experiential Avoidance was $M = 3.28$ ($SD = .96$) and the score of Experiential Avoidance in Demanding, Daily Situations had a mean score of $M = 3.13$ ($SD = 1.04$). The mean score of the Depression scale was $M = 1.42$ with $SD = .42$. Before a correlation analysis could be conducted the study variables had to be analyzed for normality which was done through viewing the Skewness and Kurtosis. Seeing that none of the scales showed levels higher than 1, it can be concluded that the data was normally distributed. A summary of the descriptive analysis is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha	Pearson's Correlation Coefficients		
						1.	2.	3.
1. Experiential Avoidance	3.28	.96	.59	.59	.83	1	-	-
2. Experiential Avoidance in demanding, daily situations	3.13	.10	.04	-.80	.84	.70*	1	-
3. Depression	1.42	.42	.42	-.55	.77	.67*	.50*	1

Note. * $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Given the normality of the data, a Pearson's correlation was computed to determine the relationship between Experiential Avoidance, Experiential Avoidance in Demanding, Daily Situations and Depression. The results are also given in Table 2. They show that Depression was moderately and positive related with Experiential Avoidance ($r = .67$, large effect, $p < .001$) as well as with Experiential Avoidance in Demanding, Daily Situations ($r = .50$, large effect, $p < .001$). Regarding these results, the hypothesis 1_a is accepted whereas the hypothesis 1_b is not accepted. Furthermore, Experiential Avoidance and Experiential Avoidance in Demanding, Daily Situations had a strong correlation with $r = .70$ (large effect, $p < .001$), but not a total overlap. According to this result, hypothesis 1_c is confirmed.

Regression analysis

A linear regression analysis was calculated to determine whether Experiential Avoidance could predict Depression. Experiential Avoidance was thus used as independent variable with dependent variable depression. In this model Experiential Avoidance did explain 45.2% of the variance of the depression rate ($R^2 = .452$, $F_{(1,113)} = 93.26$, $p < .001$).

Table 4

Summary of the linear Regression Analysis with Depression as dependent variable

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	p	F	R	R ²	ΔR^2
	B	SE	Beta							
(Constant)	3.16	.73			4.31	.00	93.26	.67	.45	.45
Experiential avoidance	.21	.02	.67		9.65	.00				

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relation between experiential avoidance, experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression within the Twente region in the Netherlands. In general it was found that experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in

demanding, daily situations are both positively related to depression. Similarly, experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations are positively related. The results of the regression analysis indicate also that experiential avoidance is a significant predictor for depression.

The relation between experiential avoidance and depression

As stated in hypothesis 1_a, it was expected that experiential avoidance is positively related to depression. The results provide support for this hypothesis as there was found a significant relation between these variables. These findings are consistent with the results of the study from Kashdan and colleagues (2006) and Robertson (2009). Hayes and colleagues (2013) stated, that avoiding a negative inner experience leads to the counterproductive effect of increasing the negative feelings of the experience. This provides explanation for the positive relation between experiential avoidance and depression.

Furthermore, according to hypothesis 2 it was expected that experiential avoidance predicts depression. The results from the regression analysis show, that experiential avoidance predicts depression significantly as it explains 45% of the conducted model. This result thus provides additional evidence for several studies that identified experiential avoidance as a significant predictor for depression (Mellick et al., 2017; Bouteyre et al., 2007; & Seiffge-Krenkel & Klessinger, 2000). An explanation for the results of this study is, that the use of experiential avoidance as a coping strategy is related to depression because people are achieving the opposite of what they originally wanted to achieve. Instead of avoiding the negative affect, people are getting in a vicious circle: They relate more and more things to the event that is intended to be avoided, which makes it more difficult to ignore it (Hayes et al., 2013; Hayes, 2016 & Hayes et al., 1999). Hayes and colleagues (1999) even found that experiential avoidance may contribute more to depression, than the actual intensity and frequency of the experience that is avoided.

The relation between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression

The hypothesis 1_b approaches the new construct in this study - experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations - and its relationship with depression. It states, that experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations, is negatively correlated with the extent of depression.

on. According to that the hypothesis cannot be accepted. In contrast, experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations is with a large effect positively related to depression. One possible explanation for the unexpected findings might be given by the large correlation coefficient between the variables experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations ($r = .70$). This gives reason to assume, that people that cope avoidant in a demanding, daily situation, are also likely to use avoidance as a strategy in other situations. Using experiential avoidance as a coping strategy in general, is found to be related to depression (Mellick et al., 2017; Bouteyre et al., 2007; & Seiffge-Krenke1 & Klessinger, 2000), and this could explain the positive relation between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression. This assumption can be supported by literature. For example Bond and colleagues (2011) stated that psychological inflexibility is highly related with the use of experiential avoidance. Psychological inflexibility indicates that people are not able to choose their coping styles flexible. People that engage in experiential avoidance tend thus to be inflexible in their use of coping strategies (Bond et al., 2011). This would deliver an explanation why there was also found a positive relation between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression in this sample (Hayes et al., 1999; Mellick et al., 2017; Bouteyre et al., 2007; & Seiffge-Krenke1 & Klessinger, 2000).

The relation between experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situation

The Hypothesis 1_c states that experiential avoidance is positively related with experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations. This hypothesis can be accepted as there was found a significant positive correlation between experiential avoidance and experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations ($r = .70$). This result leads to the assumption that people, that use experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situation, are likely to use it other situations, as well. One explanation for this might be given by the psychological inflexibility, that is related with experiential avoidance (Bond et al., 2011). As already discussed in the previous paragraph, inflexibility concerning the choice of coping styles is related to experiential avoidance, what makes it probable that people who are using experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations, also use experiential avoidance in general as strategy.

Limitations

In order to interpret the results of this study, the limitations have to be considered. The main issue of this research is the new variable „experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations“. The questionnaire that retrieved this variable was a changed version of the AAQ II. In order to inquire information about experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations the statements of the original AAQ II were changed. The statements were adjusted, so that they referred these situations. Additionally an introductory text was given at the beginning which instructed people to think of the last stressing, unpleasant or challenging situation they experienced in their daily life and to answer the following question with this situation in their mind. The alpha coefficient of this changed version of the AAQ II was still $\alpha = .84$, so the reliability of the test was not changed. Nevertheless the adjustments, may have influenced the validity of the questionnaire, what could also be a reason for the positive relation that was found between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression. The questionnaire was never used before and did not undergo tests of validity, so it cannot be stated that it is valid. However, it is not determined that the adjustments of the statements had a negative influence. According to Ebner-Priemer & Trull (2009) retrospective error is likely in self-reports. They can be high when measuring general tendencies of people because they have to reflect on their general feelings in the past, which can cause this error easily (Ebner-Priemer & Trull, 2009). Through focusing on one situation, like in the changed questionnaire, this error could possibly be minimized. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind, that the questionnaire is not proven as valid.

Another limitation emerges out of the nationality of the participants, who were mainly German (92.5%) and mainly in the age-category of 18-30 (68.2%). This sample might not be representative for the whole Twente region. Furthermore, the questionnaires were in English, which also might state a problem for the sample, as it is mainly composed out of German respondents. This might have an influence on the ability to understand and interpret the questionnaires.

When regarding the strengths of this research, the high reliability of the questionnaires used has to be mentioned. The Cronbach's alpha of all three questionnaires was around $\alpha = .80$. Furthermore, the survey design has no unethical issues because the participants were not manipulated, which avoided mental stress. Also physical stress was excluded because the sur-

vey could be fulfilled from home and the point-and-click response made it simple to use it (Van Selm, & Jankowski, 2004). Additionally, by using questionnaires that could be filled in anonymously, at home and with flexible time-management, the participants could give the answers in privacy with honesty and calmness. Finally, one strength is that the study was conducted in a short period of time and with no expenses. Nevertheless a great response of participants could be achieved (n=131). Another possible strength might be, that the self-developed AAQ-II for demanding, daily situations minimizes the retrospective bias because it focuses on the most recent stressful situation. It might be easier for participants to evaluate their extent of avoidance, based on a concrete situation rather than as a general tendency (Ebner-Priemer & Trull, 2009). However, based on the not proven validity of the self-developed questionnaire, this strength has to be considered with caution.

Further research

Regarding the relation between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression, the results of this study were unexpected. One possible explanation for this could be the validity of the self-developed questionnaire. In order to investigate in this relationship in a more valid way, a longitudinal research would offer better insight into it. For example, participants could be asked to evaluate their avoidant behavior and their level of depression as direct as possible after a demanding, daily situation within a period of one month. This would provide more detailed data about the short-term effect of experiential avoidance on depression. This method of data collection was not within the limits of this study.

Furthermore, as the inflexibility concerning the choice of coping strategies is strongly related to experiential avoidance and even suggested as the main reason for its negative effect on humans' health (Folkman et al., 1986), it is important for future research, to investigate in this variable. For example it could be examined how the inflexibility does mediate the effect that experiential avoidance has on depression. This would provide better insight into the working mechanism of experiential avoidance and thus also provide a better foundation for its treatment. For instance, the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) aims to increase psychological flexibility and states it as the central concept of the therapy. Further evidence over how experiential avoidance might be influenced by psychological inflexibility and how strong these are related to depression might offer worthy further information for this treat-

ment. For example, participants could be trained in the use of flexible coping strategies based on demanding, daily situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study confirms that experiential avoidance can predict depression, which supports the evidence from prior literature. Surprisingly, no negative relation between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression was found, but a positive. Psychological inflexibility might offer an explanation for this result, because it inhibits the application of other coping strategies. Furthermore, the results have to be regarded, considering the not proven validity of the questionnaire. This also could contribute to the unexpected results. Further research would be necessary to investigate more concrete in the relationship between experiential avoidance in demanding, daily situations and depression.

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Appendix A

Item Battery

Self-developed demographic questionnaire:

First, we would like to ask you for some background information.

What is your sex?

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)

How old are you? ____

What is your marital status?

- ☐ Single (1)
- ☐ With partner (2)
- ☐ Married/ registered partnership (3)
- ☐ Divorced (4)
- ☐ Widowed (5)

What is your nationality?

- ☐ German (1)
- ☐ Dutch (2)
- ☐ English (3)
- ☐ Others (4)

What is your highest educational qualification?

- ☐ Primary School (Grundschule, Basisschool) (1)
- ☐ Vocational Education (e.g. Hauptschule, LBO, VMBO) (2)
- ☐ Secondary Education (e.g. Realschule, MAVO) (3)
- ☐ Higher Secondary Education (e.g. Abitur, Fachhochschulreife, HAVO, VWO) (4)
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (5)
- ☐ Master's Degree (6)
- ☐ Doctorate Degree (7)

Avoidance and Action Questionnaire – II (AAQ-II):

ITEM	Never true (1)	Very sel- dom true (2)	Seldom true (3)	Someti- mes true (4)	Fre- quently true (5)	Almost always true (6)	Always true (7)
Its OK if I re- member some- thing unplea- sant. (1)							
My painful experiences and memories make it diffi- cult for me to live a life that I would value (2)							
I'm afraid of my feelings. (3)							
I worry about not being able to control my worries and feelings. (4)							
My painful memories prevent me from having a fulfilling life. (5)							
I am in control of my life. (6)							
Emotions cau- se problems in my life. (7)							
It seems like most people are handling their lives bet- ter than I am. (8)							
Worries get in the way of my success. (9)							

My thoughts and feelings do not get in the way of how I want to live my life. (10)							
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Self-developed AAQ-II for a demanding, daily situation:

This is the last questionnaire. It is again about aversive situations or experiences, but this time in a more specific context. We are interested in recently occurred situations that you perceived as stressful, challenging or unpleasant. Think of the most recent stressful or unpleasant event you encountered in the last day(s) and take a moment to try to relive it as vivid as possible.

Therefor you can use questions like: When did it happen? Where was I? Who was with me or involved? What happened? How did I feel?

ITEM	Agree (1)	Moderately agree (2)	Slightly agree (3)	Slightly disagree (4)	Moderately disagree (5)	Disagree (6)
It's okay to remember this unpleasant situation. (1)						
The painful experiences and memories from this situation and similar stressful situations make it difficult for me to live a life that I would value. (2)						
I was afraid of my feelings in this situation. (3)						
I was worrying about not being able to control my worries and feelings. (4)						

Painful memories from this situation and similar stressful situations prevent me from having a fulfilling life. (5)						
I felt I was in control of my life. (6)						
Emotions that arose in this situation caused problems in my life. (7)						
When I was in that situation, it seemed to me like most people are handling their lives better than I was. (8)						
My worries in this or similar situations got in the way of my success. (9)						
My thoughts and feelings in this or similar situations did not get in the way of how I want to live my life. (10)						

The Depression Scale from the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS):

ITEM	Almost never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Most of the time (3)	Almost always (4)
I feel as if I am slowed down (2)				
I still enjoy the things I used to enjoy (3)				
I can laugh and see the funny side of things (5)				
I look forward with enjoyment to things (8)				
I feel cheerful (9)				
I can enjoy a good book or radio or TV program (12)				
I have lost interest in my appearance (14)				