

THE JOINT EFFECTS OF AVOIDANCE
COPING AND PERSONALITY ON BURNOUT

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Psychology

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Rissa Cone

December, 2018

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ABSTRACT

There are many different coping styles, some healthier than others. I examined how an avoidant coping style, which is generally considered unhealthy, can be beneficial for some people. Among individuals low in neuroticism and low in extraversion, such coping styles as denial and disengagement might actually help reduce burnout. Those low in extraversion and high in neuroticism may also benefit from avoidance coping. However, individuals high in extraversion and low in neuroticism (and high in both) might have the opposite reaction to avoidance coping. With this study, I intended to examine how personality interacts with avoidance coping to affect burnout. Results revealed problems with the scales, main effects consistent with expectation, and mixed results with the form of the three-way interaction.

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People react to stressors in different ways. Some coping styles are generally more beneficial than others. Avoidance coping, a coping style generally considered maladaptive, is a combination of denial, mental disengagement, and behavioral disengagement. The effectiveness of avoidance coping may be dependent on personality differences. Two personality dimensions perhaps worth looking at in regards to coping are neuroticism and extraversion, as the other three (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) are less consistently correlated with coping (Watson et al., 1999; Semmer, 2006). Neuroticism refers to how upset individuals get in general as well as when something bad happens. A person high in neuroticism is considered neurotic, emotional, and troubled. Extraversion refers to how outgoing or social a person is. A person high in extraversion is full of energy, is the life of the party, and enjoys social gatherings.

I examined how avoidant coping styles can actually be beneficially for some people. Among individuals low in neuroticism and low in extraversion, such coping styles as denial and disengagement might actually help reduce burnout. Those low in extraversion and high in neuroticism may also benefit from avoidance coping. However, individuals high in extraversion and low in neuroticism (and high in both) might have the opposite reaction to avoidance coping. With this study, I intended to examine how personality interacts with avoidance coping to affect burnout.

Burnout

Burnout has had many definitions over the years. One of the first definitions came from Maslach (1982), who described burnout as a syndrome that occurs in employees

who deal with people and consists of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Emotional exhaustion is “compassion fatigue” that one experiences or the draining experience of being in contact with other people (Maslach, 1986). The employee feels used up or depleted. Depersonalization is a rude or insensitive response to others that may include withdrawing behaviors. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to the decline in one’s sense of achievement in one’s work. The employee does not feel cut out to do the work anymore and feels inadequate. As research on burnout continued, the term broadened to include all professions instead of just those in human services (e.g., nurses, teachers, and customer service). As the definition of burnout broadened to include more professions, Maslach created a survey designed for the general population.

Maslach created three subscales: exhaustion, cynicism and professional efficacy (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). Exhaustion includes references to both physical and emotional exhaustion but does not make direct reference to people as a source of exhaustion. Cynicism, replacing depersonalization, reflects indifference or a distance attitude toward work. And professional efficacy, similar to personal accomplishment, encompasses both social and nonsocial aspects of occupational accomplishment. Of the three subscales, exhaustion is the most widely studied and analyzed (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Scholars have also conceptualized burnout in terms of long-term exhaustion and diminished interest in work, the latter of which consists of two aspects: exhaustion and disengagement (Demerouti, 1999; Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). “Exhaustion is defined as a consequence of intensive physical, affective and cognitive strain, that is, as a

long-term consequence of prolonged exposure to certain job demands” (Demerouti, Mostert & Bakker, 2010, p. 210). The employee feels worn out and tired.

“Disengagement refers to distancing oneself from one’s work in general, work object and work content” (Demerouti et al., 2010, p. 210-211). The employee distances herself from the work and the people.

There are many work-related outcomes associated with burnout. Even when the employee chooses a customer service job based on social motives and values, interactions with customers can become a large factor in burnout and other negative work-related outcomes (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). High levels of burnout have associations with lower job satisfaction (Jayaratne & Chess, 1983), higher turnover intentions (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), and more absences (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Those who experience burnout can negatively affect their colleagues by causing greater personal conflict and disrupting job tasks (Maslach et al., 2001).

Burnout, especially the exhaustion component, has associations with stress-related health outcomes. High levels of neuroticism and burnout have a relationship such that there is support for burnout being a form of mental illness, or mental dysfunction (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Lieter, 2001). There are risk factors associated with burnout that links it to myocardial infarctions (heart attacks) and coronary heart disease (Kakiasvili, Leszek, & Rutkowski, 2013).

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Jobs Demand Resources (JDR) model discussions of resources offer some understanding of burnout. According to COR theory, resources are “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal

characteristics, conditions, or energies” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Examples of resources include housing, self-esteem, tenure, and time. In the JDR model job resources refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Examples of job resources are physical fitness, self-efficacy, social support, and job control. COR theory posits that one of the causes of burnout is resource depletion (Shirom, 1989).

Resources come in different shapes and sizes, some are visible (e.g., money, transportation, and clothing). Many resources are internal. Such internal resources such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and personality are critical to keeping employees from suffering burnout (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). Self-esteem, which refers to the confidence in one’s own worth or abilities, mediates the relationship between job stress and burnout (Wang et al., 2017). Self-efficacy, which reflects the confidence in one’s ability to succeed in a situation or task, relates to lower levels of burnout (Shoji et al., 2016). Personality traits, such as extraversion and emotional stability (the opposite of neuroticism), are also resources that are important to well-being (Morris, Burns, Periard, & Shoda, 2015).

Avoidance Coping

There are two approaches to coping – avoidance and approach. “Coping reflects thinking, feeling, or acting so as to preserve a satisfied psychological state when it is threatened” (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001, p. 4). Approach coping is generally considered the healthier of the two routes. It entails problem-focused coping techniques, such as planning and seeking social support. Avoidance coping, such as denial, is generally considered maladaptive. There is some evidence to suggest that denial (ignoring the

problem) can be effective in the short-term, but that in the long-term it yields less resistance to disease and immunocompetence (Snyder & Pulvers, 2001).

Avoidance coping is a common coping style used when dealing with stressors that cannot be changed. Avoidance coping consists of three coping styles: denial, behavioral disengagement and mental disengagement. Denial consists of ignoring the problem and perhaps even refusing to believe the problem exists. An employee who uses denial strategies might refuse to accept the negative words they hear. Behavioral disengagement is “reducing one’s effort to deal with the stressor, even giving up the attempt to attain goals with which the stressor is interfering” (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989, p. 269). An employee who uses behavioral disengagement might give up trying to please the customer who is bothering them. Mental disengagement is similar to behavioral disengagement, but it occurs mostly when conditions prevent behavioral disengagement. Employees who use mental disengagement might let their mind wander to their “happy place” instead of facing the incivility. Behavioral and mental disengagement relate positively with anxiety and negatively with optimism and control (Carver et al., 1989). Denial, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement are generally dysfunctional coping styles. (Hershcovis, Cameron, Gervais, & Bozeman, 2018). Below, I break down each avoidant coping style.

Denial. Denial is a refusal to believe that the stressor exists or trying to act as though the stressor is not real. The opposite of denial is acceptance. Denying the reality of an event may result in the event becoming more serious, thereby making it more difficult to cope. Dehue, Bolman, Völlink, and Pouwelse, (2012) found that employees who frequently use denial “experienced more health complaints, reported more

depressive symptoms, had poorer well-being, and were absent from work more than others” (p. 191). It is possible for denial to be beneficial in the right situation. Von Hippel et al. (2005) found that denial, when used to combat stereotype threat, was advantageous for those high in impression management.

Mental disengagement. There are some mixed results when it comes to mental disengagement. Mental disengagement “occurs via a wide variety of activities that serve to distract the person from thinking about the behavioral dimension or goal with which the stressor is interfering” (Carver et al., 1989, p. 269). Activities can include daydreaming, escaping through sleep, or escaping through television. Litman and Lunsford (2009) found that mental disengagement has a positive impact on problems and emotions. They concluded that it has an overall marginally positive impact. They also found a relationship between mental disengagement and illness, such that they posited mental disengagement might have a temporary benefit. However, they noted that it is detrimental over the long-term.

Behavioral disengagement. Behavioral disengagement is “reducing one’s effort to deal with the stressor, even giving up to attempt to attain goals with which the stressor is interfering” (Carver et al., 1989, p. 269). It’s most likely to occur when people expect poor outcomes (Carver et al., 1989). When comparing the relationship between self-compassion and coping styles, behavioral disengagement and denial were both found to be negatively related to self-compassion (Sirois, Molnar, & Hirsch, 2015).

Avoidant coping styles are linked to increases in emotional exhaustion and decreases in personal accomplishment (Evans, Bryant, Owens, & Koukos, 2004; Hershcovis et al., 2018; Wallace, Lee, & Lee, 2010). Job stress is positively related to

disengagement, whereas disengagement is positively related to burnout (Wallace et al., 2010). Doolittle (2007) found that disengagement correlated with increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Consistent with previous work, avoidance coping is positively related to burnout.

Hypothesis 1: Avoidance coping is positively related to burnout.

Extraversion and Neuroticism

The big five personality traits are extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Extraversion is generally considered a social trait, one that focuses on gregariousness and social desirable traits. Someone high in extraversion is friendly and outgoing. Neuroticism is how upset and emotional one is, especially when dealing with emotionally-charged situations. Someone high in neuroticism is prone to outbursts and has difficulty handling emotions. People who are high in neuroticism tend to create social stress by not handling conflict well (Semmer, 2006).

Eysenck (1951) documented extraversion and neuroticism using biological criteria. Extraversion is related to approach motivation and positive affect, whereas neuroticism is related to avoidance motivation and negative affect. Eysenck proposed that extraverts are generally under-aroused and require more stimulation in the form of socialization, heightened activity levels, and the seeking out of stimulating activities (Augustine, Larsen, & Lee, 2013). Introverts, in contrast, required less stimulation, which explains why they are more comfortable with quiet activities such as reading. Extraverts (compared to introverts) experience more enthusiasm, interest, pleasantness, and relief (i.e., positive affect; Larsen & Augustine, 2008). Neuroticism is related to avoidance

motivation or withdrawal; neurotics experience a variety of negative emotions, such as anxiety, fear, anger, frustration, and disgust (i.e., negative affect).

According to Gray's reinforcement sensitivity theory, there are two systems in the brain: the behavioral activation system (BAS) and the behavioral inhibition system (BIS) (Augustine et al., 2013). These two systems map onto measures of extraversion and neuroticism, respectively. The BAS is responsive to incentives and rewards and is thought to underlie and motivate approach behavior. Canli and colleagues (2001) found that brains of extraverts were more reactive to pleasant, rewarding images than those of introverts. Gray might argue that extraverts are more reactive to reward and have stronger positive emotional responses to pleasant stimuli (Augustine et al., 2013). The BIS is related to neuroticism (Augustine et al., 2013). What this means is that those high in neuroticism are more likely to withdraw from or avoid stimuli (Smits & Boeck, 2006). They are also more likely to ruminate about negative events, which mediates the relationship between neuroticism and depression (Augustine et al., 2013). As tasks become more difficult, those high in neuroticism actually increase their performance, but only among those high in withdrawal (Smillie, Yeo, Furnham, & Jackson, 2006).

Extraversion. Someone high in extraversion could be considered the life of the party, whereas someone low in extraversion (introverted) is shy and reserved. The terms extraversion and introversion are Jungian in origin. Jung (1917) described extraversion as the outward turning of psychic energy toward the external world. Extraverts like working in groups and enjoy human interactions. Introverts (someone low in extraversion) prefer activities that can be achieved alone such as reading, writing, and hiking.

Extraversion predicts subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). It is negatively associated with avoidance coping in dealing with cardiac catheterization (Bosworth, Feaganes, Vitaliano, Mark & Siegler, 2001; De Raad, & Perugini, 2002). Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig, and Dollard (2006) found that extraversion was negatively related to depersonalization and positively related to personal accomplishment. Alarcon, Eschleman, and Bowling (2009) found that extraversion was negatively associated with burnout.

Several studies have found a relationship between extraversion and burnout (Bakker et al., 2006; Alarcon et al., 2009). Eastburg, Williamson, Gorsuch, and Ridley (1994) found that extraverted nurses, compared to introverts, needed more work-related peer support to avoid emotional exhaustion. This could be because they require more stimulation in the form of socialization. Extraversion is associated with problem-focused coping and social-support seeking behavior which could be because they are more sensitive to positive stimuli (Bakker et al., 2006). Considering this, I hypothesize that extraversion is negatively related to burnout.

Hypothesis 2: Extraversion is negatively related to burnout.

Neuroticism. Someone low in neuroticism (i.e., emotionally stable) is considered stable and balanced, whereas someone high in neuroticism is emotional and unstable. The first use of a measure of neuroticism was done during World War I to assess the ability of soldiers to cope with military stress (Woodworth, 1917). Those high in neuroticism may experience feelings, such as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, guilt, depressed mood, and loneliness (Thompson, 2008). Although neuroticism is generally considered a negative trait, it has been theorized that a certain level of neuroticism is

evolutionarily beneficial to avoid negative stimuli like predators (Allen & Badcock, 2006). When presented with a negative stimulus, those higher in neuroticism tend to have a greater degree of negative affect reactivity (Augustine et al., 2013).

There are plenty of outcomes related to neuroticism. In the workplace, neuroticism is negatively related to both job performance and job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001; De Raad & Perigini, 2002). Bakker and colleagues (2006) found neuroticism predicted all forms of burnout. Neuroticism is also related to depression and anxiety disorders (Ormel et al., 2013). Salgado (2002) found that neuroticism is positively related to turnover. Those high in neuroticism have a difficult time finding a coping strategy that works for them, so they are prone to trying multiple coping styles (Suls & Martin, 2005).

Hypothesis 3: Neuroticism is positively related to burnout.

Extraversion is generally tied to positive events, whereas neuroticism is tied to negative events (Semmer, 2006). Watson et al. (1999) suggested that only neuroticism and extraversion were related to ways of coping. What is potentially interesting is to consider the joint effects of avoidance coping, extraversion, and neuroticism. Below, I consider the four combinations of neuroticism and extraversion in terms of the relationship between avoidance coping and burnout. In general, individuals lower (higher) in extraversion are (less) likely to benefit from avoidance coping because engaging is (un)likely to require them to spend resources.

High neuroticism, low extraversion. Individuals high in neuroticism and low in extraversion are the most likely to suffer burnout regardless of the severity and volume of stressors present in the situation. That is, neurotic introverts are likely to suffer burnout across situations. They are nervous, insecure, guarded, negativistic, and critical (Judge &

Erez, 2007). This is due to their unstable emotional disposition and the likelihood that they internalize stressors. Hotard, McFatter, McWhirter, and Stegall (1989) found that subjective well-being was lowest among neurotic introverts. They argued that introverts seek to avoid social interactions because they view them negatively. Neurotic introverts would primarily use the BIS. Hence, they are predisposed to use avoidant coping styles more regularly than others. I anticipate that neurotic introverts employing high (low) levels of avoidance coping experience lower (higher) levels of burnout because they tend (not) to prefer limited engagement. Hence, I argue that the relationship between avoidance coping and burnout is negative among these individuals. However, the relationship is likely to be moderate because neurotics tend to be burned out across situations.

High neuroticism, high extraversion. Workers high in both neuroticism and extraversion are also likely to suffer burnout. Neurotic extraverts are volatile, explosive, excitable, high strung, and edgy (Judge & Erez, 2007). Neurotic extraverts use both BIS and BAS. As they do not have a dominant system, they are likely to switch back and forth from the two. This might suggest that when avoidance coping is high, burnout will be relatively the same as if avoidance coping is at low levels. However, as avoidance is inconsistent with the nature of extroverts, it is likely that low levels of engagement are not beneficial to these individuals. Hence, I anticipate that the relationship between avoidance coping and burnout is weak and positive among these individuals. The relationship is likely to be weak-to-moderate because neurotics tend to be burned out across situations.

Low neuroticism, low extraversion. Individuals who are low in both neuroticism and extraversion are sedate, placid, acquiescent, subdued, and unexcitable (Judge & Erez, 2007). Similar to the neurotic extraverts, the emotionally stable introverts may use both the BIS and the BAS, as neither system is likely dominate. The relationship between avoidance coping and burnout is likely to be negative among these individuals, as low-levels of engagement are consistent with their introversion. However, the relationship is likely to be weak-to-moderate because they are emotionally stable.

Low neuroticism, high extraversion. Emotionally stable extraverts are happy, hearty, vigorous, assured, and buoyant (Judge & Erez, 2007). These may be the best adjusted individuals of the four groups. Emotionally stable extraverts primarily use the BAS. Hence, avoidance coping would not come naturally to them. When employing high (low) levels of avoidance coping, emotionally stable extraverts are likely to experience higher (lower) levels of burnout. Therefore, I argue that the relationship between avoidance coping and burnout is positive and moderate among these individuals.

Hypothesis 4: Extraversion and neuroticism moderate the relationship between avoidance coping and burnout, such that the relationship is moderately negative among individuals high in neuroticism and low in extroversion, weak and positive among persons high in both neuroticism and extroversion, weakly-to-moderately negative among individuals low in both neuroticism and extroversion, and moderate and positive among people low in neuroticism and high in extroversion (see figure 1).

Method

Participants and Procedure

I recruited participants from undergraduate students at the University of Houston. The reward for completing the survey was extra credit toward psychology courses. A total of 390 individuals completed the survey. On average, the participants were 23.48 years old ($SD = 5.42$) and had spent 2.00 years ($SD = 2.18$) at their current employer.

Measures

Burnout. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory measured the level of burnout (OLBI; Demerouti, 1999; Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). This measure broke burnout into two different aspects – disengagement and exhaustion. Participants rated 16 statements using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) and half of the statements were reverse coded. An example statement is “I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well.” See Appendix A for a complete list of items.

Avoidance Coping. The COPE Inventory measured avoidance coping using the denial, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement items (COPE; Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). Participants rated their confidence on 53 statements on a scale of 1 (I usually don’t do this at all) to 4 (I usually do this a lot). An example statement is “I act as though it hasn’t really happened.” See Appendix B for a complete list of items.

Personality. International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) created by Goldberg (1999), measured extraversion and emotional stability. The IPIP measured the five different personality types of the “Big Five” – open-mindedness, conscientiousness,

extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism. The participant rated 50 statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale, 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. There were 10 items for extraversion and 10 items for neuroticism. Half of the statements were reverse coded. An example statement is “I am the life of the party” See Appendix C for a complete list of items.

Control Variables. The control variables for hypotheses were age and gender. Participants self-reported their demographics.

Results

Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities and the intercorrelation matrix are in Table 1. To assess the structural integrity of the scales, I conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses. As reflected in Appendix D, the factor loadings revealed that: (a) the burnout scale loaded onto four factors, (b) avoidance coping loaded onto two factors, (c) extraversion loaded onto two factors, and (d) neuroticism loaded onto two factors. These results indicate non-trivial limitations in the subsequent analysis and interpretation of hypotheses testing. Nevertheless, to follow the protocol outlined in the proposal, I tested the hypotheses. As shown in Table 1 and consistent with hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, avoidance coping ($r = 0.20, p < .001$), extraversion ($r = -.24, p < .001$) and neuroticism ($r = .30, p < .001$) were related to burnout, respectively.

To test hypothesis 4, I first entered the main effects, then the two-way interactions, and then the three-way cross-product term. I present the results in Table 2. At the first stage, I entered age, gender, avoidance coping, extraversion, and neuroticism ($R^2 = .106$). Only extraversion ($B = -.08, SE = .03, p = .018$) and neuroticism ($B = .13, SE = .04, p = .001$) were significant predictors. At the second stage, I entered the two-way

interactions ($R^2 = .115$, $\Delta R^2 = .009$). Again, only extraversion ($B = -.08$, $SE = .03$, $p = .021$) and neuroticism ($B = .13$, $SE = .04$, $p = .001$) were significant. At the third stage, I entered the three-way cross-product term, which added unique incremental variance ($B = -.26$, $SE = .09$, $p = .004$, $R^2 = .136$, $\Delta R^2 = .021$).

I present in Figure 2 the plot of the three-way interaction. As shown in Table 3, the greatest slope difference ($t = -3.090$, $p = 0.002$) was between slopes 1 (high extraversion, high neuroticism) and 2 (high extraversion, low neuroticism). Slope 2 was significantly different from both slope 3 (low extraversion, high neuroticism; $t = 2.6$, $p = 0.01$) and slope 4 (low extraversion, low neuroticism; $t = 2.356$, $p = 0.019$). Although slope 2 (high extraversion, low neuroticism) showed the predicted slope of increasing burnout as avoidance coping increases, the other slopes did not reflect the predicted direction. Slope 1 (high extraversion, high neuroticism) was slightly negative instead of positive. Both slope 3 (low extraversion, high neuroticism) and slope 4 (low extraversion, low neuroticism) showed little-to-no change in burnout levels at increasing levels of avoidance coping. These results reflect weak, partial support for hypothesis 4.

Discussion

I examined the relationship between personality and avoidance coping in the prediction of burnout. The goal of this study was to determine to what extent levels of extraversion and neuroticism affect how avoidance coping relates to burnout. I found that: (a) avoidance coping was positively related to burnout, (b) extraversion was negatively related to burnout, and (c) neuroticism was positively related to burnout. I also examined the three-way interaction between avoidance coping, extraversion, and neuroticism on burnout. I found that avoidance coping disadvantages individuals high in

extraversion and low in neuroticism, but that avoidance coping likely does not have much of an effect on all other personality combinations.

Previous research has not investigated how personality and avoidance coping interact on burnout. However, Hershcovis et al. (2018) found that avoidance can lead to increased emotional exhaustion. Avoidant coping styles are also related to decreases in personal accomplishment (Wallace, Lee, & Lee, 2010). Although no one to my knowledge has studied the effect that personality has on avoidance coping and such outcomes as burnout, there was evidence to suggest that extraversion was negatively related to burnout and that neuroticism was positively related to burnout (Bakker et al., 2006).

Implications

I emphasize two implications from the findings of this study. One implication is that avoidance coping might not be as maladaptive for some people as it was once thought. For three groups out of four, there was little to no change in burnout levels due to avoidance coping. The only group that was negatively affected by avoidance coping was individuals high in extraversion and low in neuroticism. This has both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, this means that the emotionally stable extraverts are at risk of burnout when they try to use avoidance coping techniques. Whereas others can use avoidance coping with no real effect on their burnout levels. Theoretically, this means avoidance coping should be reconsidered as a less maladaptive coping technique. It might only be maladaptive among highly emotional stable extraverts. For the rest of the population, avoidance coping might be benign, all other things being equal.

Another implication of the study was that neuroticism had a strong effect on levels of burnout, a finding that reinforces what we already know. Workers who are high in neuroticism are more at risk for suffering from burnout. Practically, this means that interventions might be implemented for those high in neuroticism to help alleviate burnout – interventions that could include avoidance coping techniques. Theoretically, this does not change current knowledge about the relationship between neuroticism and burnout, but knowing that avoidance coping might be a benign coping technique in some situations for some people, those high on neuroticism could be encouraged to simply avoid stressors, as appropriate.

Limitations

I emphasize four limitations. One of the limitation is the sample size. Another limitation is the population the sample pooled from. University students is a convenience sample that was used because of limited resources available. Ideally, the study should be done on a larger population that pulled from the population at large instead of just a university. Although the sample was working, they were also going to school which could add unexpected factors. Another limitation to the study was the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti, 1999), which did not hold up in this study as a single factor. Additionally, the factor structures of the other scales did not hold up as expected, suggesting issues with the scales, sample, or both.

Future Direction

Future research is needed to assess the links between avoidance coping and personality. Instead of just looking at avoidance coping and personality on burnout, it would be beneficial to look at health outcomes and productivity, as well. Perhaps there is

more to consider when looking at the relationship avoidance coping and personality plays in different outcomes. Conducting the study in a working sample that deals with customers on a daily basis would be ideal in measuring burnout.

Another future research topic could be whether there are interactions between avoidance coping and different personality traits besides just extraversion and neuroticism. Conscientiousness could interact with avoidance coping, such that those low on conscientiousness could be more likely to forget and in effect avoid certain stressors. Agreeableness might interact with avoidance coping such that those low on agreeableness could benefit from avoidance coping because they are too stubborn to change their opinion on a stressor.

It also might be interesting to look at different coping techniques and their interactions with personality. Restraint coping, or waiting until the appropriate time to act, could interact with neuroticism and conscientiousness such that those high in neuroticism and high in conscientiousness have the most trouble restraining themselves. Seeking social support for emotional reasons could interact with extraversion and neuroticism such that those low in extraversion and low in neuroticism could find seeking support to be exhausting and unnecessary.

Conclusion

The relationship between avoidance coping and personality on burnout is an interesting topic to research. Avoidance coping might not help emotionally stable extraverts, but it might not have much of an effect among individuals with other personality combinations. It is my hope that future research will look into this more

closely and discover relationships between personality and coping that have yet to be revealed in research to date.

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Table 1

Sample Size, Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations (and Cronbach alphas) Among Variables

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	361	23.48	5.42	---										
2. Gender	361	1.18	0.38	.10	---									
3. Denial	390	1.62	0.70	-.14**	.01	(.85)								
4. Behavioral Diseng.	390	1.65	0.67	-.10	.01	.63**	(.82)							
5. Mental Diseng.	390	2.41	0.70	-.20**	-.06	.48**	.48**	(.66)						
6. Avoidance Coping	390	1.89	0.57	-.18**	-.02	.85**	.85**	.79**	(.86)					
7. Disengagement	372	2.58	0.52	-.04	.06	.01	.11*	.09	.08	(.77)				
8. Exhaustion	372	2.42	0.46	-.11*	-.02	.19**	.26**	.26**	.28**	.54**	(.75)			
9. Burnout	372	2.50	0.43	-.08	.03	.11*	.20**	.19**	.20**	.89**	.86**	(.84)		
10. Extraversion	378	3.43	0.70	.16**	-.06	-.22**	-.34**	-.18**	-.29**	-.20**	-.22**	-.24**	(.86)	
11. Neuroticism	378	2.58	0.65	-.11*	-.03	.29**	.37**	.25**	.36**	.15**	.40**	.30**	-.38**	(.79)

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 2
Regression on Burnout, run using SPSS and centering

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Constant	2.51	.11	-	2.50	.11	-	2.47	.11	-
Controls									
Age	-.00	.00	-.02	-.00	.00	-.02	.00	.00	.01
Gender	.03	.06	.02	.03	.06	.03	.03	.06	.03
Main Effects									
Avoidance Coping	.06	.04	.08	.08	.04	.11	.05	.04	.06
Extraversion	-.08	.03	-.13*	-.08	.03	-.13*	-.04	.04	-.07
Neuroticism	.13	.04	.20**	.13	.04	.19**	.10	.04	.15**
Two-way Interactions									
Avoidance*Extraversion				.03	.07	.03	.07	.07	.06
Avoidance*Neuroticism				-.10	.07	-.08	-.15	.07	-.12*
Extraversion*Neuroticism				.00	.05	.00	-.02	.05	-.02
Three-way Interaction									
Avoid*Extraversion*Neuroticism							-.26	.09	-.20**
N = 359									
R ²		.106**			.115			.136**	
Adjusted R ²		.093			.095			.114	
ΔR^2		.098**			.009			.021**	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 3

Simple Slopes for the Three-way Interaction between Avoidance Coping, Extraversion and Neuroticism

Pair of slopes	t-value for slope difference	p-value for slope difference
(1) and (2)	-3.090	0.002
(1) and (3)	-1.174	0.241
(1) and (4)	-0.554	0.580
(2) and (3)	2.600	0.010
(2) and (4)	2.356	0.019
(3) and (4)	0.424	0.672

Figure 1

Three-way Interaction of Avoidance Coping, Extraversion, and Neuroticism on Burnout

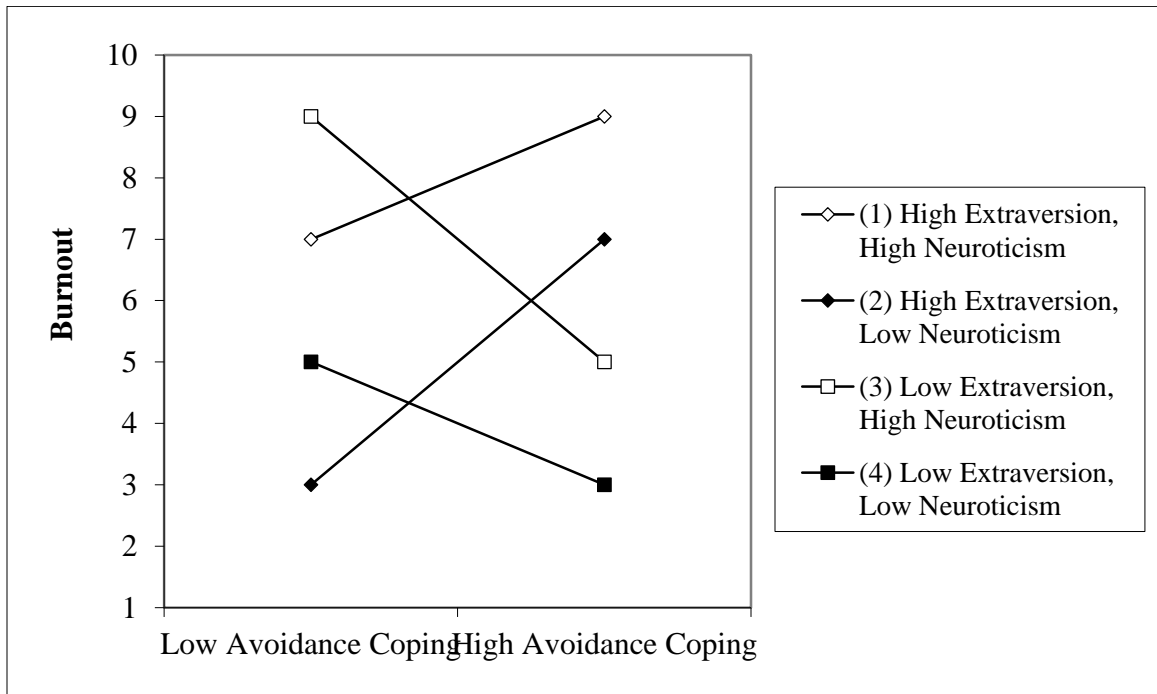
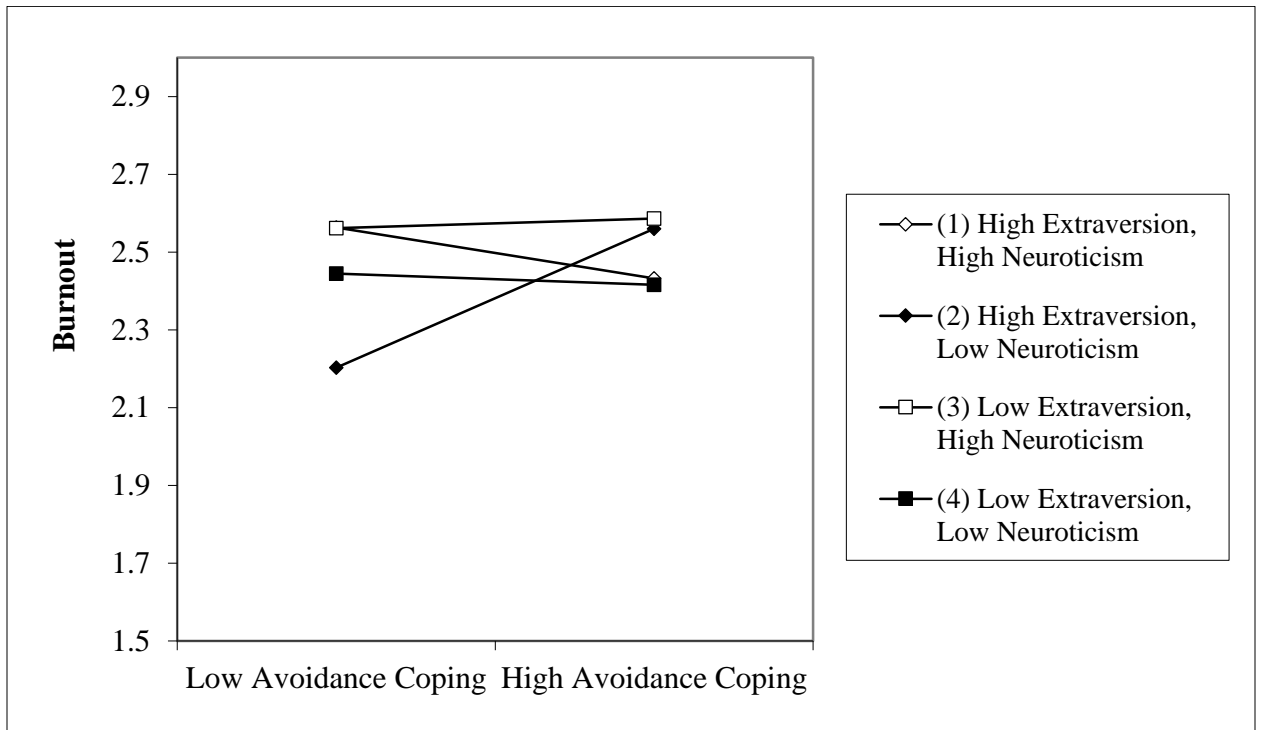


Figure 2

Three way Interaction between Avoidance Coping, Extraversion and Neuroticism on Burnout



Appendix A: Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI; Demerouti, 1999)

Instruction: Below you find a series of statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale, please indicate the degree of your agreement by selecting the number that corresponds with each statement.

Response scale: 1 strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree

1. I always find new and interesting aspects in my work.
2. There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.
3. It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.
4. After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.
5. I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well.
6. Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.
7. I find my work to be a positive challenge.
8. During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.
9. Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.
10. After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities.
11. Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks.
12. After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.
13. This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing.
14. Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well.
15. I feel more and more engaged in my work.
16. When I work, I usually feel energized.

Note: Disengagement items are 1(R), 3, 6, 7(R), 9, 11, 13(R), 15(R). Exhaustion items are 2, 4, 5(R), 8, 10(R), 12, 14(R), 16(R). (R) means reversed item.

Appendix B: Coping strategies (COPE)

Instructions: We are interested in how people respond when they confront difficult or stressful events in their lives. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. This questionnaire asks you to indicate what you generally do and feel when you experience stressful events. Obviously, different events bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what you usually do when you are under a lot of stress.

1 = I usually don't do this at all

2 = I usually do this a little bit

3 = I usually do this a medium amount

4 = I usually do this a lot

1. I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem.
2. I concentrate my efforts on doing something about it.
3. I do what has to be done, one step at a time.
4. I take direct action to get around the problem.
5. I try to come up with a strategy about what to do.
6. I make a plan of action.
7. I think hard about what steps to take.
8. I think about how I might best handle the problem.
9. I put aside other activities in order to concentrate on this.
10. I focus on dealing with this problem, and if necessary let other things slide a little.
11. I keep myself from getting distracted by other thoughts or activities.
12. I try hard to prevent other things from interfering with my efforts at dealing with this.
13. I force myself to wait for the right time to do something.
14. I hold off doing anything about it until the situation permits.
15. I make sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon.
16. I restrain myself from doing anything too quickly.
17. I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did.
18. I try to get advice from someone about what to do.
19. I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.
20. I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.
21. I talk to someone about how I feel.
22. I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.
23. I discuss my feelings with someone.
24. I get sympathy and understanding from someone.
25. I look for something good in what is happening.
26. I try to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
27. I learn something from the experience.
28. I try to grow as a person as a result of the experience.
29. I learn to live with it.
30. I accept that this has happened and that it can't be changed.
31. I get used to the idea that it happened.
32. I accept the reality of the fact that it happened.

33. I seek God's help.
34. I put my trust in God.
35. I try to find comfort in my religion.
36. I pray more than usual.
37. I get upset and let my emotions out.
38. I let my feelings out.
39. I feel a lot of emotional distress and I find myself expressing those feelings a lot.
40. I get upset, and am really aware of it.
41. I refuse to believe that it has happened.
42. I pretend that it hasn't really happened.
43. I act as though it hasn't even happened.
44. I say to myself "this isn't real".
45. I give up the attempt to get what I want.
46. I just give up trying to reach my goal.
47. I admit to myself that I can't deal with it, and quit trying.
48. I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem.
49. I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things.
50. I go to the movies or watch TV, to think about it less.
51. I daydream about things other than this.
52. I sleep more than usual.
53. I drink alcohol or take drugs, in order to think about it less.

Appendix C: International Personality Item Pool (IPIP short-form; Goldberg 1999)

Response scale: 1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree

1. Tend to vote for conservative political candidates.
2. Have frequent mood swings.
3. Am not easily bothered by things.
4. Suspect hidden motives in others.
5. Enjoy hearing new ideas.
6. Believe in the importance of art.
7. Have a vivid imagination.
8. Am the life of the party.
9. Am skilled in handling social situations.
10. Am always prepared.
11. Make plans and stick to them.
12. Dislike myself.
13. Respect others.
14. Insult people.
15. Would describe my experiences as somewhat dull.
16. Seldom feel blue.
17. Don't like to draw attention to myself.
18. Carry out my plans.
19. Am not interested in abstract ideas.
20. Have a sharp tongue.
21. Make friends easily.
22. Tend to vote for liberal political candidates.
23. Know how to captivate people.
24. Believe that others have good intentions.
25. Am very pleased with myself.
26. Do just enough work to get by.
27. Find it difficult to get down to work.
28. Carry the conversation to a higher level.
29. Panic easily.
30. Avoid philosophical discussions.
31. Accept people as they are.
32. Do not enough going to art museums.
33. Pay attention to details.
34. Keep in the background.
35. Feel comfortable with myself.
36. Waste my time.
37. Get back at others.
38. Get chores done right away.

39. Don't talk a lot.
40. Am often down in the dumps.
41. Shirk my duties.
42. Do not like art.
43. Often feel blue.
44. Cut others to pieces.
45. Have a good word for everyone.
46. Don't see things through.
47. Feel comfortable around people.
48. Make people feel at ease.
49. Rarely get irritated.
50. Have little to say.

Note: Openness items are 1(R), 5, 6, 7, 19(R), 22, 28, 30(R), 32(R), 42(R).

Conscientiousness items are 10, 11, 18, 26(R), 27(R), 33, 36(R), 38, 41(R), 46(R).

Extraversion items are 8, 9, 15(R), 17(R), 21, 23, 34(R), 39(R), 47, 50(R). Agreeableness items are 4(R), 13, 14(R), 20(R), 24, 31, 37(R), 44(R), 45, 48. Neuroticism items are 2, 3(R), 12, 16(R), 25(R), 29, 35(R), 40, 43, 49(R). (R) means reversed item.

Appendix D: Factor Analysis

The varimax rotated exploratory factor analysis of Oldenburg Burnout Inventory is reported in Table D:1. It shows that the factors loaded mostly on two factors, items that were normally coded and items that were reverse coded. Items for disengagement and exhaustion were mixed together. Though the Cronbach alphas for disengagement (.77; 8 items) and exhaustion (.75; 8 items) were both in the borderline range, the alpha for burnout was 0.84 (16 items) which is not high, but falls in the adequate range.

The varimax rotated exploratory factor analysis of avoidance coping is found in Table D:2. The factors loaded onto two factors, one that includes denial and behavioral disengagement, and one that includes mental disengagement. The Cronbach alphas for each of these scales are denial (.85; 4 items), behavioral disengagement (.82; 4 items), mental disengagement (.66; 4 items), and for total avoidance coping (.86; 12 items). The alphas for denial and behavioral disengagement are suitable, but the mental disengagement alpha is fairly low. When combined though, the alpha is much better.

The varimax rotated exploratory factor analysis of International Personality Item Pool for extraversion and neuroticism can be found in Table D:3. This loaded onto four factors, basically two for each personality trait, one normally coded and one reverse coded. The Cronbach alpha for extraversion was 0.86 (10 items) whereas the alpha for neuroticism was 0.79 (10 items). This makes sense as the factors for extraversion were pretty straight forward normal/reverse coded whereas the neuroticism factors were more mixed as some reverse coded items ended up grouped with the normal coded items and some normal coded items ended up with the reverse coded items.

Appendix D: Table 1

Varimax Rotated Factor Analysis of Oldenburg Burnout Inventory

Items (N = 372)	1	2	3	4
During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.	.74			
It happens more and more often that I talk about my work in a negative way.	.71			
Sometimes I feel sickened by my work tasks.	.69			
Lately, I tend to think less at work and do my job almost mechanically.	.67			
Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of work.	.65			
After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.	.64			.43
After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.	.59			.51
There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.	.49			.49
I find my work to be a positive challenge. (R)		.76		
I feel more and more engaged in my work. (R)		.75		
I always find new and interesting aspects in my work. (R)		.74		
This is the only type of work that I can imagine myself doing. (R)		.66		
When I work, I usually feel energized. (R)		.62		
I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well. (R)			.79	
Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well. (R)			.78	

After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities. (R)					.79
Eigenvalue	4.93	2.12	1.50	1.09	
% Variance	30.80	13.23	9.38	6.82	

*(R) are reverse coded

Appendix D: Table 2

Varimax Rotated Factor Analysis of Avoidance Coping

Items (N = 390)	1	2
I refuse to believe that it has happened.	.78	
I pretend that it hasn't really happened.	.76	
I admit to myself that I can't deal with it, and quit trying.	.72	
I give up the attempt to get what I want.	.72	
I say to myself "this isn't real".	.71	
I act as though it hasn't even happened.	.71	
I just give up trying to reach my goal.	.67	
I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem.	.65	
I go to the movies or watch TV, to think about it less.		.75
I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things.		.75
I daydream about things other than this.		.60
I sleep more than usual.		.58
Eigenvalue	4.96	1.38
% Variance	41.29	11.50

Appendix D: Table 3

Varimax Rotated Factor Analysis of International Personality Item Pool

Items (N = 378)	1	2	3	4
Know how to captivate people.	.74			
Make friends easily.	.74			
Am skilled in handling social situations.	.73			
Am the life of the party.	.72			
Feel comfortable around people.	.67			
Am often down in the dumps.		.80		
Dislike myself.		.79		
Often feel blue.		.77		
Am very pleased with myself. (R)		.72		
Feel comfortable with myself. (R)		.69		
Panic easily.		.46		.43
Keep in the background. (R)			.69	
Have little to say. (R)			.67	
Don't talk a lot. (R)	.45		.63	
Would describe my experiences as somewhat dull. (R)			.56	
Don't like to draw attention to myself. (R)			.55	
Seldom feel blue. (R)				
Have frequent mood swings.				.72
Rarely get irritated. (R)				.72

Am not easily bothered by things. (R)				.65
Eigenvalue	5.83	2.62	1.75	1.22
% Variance	29.15	13.10	8.76	6.10

*(R) are reverse coded