General Personality Disorder: A study into the core components of personality pathology
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Summary
Chapter 1 presents the introduction of this thesis and briefly describes the different models of general and specific personality pathology selected for further study. Moreover, it presents the main research questions of this thesis.

Chapter 2 presents Livesley’s (2003) Adaptive Failure Model. This model of general personality dysfunction is discussed from a theoretical perspective, in comparison with other models of personality pathology. This chapter also presents the psychometric evaluation of the General Assessment of Personality Disorders (GAPD). The GAPD is developed as a self-report questionnaire for assessing core features of personality dysfunction, as operationalized from Livesley’s adaptive failure model. The presumed underlying factor structure was confirmed by an exploratory factor analysis, and corresponded with the factor structure as found in a Canadian general population and a group of Dutch psychiatric patients. Correlations with the DSM-IV personality disorders (as measured by the SCID-II) and with a pathological trait model Dimensional Assessment of Personality Pathology – Basic Questionnaire (DAPP-BQ) suggest partial conceptual overlap between these instruments. Especially, the DAPP-BQ trait domain Emotional dysregulation and the GAPD primary scale Self-pathology showed relatively high associations. This study provides evidence for the assumption that core features of personality dysfunction can be defined as disorders in the self, and in the capacity for interpersonal functioning. Especially self-pathology appeared to be a strong factor that differentiated between clinical and non-clinical populations, and between levels of personality dysfunction severity in a sample of psychiatric patients.

Chapter 3 describes a study on the psychometric qualities and validity of a Dutch translation of the Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO-NL). The IPO was constructed by Kernberg and associates as a self-report instrument to measure underlying dimensions of Kernberg's structural model of personality organization. The reliability and validity of the IPO-NL proved to be satisfactory in the study group, which consisted of both a general population and psychiatric patients. Exploratory factor analyses showed a clear four-factor solution: General Personality Pathology, Reality Testing, Aggression, and Sadistic Aggression. From a theoretical point of view, the latter factor can also be seen as a sub-factor of the trait aggression. The General Personality Pathology factor consisted mainly of items which were associated with the constructs of identity diffusion, primitive defenses, and moral values. As expected, this study also found that scores on the IPO-NL scales were associated with a specific Five Factor Model profile. More specifically, higher IPO-NL scores were correlated with higher scores on the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) domain Neuroticism, and with lower scores on the NEO-PI-R domains Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

Chapter 4 describes research on key markers of a general level of personality functioning. In this study the Item Response Theory (IRT) was used to identify markers of this global dimension of personality pathology. The GAPD and the
Severity Indices of Personality Pathology-118 (SIPP-118) were used as measures of general personality dysfunction. The markers of this global dimension of personality pathology were defined as functions related to self (e.g. identity integration, integrity of self-concept), and interpersonal (e.g. capacity for empathy and intimacy). The dimension of levels of personality dysfunction was significantly associated with the probability of being assigned any DSM-IV PD diagnosis, and with the severity of a DSM-IV PD diagnosis. The relevance of these findings with regard to the proposals for the alternative model for personality disorders in the DSM-5 is discussed.

The studies described in the first three chapters, which together form Part I of this thesis, can be considered as an attempt to examine underlying models of core features of personality pathology / personality functioning, as well as the operationalization of these models within subsequent assessment procedures.

The factors Identity-integration or Identity diffusion, Interpersonal and Societal (dys)function, and Self-direction (coping, primitive defenses, regulation of aggression) emerged as univocal and strongly differentiating factors. Kernbergs model distinguishes in addition to these mentioned dimensions also the factor Reality Testing. These factors are comparable to core features of PD as defined in other studies (e.g. Parker & Barret, 2000; Cloninger, 2000; Bornstein & Huprich, 2011; see also Table 1, Chapter 6 of this thesis), and emerged as the core dimensions in the proposed new general criteria of PD by the DSM-5 P&PD workgroup.

To further substantiate the investigated models of core features of PD, these models were in Part II, chapters five, six and seven, compared with dimensional trait models. A second research question was examined, that is to explore the relation of these models of core features of PD with the dimensional trait models.

With respect to this second research question, chapter 5 describes a factor-analytical study towards the differentiation between models of general personality dysfunction and specific personality traits. The GAPD and SIPP-118 were used as instruments for assessing general personality dysfunction, and the NEO-PI-R was used as an instrument to measure specific personality traits. A seven-factor structure emerged after exploratory factor analyses with these three instruments. As expected, three factors were associated with factors as defined in models of general personality dysfunction (see chapter 1 to 3): Self-identity functioning, Relational functioning, and Self-direction/Self-control or Pro-social functioning. The other four factors were clearly associated with four domains of the Five Factor Model. Apart from a factor Conscientiousness, and a factor Openness, we found factors which we named Inactivity and Obliging. These last two factors were associated with the FFM domains (low) Extraversion and Agreeableness, respectively. Of note was the observation that facets of the NEO-PI-R domain Neuroticism were scattered over different factors, that included both specific trait-factors and general dysfunction-factors.
While in chapter 5 we investigated whether specific personality traits could be differentiated from general personality dysfunction, in chapter 6 we explored how these models might predict the presence and severity of PD, both as independent measurements and as a combination of trait- and dysfunction measurements. Since some PDs were only minimal represented in our sample, our analyses were limited to paranoid PD, borderline PD, avoidant PD, and obsessive-compulsive PD. A constructed Total dimensional PD-score was used as measure of severity of PD. This study used instruments that are operationalizations of both normal and pathological personality traits: the NEO-PI-R was selected as a measure of normal personality traits, and the DAPP-BQ was selected as a measure of pathological personality traits. In addition, the GAPD and the SIPP-118 were used as measures of general personality dysfunction.

This study showed that correlational patterns between these models, and of these models with PD’s, were largely as expected. That is, models of general personality dysfunction, and the pathological trait Emotional Dysregulation were strongly associated with all selected PD’s in this study group, and most associations of other specific dimensional traits were PD-specific (e.g. DAPP-BQ facet Compulsivity and DSM-IV obsessive-compulsive PD).

With respect to the predictive validity, this study showed that both models of general personality dysfunction and models of specific personality traits predicted the presence and severity of PDs. Moreover, the combination of general personality dysfunction models and personality trait models provided incremental information over and beyond each of them separately, about the presence and severity of PDs. These findings suggest that an integrative approach of multiple conceptual perspectives, within the advocated hybrid model, may serve a comprehensive assessment of PDs.

Chapter 7 can be seen as a study on an additional research question that emerged during the ongoing project, and which is relevant in the discussion on the use of measurements of core features of PDs for determining pathology of trait extremities. We investigated whether extreme scores at both poles of FFM traits (as operationalized by the NEO-PI-R) were indications of general personality dysfunction. Our findings clearly did not support a strong bipolar hypothesis, but instead that only high Neuroticism, low Extraversion, low Agreeableness, and low Conscientiousness were indicative of general personality dysfunction in our treatment seeking sample of psychiatric patients.

In chapter 8, we summarize and discuss the main findings of our study. The chapter discusses methodological limitations of this body of research as well as its specific clinical implications. Finally, we suggest directions for further research.