

Association Between OCPD Traits and Feelings of Emptiness

Margaret Froehlich & Matthew M. Yalch

INTRODUCTION

- Emptiness is the absence of emotional experience.
- At high levels, emptiness is disruptive, leading to painful detachment from oneself and others.
- Emptiness is closely associated with borderline personality disorder.
- It may also be associated with other PDs, including obsessive compulsive personality disorder (OCPD).
- In the AMPD, OCPD consists of four traits: intimacy avoidance, perseveration, restricted affectivity, and rigid perfectionism.
- Restricted affectivity and intimacy avoidance may be most linked with emptiness since they entail absence of emotional and interpersonal engagement, respectively.
- However, this has not yet been examined empirically.

METHOD

- Participants were 300 people recruited from MTurk with an average age of 38 years (SD = 10; see Table 1)
- Measures: *Subjective Emptiness Scale*, OCPD subscales of *Personality Inventory for DSM-5*
- We tested our hypothesis using multiple regression

RESULTS

- Correlations between OCPD personality traits and emptiness were high on average ($r_{\text{mean}} = .75$; see Table 2).
- OCPD traits accounted for a large amount of variance in emptiness (see Table 3).
- Perseveration was the strongest predictor of feelings of emptiness.

DISCUSSION

- That perseveration was the strongest predictor of emptiness suggests that excessive fixation and rumination can leave people feeling empty.
- This raises the question of whether emptiness may be a problem for other disorders where perseveration is a symptom (e.g., GAD, OCD).
- Future research might thus examine the degree to which emptiness is characteristic of other mental health problems.

Of OCPD traits, perseveration is most associated with feeling empty



Table 1

Demographic Information

	n	%
Sex		
Female	165	55%
Male	134	45%
Race		
Asian	14	5%
Black	11	4%
Native American	3	1%
White	266	88%
Multiracial	3	1%
Another Race	3	1%

Table 2

Correlations Between Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Emptiness	(.92)				
2 Intimacy Avoidance	.74	(.82)			
3 Perseveration	.80	.77	(.93)		
4 Restricted Affectivity	.75	.77	.81	(.90)	
5 Rigid Perfectionism	.72	.72	.85	.83	(.93)

Note. Cronbach's alpha on diagonal; all correlations are statistically significant at $p < .05$

Table 3

Relative Influence of OCPD Traits on Emptiness

	β	B	95% CI	R^2
Intimacy Avoidance	.24*	1.50	[.80, 2.19]	.82*
Perseveration	.45*	2.69	[1.86, 3.52]	
Restricted Affectivity	.21*	1.28	[-.49, 2.06]	
Rigid Perfectionism	-.01	-.06	[-.95, .82]	

Note. * indicates value is statistically significant at $p < .05$