

Belongingness, obsessiveness, narcissism, and mindfulness

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Abstract

Many studies tend to explore a link between obsessive-compulsive symptoms, stressful life events and the social support received when facing them and other developmental challenges. While the compulsions are the most obvious aspect of this disorder, stereotypical behavior is encountered as a symptom in several other disorders and the underlying obsessions are less obvious. In the present study we investigated the associations between obsessing, different types of compulsions and the pathological aspects of narcissism with some aspects positively associated with well-being, like feeling of belonging and mindfulness, with its two dimensions, the here-and-now awareness and the acceptance of this experience. The data showed that on obsessing had a significant effect exclusion/rejection, awareness and the acceptance of here-and-now-experience; washing was best predicted by the feeling of being accepted/included (negative correlation); neutralizing by awareness, acceptance of here-and-now-experience (negative correlations), and entitlement (positive correlation); checking by acceptance of here-and-now-experience (negative correlation) and entitlement (positive correlation). Also, there were significant negative correlations between hoarding and awareness, but also between ordering and acceptance of here-and-now experience. The findings suggest different psychological explanations for the different types of compulsive behaviors, but also ways of diminishing the obsessing process and compulsions by developing the awareness capacity.

Keywords: acceptance, awareness, compulsions, entitlement, obsessiveness, rejection.

1. INTRODUCTION

The need to belong and to feel loved, according to Maslow's theory of personality, is a deficit need, its frustration resulting in accumulation of internal tension which only decreases with the need gratification, experienced as pleasure, allowing the person to focus on the deficit needs on the next level, of esteem and respect. When these have been met, the person may focus on the satisfaction of the need for Self-actualization, a growth need (Maslow, 2013). Thwarted belongingness has a significant positive association with non-suicidal self-injury, so the perceived burdensomeness (feeling like a burden for others) in persons with no suicidal behavior. In persons with suicidal behavior, there was an indirect effect on thwarted belongingness and burdensomeness through depression (Assavedo & Anestesis, 2016). Also, thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness were higher in patients with fibromyalgia with or without suicidal ideation (Lafuente-Castro et al., 2018). Feeling more connected with the parents is associated with feeling less of a burden and more like belonging, while feeling more connected with friends is associated with a more intense feeling to belong, with suicidal ideation having the strongest negative association with perceived burdensomeness in adolescents (Sommerfeld & Malek, 2019). Obsessions "are repetitive

and persistent thoughts, images, impulses or urges associated with anxiety”, while compulsions represent “repetitive behaviors or mental acts that the individual feels driven to perform in response to an obsession according to rigid rules, or to achieve a sense of completeness” (Stein, 2019) A high level of compulsions experience people with higher levels of obsessions, shame proneness, and thought action fusion-morality beliefs (Valentiner & Smith, 2008). Obsession and compulsion severity were negatively predicted by the nonjudgement facet of mindfulness (Cek, Reese, Broos, & Timpano, 2022), and the effects of a mindful attention training were higher in a group with harm-related obsessions, than in a group with persons with intrusive thoughts about contamination. Wahl, Huelle, Zurowski, and Kordon (2013) had the interesting idea to test what happens when people with obsessive-compulsive disorder listen to their obsessions: mindful metaphors significantly reduced the urge to neutralize. Anxiety in general, but also that associated with obsessions, seems to reduce the executive functions which furthermore heightens trait-anxiety (the tendency to experience anxiety) (Zainal & Newman, 2022), becoming aware of the present experience helping in escaping this loop, while acceptance of obsessions seems only to increase the urge to perform certain compulsions, with the tendency to control the environment or to detach from it.

Narcissism has positive correlations with severe violence, hostility, elated mood, grandiosity, unusual thoughts, bizarre behavior, conceptual disorganization, uncooperativeness, excitement, motor hyperactivity, and self-esteem and higher levels are encountered in men, those being involuntary admitted, and with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, while negative correlations have been observed with depression, suicidality, motor retardation, and global functioning. Especially entitlement seemed to have a substantial contribution, this dimension of narcissism also correlating with suspiciousness, mannerism and posturing. The association with unusual thinking was stronger for entitlement than for the total score on narcissism (Svindseth et al., 2008). Narcissism is positively associated with anger, and negatively with negative emotions after experiencing or remembering social rejection, those higher in narcissism reacting more aggressive against those rejecting them, but also a third innocent party, and aggressive behavior decreased after social acceptance (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). After bogus negative feedback on the results on an intelligence test (they were told they had lower performances, while the time for completing the test was shorter), those with a low self-concept clarity with high narcissism reacted with aggressiveness against the source of feedback, while those with clearer self-concept and low narcissism developed feelings of depression, with no aggression (Stucke & Sporer, 2002). Lower intelligence is often the motive for social rejection. Montoro and colleagues (2022) examined the associations of seven dimensions of narcissism with both resiliency and post-traumatic symptoms, also considering different self-regulating mechanisms. While authority and exhibitionism had positive correlations with most aspects of resilience (persistence, control, adaptability, purpose), acting exploitative only had a negative association with spirituality, superiority and entitlement having no significant associations with resilience factors. Entitlement was positively associated with the frequency of post-traumatic symptoms, while self-sufficiency was negatively correlated with frequency of PTSD symptoms and severity and vanity only with frequency of PTSD symptoms. Self-sufficiency and vanity were negatively associated with negative affect, perceived stress, and positively with positive affect, along with authority, exhibitionism, and superiority. Superiority and vanity negatively correlated with emotional suppression, while it had a positive association with entitlement.

The objective of our research was to investigate the associations between dimensions of belongingness (the satisfaction or the need to belong and its frustration), obsessive thinking, compulsive behavior, but also pathological narcissism, and aspects correlated with healthy living like awareness of here-

and-now experience and its acceptance. Starting from the associations between the variables, another objective was to try to find a prediction model for obsessive thinking, different types of compulsive behaviors and different aspects of narcissism starting from aspects associated with well-being which could be developed or worked on in personal development or psychotherapeutic programs.

The working hypothesis were that there are associations between (1) feeling accepted/included as satisfying the belonging need and obsessiveness; (2) accepted/included and certain compulsions; (3) feeling excluded or rejected and obsessive thinking; (4) feeling excluded or rejected and certain compulsions; (5) feeling excluded or rejected and narcissism; (6) narcissism and obsessiveness; (7) narcissism and certain compulsions; (8) between awareness and obsessiveness; (9) awareness and certain compulsions; (10) between accepting moment-to-moment experience and obsessing; and (11) between accepting moment-to-moment experience and certain compulsions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To accomplish the objectives, we conducted a correlational study, with psychometric and statistical methods.

The participants in the experiment were 44 persons (38 women and 6 men) with ages between 23 and 56 years ($M=42.93$, $SD=8.60$), four of them with doctoral studies, and the rest with masteral and bachelor's degree, with jobs in different domains.

Materials and methods:

The General Belongness Scale (GBS, Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012) is an instrument with 12 items divided on two subscales, Acceptance/Inclusion and Rejection/Exclusion. The English form was validated by online administration, proving strong validity and high reliability. It refers to the actual feeling of belonging. On the sample in the present research, alpha Cronbach was .703 for the Acceptance/Inclusion scale and .845 for the Exclusion/ Rejection Scale.

The Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory Short Version (OCI-R, Foa et al. 2002) is an 18-item questionnaire with 6 subscales, with excellent psychometric properties on persons with obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders, and nonanxious persons. The six subscales are: Washing, Obsessing, Hoarding, Ordering, Checking, and Neutralizing. The internal consistency as measured with alpha Cronbach for the form in the present research was .891.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory – 13 (NPI-13, Gentile et al. 2013) is a questionnaire with 13 items, with two divergent answer variants asking the respondent to choose one of them, which characterizes her/him. The instrument distinguishes three factors of narcissistic personality: Leadership/Authority, Grandiose Exhibitionism, and Entitlement/Exploitativeness. The last one correlates especially with psychological distress, impulse-control problems, submissiveness. The alpha Cronbach of the present form was .511.

The Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PHLMS, Cardaciotto et al. 2008) contains two subscales: awareness of moment-to-moment personal experience and its acceptance. It refers to mindfulness as described by Kabat-Zinn and it has negative associations with psychopathology in general. The alpha Cronbach in the present study was .769 for awareness subscale and .820 for acceptance subscale.

Procedure: The instruments were administered online, in November, 2022.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The collected data confirmed the association between feeling accepted, included and obsessive-compulsive manifestations in general ($r=-.342$, $p=.023$), especially with obsessing ($r= -.327$, $p=.030$),

as supposed in the first hypothesis and shown in Figure 1, with washing ($r=-.442$, $p=.003$, Figure 2) and neutralization ($r= -.307$, $p=.043$, Figure 3) as supposed by the second hypothesis.

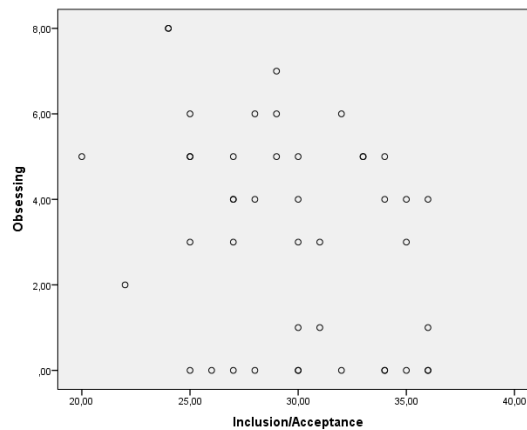


Figure 1. The correlation between Obsessing and Acceptance/Inclusion

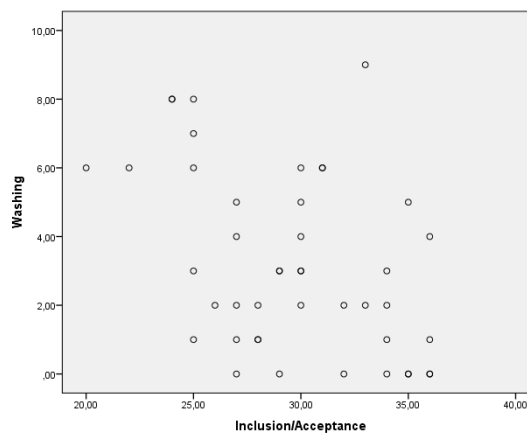


Figure 2. The correlation between Acceptance/Inclusion (feeling of belonging) and Washing

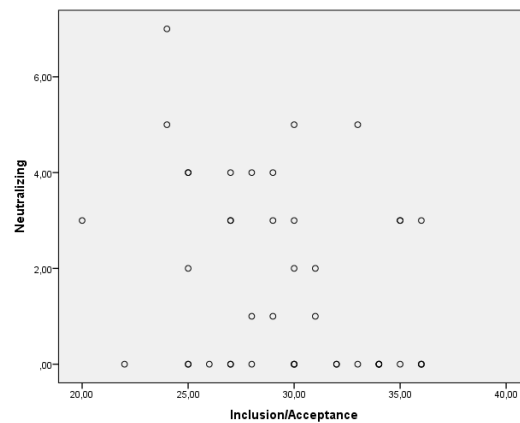


Figure 3. The correlation between Acceptance/Inclusion (feeling of belonging) and Neutralizing

On the other side, feeling excluded/rejected positively correlated with obsessive-compulsive symptoms in general ($r=.381$), and especially with obsessing ($r=.495$, $p=.001$, Figure 4), confirming the third hypothesis, and with compulsions such as washing ($r=.352$, $p=.019$, Figure 5), and neutralizing ($r=.353$, $p=.019$, Figure 6), partially confirming the fourth hypothesis.

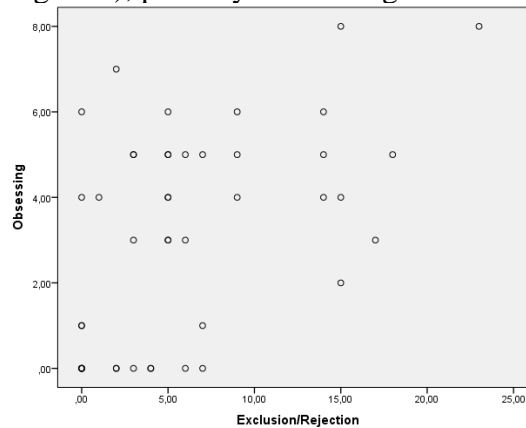


Figure 4. The correlation between feeling excluded/rejected (as opposed to belonging) and Obsessing

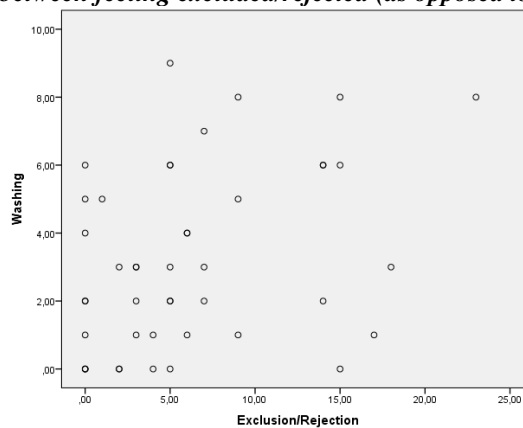


Figure 5. The correlation between feeling excluded/rejected (as opposed to belonging) and washing as compulsion

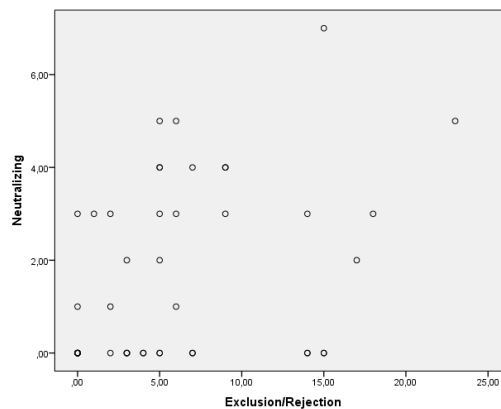


Figure 6. The correlation between feeling excluded/rejected (as opposed to belonging) and neutralizing as compulsion

The data did not confirm the fifth hypothesis: the correlation between feeling excluded/rejected and narcissism was not significant, and only partially confirmed the sixth and the seventh: the entitlement dimension of narcissism had a positive correlation with obsessing ($r=.367$, $p=.014$), order ($r=.362$, $p=.016$), checking ($r=.519$, $p=.000$), and neutralization ($r=.386$, $p=.010$). The eighth hypothesis was confirmed, the awareness dimension of mindfulness being negatively correlated with obsessing ($r=-.341$, $p=.023$, Figure 7).

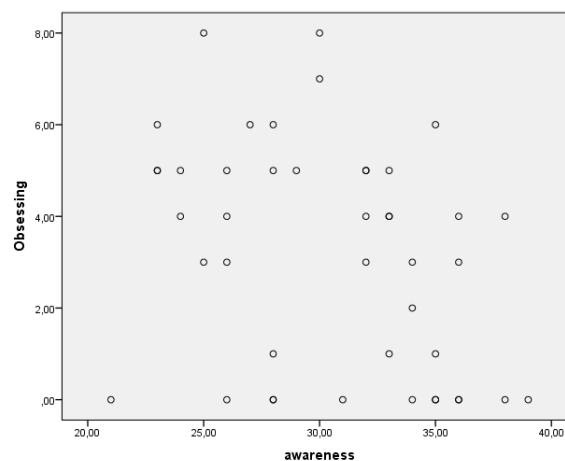


Figure 7. The correlation between the awareness dimension of PHLMS and obsessing

The ninth hypothesis was only partially confirmed, awareness (PHLMS) being negatively associated with hoarding ($r=-.459$, $p=.002$, Figure 8) and neutralization ($r=-.364$, $p=.015$, Figure 9). The data did not confirm the tenth hypothesis, the association between acceptance of here-and-now experience with obsessing was not significant. The eleventh, assuming associations between acceptance of here-and-now experience with the different type of compulsions, was only confirmed for ordering ($r=-.462$, $p=.002$, Figure 10), checking ($r=-.388$, $p=.009$, Figure 11), and neutralizing ($r=-.344$, $p=.022$, Figure 12).

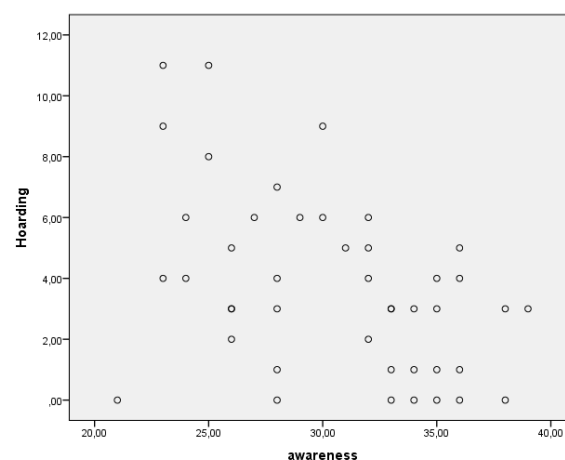


Figure 8. The correlation between the awareness dimension of PHLMS and hoarding as compulsion

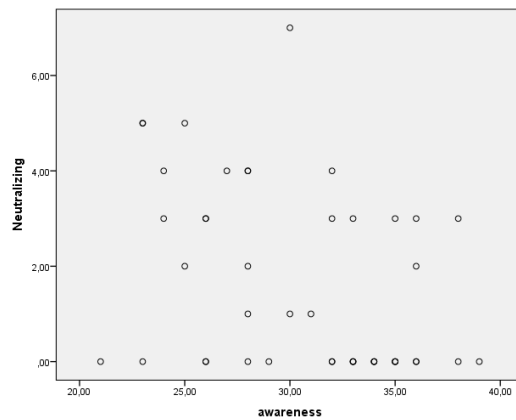


Figure 9. The correlation between the awareness dimension of PHLMS and neutralizing as compulsion

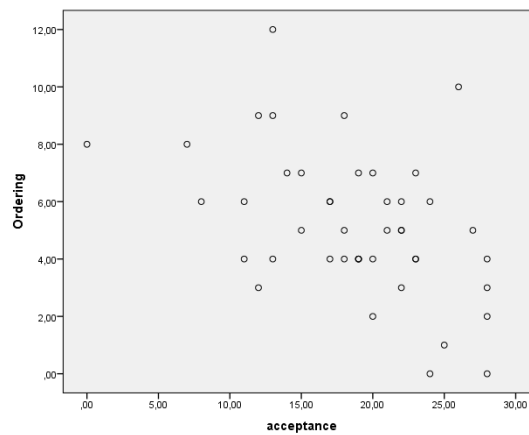


Figure 10. The correlation between the acceptance dimension of PHLMS and ordering as compulsion

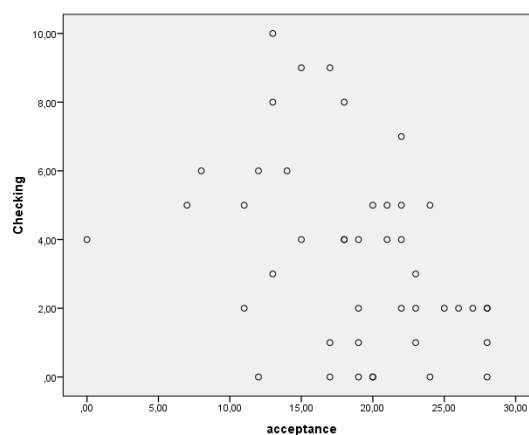


Figure 11. The correlation between the acceptance dimension of PHLMS and checking as compulsion

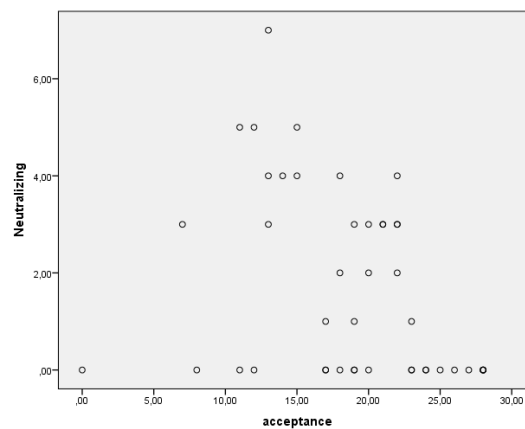


Figure 12. *The correlation between the acceptance dimension of PHLMS and neutralizing as compulsion*

Starting from these correlations, we used the linear regression analysis to find out which variables help in predicting obsessing, but also the different types of compulsions. On obsessing, there was a significant effect of exclusion/rejection ($\beta=0.470$, $t=2.547$, $p=.015$) and of awareness ($\beta=-0.299$, $t=2.355$, $p=.024$), but not of acceptance/inclusion ($\beta=0.091$, $t=.496$, $p=.623$), entitlement ($\beta=0.186$, $t=1.406$, $p=.168$), or acceptance (PHLMS) ($\beta=-0.238$, $t=-1.917$, $p=.063$). When removing acceptance/inclusion and entitlement from the analysis, acceptance of moment-to-moment experience had a significant effect on obsessing ($\beta=-0.271$, $t=-2.203$, $p=.033$). On neutralizing, there was a significant effect of awareness ($\beta=-0.309$, $t=-2.366$, $p=.023$) and acceptance (PHLMS) ($\beta=-0.299$, $t=-2.340$, $p=.025$), but not of inclusion/acceptance ($\beta=-0.92$, $t=-.484$, $p=.631$), exclusion/rejection ($\beta=0.167$, $t=.930$, $p=.358$), nor entitlement ($\beta=0.291$, $t=1.923$, $p=.062$). When removing the dimensions of belonging, the entitlement reached a significant effect on neutralizing ($\beta=0.302$, $t=2.313$, $p=.026$). On checking, there was a significant effect of acceptance (PHLMS) ($\beta=-0.301$, $t=-2.363$, $p=.023$) and entitlement ($\beta=0.462$, $t=3.626$, $p=.001$). For washing, in the initial model with two predictors (the two dimensions of belongingness) none of them reached statistical significance, so, we only kept one dimension, which had a significant effect on this type of compulsion: acceptance/inclusion ($\beta=-3.196$, $t=2.547$, $p=.003$).

The research argues in favor of considering the need to belong as a deficit need, its satisfaction being associated with different aspects of functioning. So, there is the positive aspect resulting in the feeling of being included or accepted, and the negative aspect resulting from actively frustrating it, by rejection. Obsessions may be positively predicted by feeling excluded or rejected and negatively by the awareness of here-and-now experience and its acceptance. It is important to mention that previous research highlighted that rejection activates some of the same brain areas as physical pain (Kross, Berman, & Mischel, 2011). Social exclusion may activate pain mechanisms leading to intrusive thoughts of death, harm or suffering, also associated with decreasing awareness and acceptance of here-and now experience. Furthermore, the last two variables negatively predicted neutralizing, positively predicted by entitlement. Checking may be negatively predicted from acceptance of moment-to-moment experience and positively from feeling entitled, while washing was negatively predicted by feeling accepted and included. Accumulating actual experience by being aware seems to be accompanied by a lower tendency for hoarding, while acceptance of momentary experience (either external or internal – which may be in the form of obsessions) is associated with lowering ordering compulsion.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Strating from feeling excluded and rejected by significant others, people tend to react with intrusive negative thoughts regarding self and others, which they seem to be more aware of than of their actual experience in the environment. When adding an increasing feeling of entitlement, people tend also to use neutralizing (numbering) or checking as compulsions. Accumulation of experience in the environment tends to be replaced by accumulating useless objects (hoarding) and lower acceptance of experience increases the tendency to introduce a certain order in the external reality. So rejection not only activates nervous centers of physical pain, as previously suggested, but the person also behaves as if she cannot be aware of some sensory experience. Persons with a higher sense of entitlement tend to also feel entitled to check some aspects of reality, but also to introduce some order in the details of reality, like familiar forms of organization like numbers. Feeling accepted and included is associated with less compulsive washing. The psychodynamic defense mechanism of introjection seems to explain the association between exclusion and obsessions. When replacing the internal experience with that introjected rejection from significant others, the generic feeling of entitlement may replace the actual self-knowledge, and the persons seems to struggle to recover the awareness capacity by checking and reducing fear by introducing numbers, making the reality more comprehensible and less threatening and helping in focusing on the here-and-now experience in the environment. It is interesting, though, the choice of this specific type of compulsion, as it suggests an increasing number as in a growing group of people. While we may consider inclusion and exclusion as opposites, in the actual experience, they describe a continuum. So, before feeling excluded, a person feels less and less included, starting to obsess (a reflection of the actual loss of social acceptance), but also starting to wash compulsively and to neutralize the thoughts as numbering helps in focusing on the sensory experience. The results may suggest possible associations between feeling included/excluded, obsessions, possible suicidal ideation and behavior, lowering the awareness capacity and certain type of compulsions, as attempts to recover it and to increase social inclusion.

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