

Predicting Compulsive Buying from Personality Disorders

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ABSTRACT

We applied a cross-sectional design to the study of compulsive buying. Using a sample of undergraduate students who attended a public university in the northeast U.S., we found that detachment, antagonism, and pain of paying predicted compulsive buying.

INTRODUCTION

Compulsive buying is a psychopathological disorder that produces uncontrollable urges to purchase consumer goods, which result in financial, interpersonal and psychological distress (Christenson et al., 1994; McElroy, Keck, Pope, Smith, & Strakowski, 1994).

Indeed, compulsive buyers report not having enough money resulting in the use of credit cards (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989; Roberts & Jones, 2001), and therefore they experienced less pain of paying than non-compulsive buyers (Harnish, Bridges, Natarajan, Gump, & Carson, 2018).

Depression and anxiety are identified frequently as psychiatric comorbid conditions for compulsive buying (Weinstein, Maraz, Griffiths, Lejoyeux, & Demetrovic, 2016). Additionally, compulsive buyers have increased levels of anxiety, and negative affect (e.g., Billieux et al., 2008; Gallagher et al., 2017).

HYPOTHESES

We hypothesized that negative affect, detachment and antagonism would predict compulsive buying because compulsive buyers experience anxiety, depression and negative affect as compared to non-compulsive buyers.

Additionally, we hypothesized that pain of paying would predict compulsive buying because compulsive buyers were more likely to report having more credit cards and credit debt than non-compulsive buyers.

METHOD

Participants. Data were obtained from 148 undergraduates through Prolific Academic who were US citizens between the ages of 20 and 29. The study was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board, and all participants consented to the study.

Measures. The RCBS (Ridgway et al., 2008) is a 6-item scale that surmounts shortcomings associated with older measures of compulsive buying (see Ridgway et al., 2008). Scores ranged from 6 to 38. Cronbach’s alpha was .87.

The PID-5-BF (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) consists of 25 items that assesses five personality trait domains including negative affect, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism. Scores ranged from 0-2.4. Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

The STS (Rick et al., 2007) is a 4-item scale that measures the prospect of spending money painful. Scores ranged from 4 to 24. Cronbach’s alpha was .74.

A multiple regression using the standard method was conducted. A significant model emerged, $F(6, 138) = 20.93, p < .001$. The model accounted for 48% of variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.45$). Detachment, antagonism, and pain of paying were strongly linked to compulsive buying with pain of paying making the strongest contribution.

Scale	B	SE B	β	t	p
PID-5-BF: Negative Affect	.000	.181	.000	-.001	.999
PID-5-BF: Detachment	-.416	.160	-.206	-2.592	.011
PID-5-BF: Antagonism	.644	.217	.220	2.969	.004
PID-5-BF: Disinhibition	.299	.195	.123	1.534	.127
PID-5-BF: Psychoticism	.310	.180	.158	1.724	.087
STS	.943	.118	.537	7.994	.000

DISCUSSION

Results revealed that those who tend to have behaviors that put them at odds with others (high antagonism) somehow manage to maintain good social relationships (low detachment) through compulsively buying goods.

Compulsive buyers do not use the products purchased but rather discard them or give them away. This suggests that compulsive buyers may impress others with their purchases as they tend to purchase luxury goods thereby raising their self-esteem.

Alternatively, they may raise their self-esteem by giving away their purchases to others (i.e., “buying their friendships”).

RESULTS

The correlations among the variables are presented in the table below.

Variable	PID-5-BF: Negative Affect	PID-5-BF: Detachment	PID-5-BF: Antagonism	PID-5-BF: Disinhibition	PID-5-BF: Psychoticism	STS
RCBS	.16	-.04	.33**	.34**	.17*	.61**
PID-5-BF: Negative Affect	--	.48**	.21*	.35**	.58**	.13
PID-5-BF: Detachment		--	.39**	.38**	.55**	-.10
PID-5-BF: Antagonism			--	.48**	.41**	.13
PID-5-BF: Disinhibition				--	.52**	.23**
PID-5-BF: Psychoticism					--	-.04

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.