

The Relations Between Affect and Internalizing Symptoms: Disentangling Intensity, Frequency, and Granularity

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Background

- Internalizing symptoms (e.g., depressive symptoms and worry) are associated with low trait levels of pleasant emotion and high trait levels of unpleasant emotion.
- Understanding how internalizing psychopathology is related to daily emotional experiences can improve understanding of shared/specific etiology, course, and targets for intervention and improved well-being
- The goal of the current study was to examine associations between internalizing symptoms (depression and worry) and three emotion dynamics assessed in daily life: frequency, intensity, and granularity (of both pleasant and unpleasant emotion).

Methods

Participants

- 309 college students (72% women)
- Race: White (51.1%), Asian/Asian-American (31.5%), African-American (5.9%)
- Ethnicity: Latinx/Hispanic (13.5%)

Procedure

- Single 15- minute lab session to complete measures of depression and worry
- 7-days of daily diaries following lab session
- Data included for participants with five or more days (86%)

Methods (cont.)

Internalizing Symptoms

- *Depression*: Mood and Anxiety Symptoms Questionnaire (anhedonic depression subscale)
- *Worry*: Penn State Worry Questionnaire

Daily Emotion Measures

- Pleasant emotions: calm, content, cheerful, excited, proud (rated on 1-5 scale each day)
- Unpleasant emotions: sad, angry, anxious guilty/ashamed, bored (rated on 1-5 scale each day)

Measures of Emotion Dynamics

- Intensity = mean level across week
- Frequency = number of days emotion was reported
- Granularity = intraclass correlation (ICC 1 with absolute agreement) of same valence emotions across the week

Analyses

- Correlations used to examine bivariate associations between depression, worry, and dynamics
- Multiple regressions used to examine associations when other dynamics are accounted for

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Results

| Correlations | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------|
| | Depression | Worry |
| Positive Differentiation | -.04 | -.16** |
| Negative Differentiation | -.04 | -.14* |
| Positive Intensity | -.27** | -.21** |
| Negative Intensity | .42** | .32** |
| Positive Frequency | -.18** | -.20** |
| Negative Frequency | .46** | .36** |
| Standardized Beta | | |
| | Depression | Worry |
| Negative Differentiation | .04 | -.08 |
| Negative Intensity | .33** | -.23** |
| Negative Frequency | .38** | -.29** |
| Standardized Beta | | |
| | Depression | Worry |
| Positive Differentiation | -.02 | -.15** |
| Positive Intensity | -.24** | -.17** |
| Positive Frequency | -.11 | -.14* |

Conclusions

- Depression and worry are associated with unique patterns of daily emotional experiences
- Depressive symptoms are associated with low intensity of pleasant emotions, high intensity and frequency of unpleasant emotions
- Worry weakly negatively associated with dynamics of pleasant emotions, negatively associated with frequency and intensity of unpleasant emotions
- More work needed to replicate patterns in daily life to better understand how internalizing symptoms are associated with daily emotional functioning