Emotional Control and Trichotillomania: Subtypes and Phenomenology
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Background
Trichotillomania is a compulsive hair-pulling disorder, with prevalence estimated at approximately 1-3% of the population. This project explored emotional regulation in the disorder using data from the Comprehensive Survey on Trichotillomania.

Methods
Self-report data were collected from an internet-based survey.

Affective Regulation:
- Measure addresses ability to control emotions.
- Instrument had not previously been validated.
- Instruction reads: “Below you will see a list of moods. Please check the circle that indicates your ability to control each of these moods. How easily can you ‘snap out of it?’”
- 5-point scale
- Cronbach’s alpha of .83, indicating excellent internal validity for this instrument.

Hair-pulling Behavior: Previously validated Massachusetts General Hospital Hair-pulling-Scale (MGH-HPS).

Participants: N=1330

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Pullers</th>
<th>Non-Pullers</th>
<th>Mean S.D.</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender, % (N)</td>
<td>93.9 %</td>
<td>92.7 %</td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age, y</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (S.D.)</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity, % (N)</td>
<td>64.1 %</td>
<td>63.9 %</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Income, % (N)</td>
<td>26.9 %</td>
<td>27.1 %</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION: Hair-pullers self-report a somewhat lower ability to regulate emotions.

Are distinct sub-types identifiable based on trigger emotions?

Method: Cluster analysis was performed to identify sub-types of similar cases based on emotional hair-pulling cues. Four clusters were created, with various trigger emotions highlighted as prominent cues for that group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION: We expected to find clusters based on the relative importance of different emotional cues for triggering hair-pulling. Instead, we found that clusters differed by the number of emotions that trigger hair-pulling.

Do people with trichotillomania experience greater difficulty "snapping out" of emotional states?

CONCLUSION: Higher severity hair-pullers self-report greater difficulty with affective regulation.

Summary of Results:
- People with the disorder endorse greater difficulty regulating emotions.
- General ability to regulate emotions is correlated with the severity of hair-pulling.
- Distinct sub-types are identifiable. Clusters are based on the number of emotions that serve as hair-pulling cues.
- Difficulty regulating an emotion may influence that emotion’s role as a hair-pulling trigger, but does not fully explain the phenomenology behind hair-pulling cues.

Implications and next steps:
- Emotional control is a useful measure and unitary construct.
- Regulation is related to trichotillomania:
  - Pullers have greater difficulty than non-pullers.
  - Pullers with greater severity of the disorder have greater difficulty.
- The correlation between severity of the disorder and affective regulation is moderate.
- It is an important piece, but not a complete explanation.

Acknowledgements
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References