

BIS Psyche & Soul 41

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD
sumedhacentre@gmail.com

Podcast Link:

<https://anchor.fm/boscom/episodes/2-41-Psyche--Soul--89-eugti0>

Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

In this weekend's edition I shall explore Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder.

Have you heard of the secretary to a Provincial who when she was first told to prepare a report and make fifty copies of it, individually proofread all fifty copies! (This is a case of Perfectionism arising from excessive fear of making a mistake or being found to be inefficient -- and a bit of ignorance as well) Or, the young man who kept on trimming his beard to get it just right until there was nothing left to trim!! (A case of compulsive need to get things just right/ and anxiety at any possible imperfection).

Or, we may be aware of someone who has to wash his or her hands several times, even when washing once is more than enough. Or, one who checks several times the lock on the door is locked, sometimes returning to check after having gone a distance? Or one who feels the need to rearrange books and other articles on their desk several times a day to make sure they are always in the right place and in the right order.

All these persons could be labelled obsessive- compulsive. If their compulsion causes them excessive distress then they would be considered as suffering from a personality disorder.

The famous psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich described compulsive characters as “living machines” The essential feature of the disorder is a preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and mental and interpersonal control. From a psychodynamic perspective, contemporary psychologist David Shapiro emphasises the role of distorted volition or will directed toward controlling what cannot be controlled—namely, drives, spontaneous interests, and affects.

Prevalence

Obsessive-compulsive is the most frequently diagnosed personality disorder and is more often found among men.

Symptoms

Behavioural

- Those who suffer from it are driven by perfectionism and preoccupied with rules, lists, order, schedules, cleanliness, and correctness in every detail. They repeatedly check for

possible mistakes. They tend to miss what is most important in a situation by focusing on minor details.

- They are likely to be workaholics and care little for leisure activities and friendships.
- They are very dependable, but can be stubborn and possessive. They are very indecisive and tend to frequently procrastinate needed action.
- They tend to be miserly in spending both in regard to self and others.

Interpersonal

- These persons tend to be exquisitely conscious of social rank and status, and modify their behaviour accordingly (deferential and obsequious to superiors and haughty and arrogant to subordinates and peers).
- One of the most common characteristics is that they are unable to delegate tasks to others because they believe others will do them badly or not in the way they would like them to do them. This leads to being overburdened by many things and getting stressed out.
- They are very loyal to the organizations and ideals they espouse
- Socially, they are experienced as formal, cold, standoffish, aloof distant.

Cognitive

- Their cognitive processes (thinking) is very rigid and rule-based
- They have difficulty in establishing priorities and perspectives (Everything is of equal and usually grave importance)
- They find decision making difficult and tend to procrastinate decisions often leading to interpersonal conflict and organizational dysfunction.
- They are prone to ruminative thinking (tormented by worries and fears of failure and unable to stop brooding about them)

Affective

- There is an absence or deficiency in the feeling dimension of life; for them the ideal and priority is rationality, reasonableness, and correctness)
- They appear grim and cheerless
- They have difficulty in expressing intimate feelings such as warmth and tenderness. They are often embarrassed by too much affection, verbal or physical. They are more comfortable expressing caring at a distance.
- Their emotion that is most apparent to those around them is anger. They can become upset and angry in situations where they are not able to maintain control, although the anger is typically not expressed directly.
- The primary affect underlying the disorder is that of fear—fear of doing something wrong.

Spirituality

- These persons' spirituality is characterized by rigid observance of rules.
- They are over-conscientious, scrupulous, and inflexible about matters of morality. Psychoanalyst Karen Horney observes that they are driven by the "Tyranny of the should." They are virtual prisoners of their own stern, unrelenting conscience.
- They feel they need to be perfect to win God's approval and love.

- They are excessively self-critical, and because they believe the same rules apply to all they can be exceedingly judgmental of others. They do not make allowances for mitigating circumstances

Vulnerability to Stress

- Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder produces high stress resulting from constant pressure to live up to some ideal standard, concern with time and punctuality, vigilance to avoid error or failure, impatience, competitiveness and tendency to suppress feelings.

All this can lead to relational and occupational distress for self and others.

Introspection and Prayer

- Can you recognize any of these characteristics in yourself? Or in those around you?
- How do the presence of these characteristics affect your relationships and daily life?

.....

In Mathew's Gospel (5, 28) Jesus invites us to be perfect as his heavenly father. However, many of us interpret that perfection as flawlessness and try to be flawless, living a very careful and cautious life devoid of mistakes and errors. Our perfectionism arises from fear of punishment, seeing God as strict judge and ever ready to punish even the slightest mistake.

However, our God is far from being like that, as we read in sacred scripture. God is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger abounding in love, who understands our weakness and vulnerabilities and empathizes with us.

We could spend a few moments with this compassionate and caring God, bringing before God all the stress and hassles we experience because of our own obsessive-compulsive personality traits or of those around us.

Have a carefree and relaxing weekend. Be safe. Be healthy. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening/ reading.

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD
sumedhacentre@gmail.com