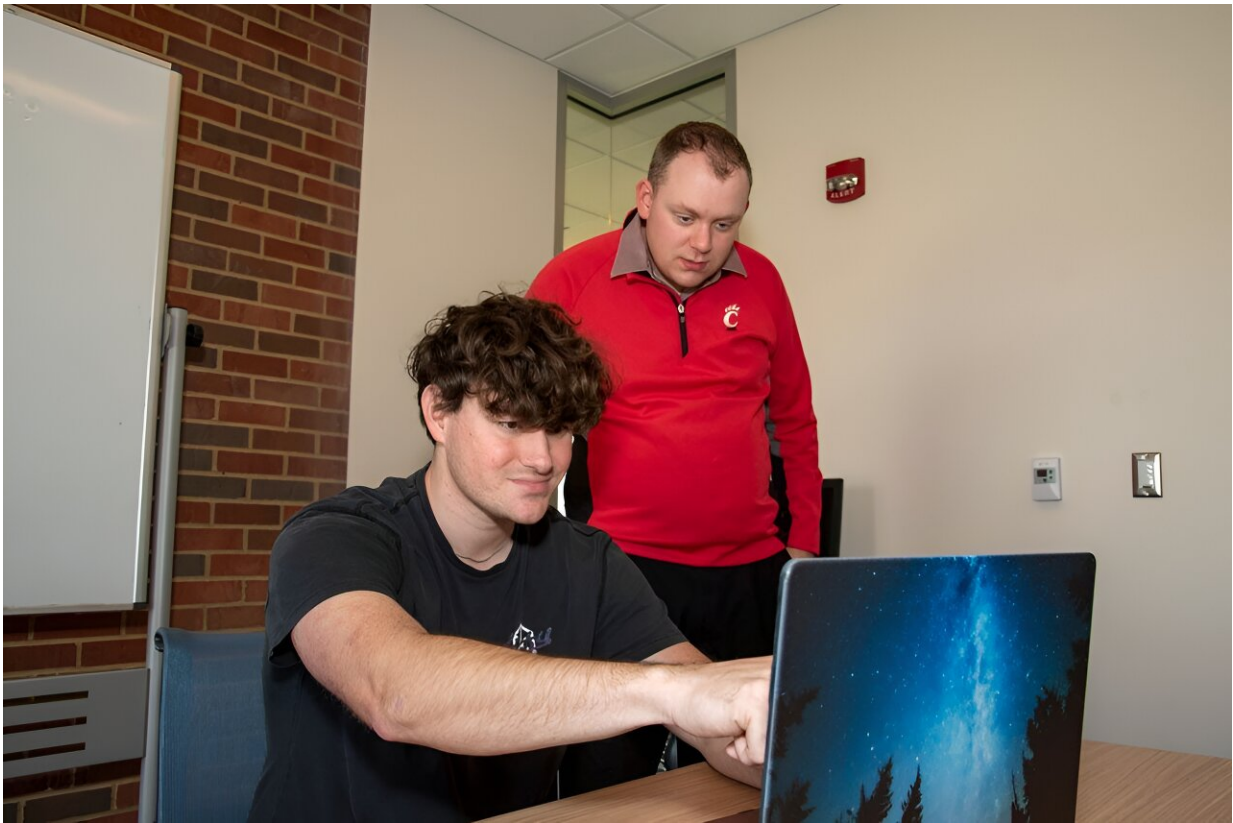


# Students publish research on smartphone use in people with OCD

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Alex Holte (standing) and Ryan Padgett review findings from their study on smartphone usage. Credit: University of Cincinnati

New research conducted by students and a professor at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College finds that smartphone usage can increase

and even become unhealthy for those who have obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), a psychiatric disorder with symptoms related to unwanted and distressing thoughts that can lead to repetitive and disruptive behaviors.

UC Blue Ash undergraduate [students](#) Kaley Aukerman, Madi Kenna and Ryan Padgett recently co-authored the research that was [published](#) in *Current Psychology*. It evaluates the impact of OCD symptoms in predicting how someone would score in Problematic Smartphone Use (PSU).

The students worked on the project with Alex Holte, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology at UC Blue Ash. They surveyed more than 400 people and asked them to complete multiple measures assessing various levels of obsessive-compulsive behavior, fear of missing out, inhibitory anxiety, boredom proneness and PSU.

The research found that individuals with clinically significant levels of OCD are more prone to have PSU in comparison to those with non-clinical levels of OCD. The group also documented that fear of missing out and boredom influenced the relationship between OCD and PSU.

"There is a theoretical model known as compensatory internet use theory and it suggests that people will compensate for [negative emotions](#) by using technology," says Holte. "Individuals who have OCD desire certainty. So, they might have a fear related to their OCD that they can use their phone to check and confirm or deny that fear."

The study also shows the chain of actions that can occur by theorizing OCD predicted boredom proneness, fear of missing out and inhibitory anxiety. These factors can lead someone with OCD to checking and re-checking their phone over and over.

The research conducted by the students opens new doors in studying how people with OCD can be impacted by their smartphone use and how using a smartphone can become a behavioral addiction. Holte said he felt the findings were important enough to submit for publication and was pleasantly surprised when *Current Psychology* responded favorably, and quickly. The research was published online this past fall, just months after it was submitted.

"It is really rare for undergrad students to get published, just because the publication process typically takes a long time," said Holte. "I think my first publication took two or three years after I submitted."

For Aukerman, Kenna and Padgett, having the research published was a nice surprise, but being part of the research process and learning how to document their findings has been a valuable learning experience.

"The really big jump is getting used to [scientific literature](#) and being able to write and format it, because it's not your simple conversation," Padgett said. "Professor Holte was really good in helping us take our research and describe it in detail, in the sort of way that is expected for scientific research."

Padgett is studying neuroscience with plans to eventually pursue a master's degree in psychology or neuropsychology. He said he appreciates the mentoring that Professor Holte has provided and is excited to continue learning about the [research process](#).

Next steps for the students and professor will be to study how some people look at smartphones as a refuge that takes them away from their troubles, while others consider it a burden that requires their frequent attention.

**More information:** Alex J. Holte et al, "Let me check my phone just

one more time": Understanding the relationship of obsessive-compulsive disorder severity and problematic smartphone use, *Current Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s12144-023-05298-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-05298-2)

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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