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**Not Just Right Experiences as ironic result of perseverative checking.**

**Background:** OCD patients report Not Just Right Experiences (NJREs) broadly defined as “uncomfortable sensations of things not being just right”. It has been suggested that NJREs serve as a motive for compulsive perseveration and that the latter may be continued until NJREs subside. We hypothesized that perseverative checking has the opposite effect and *promote*, rather than reduce NJREs.

**Methods:** Two separate experiments were conducted with 48 (Experiment 1) and 55 (Experiment 2) healthy students. In both studies, all participants checked a virtual gas stove and were asked to rate their memory of that checking trial (i.e., meta-memory: confidence, vividness and detail of memory) and additionally completed an NJRE scale. The NJRE and meta-memory ratings were assessed at two times during the experiment (pre vs. post). In between, half of the participants engaged in 20 gas stove checking trials (i.e., relevant checking), whereas the other participants checked 20 light bulbs (i.e., irrelevant checking). We expected that participants who engaged in relevant checking, would report decreased memory confidence, vividness and detail, and – most importantly – an increase in NJRE; while we did not expect a difference over time for the irrelevant checkers.

**Results:** In Experiment 1, we found no effect for Confidence in memory, but memory Vividness and Detail decreased over time only in the relevant checking group. We found a medium effect for NJRE, but this trend did not reach statistical significance. Hence, we attempted to replicate the findings in a second experiment. In Experiment 2 only participants in the relevant checking group experienced decreased memory Confidence and Vividness. Detail did not decrease in the relevant group, but increased in the irrelevant checking group. In addition, we again found a medium effect for NJRE in line with our expectations: NJREs only increased in the relevant checking group. Finally, the data from both studies were analyzed in a meta-analysis showing – in line with our hypotheses – a small effect for Confidence, large effects of Vividness and Detail and a medium effect for NJRE.

**Conclusions:** While NJREs may serve as a motive for perseverative checking, the latter seems counterproductive. Repeated checking not only affects meta-memory (reduced vividness/detail and confidence), it also increase feelings of thing being ‘not just right’. Conceptual and clinical issues will be critically discussed.

**Key words:**

Not just right experience | Perseverative checking | OCD | Metamemory | Experimental psychology