

Client Exercise Sheet 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

Steps to Discovering your Theme

- Joe doubts constantly that he has locked his car door properly. So recentring this doubt around Joe gives us: Joe believes he's the sort of person who could leave car doors unlocked.
- Joe also needs to check several times that he closed the lights before leaving his lab at work. So recentring *this* second doubt around Joe gives us: Joe believes he's a person who could leave the light on.
- Finally we have a third obsession where Joe becomes preoccupied that he might have forgotten some important detail of this work. So recentring this doubt gives us: Joe thinks he could be a person who leaves out important details in his work.

If we combine all three doubts to arrive at a common theme, we could say Joe is a person who thinks he could be someone who forgets to do important actions.

So look at John's series of obsessional doubts:

What do these doubts have in common? Well, they all involve John and all involve cleanliness. Anything else?

What about order? Clearly John gives a lot of importance to being clean, being surrounded by an orderly environment. Assuming the doubts listed are exhaustive of John's OCD, what is he not obsessively concerned about?

Well, a number of OCD domains: making errors, hurting people and saying bad things, to name a few. So John obviously considers that he doesn't need to concern himself so much with these areas. But why not? Isn't he just as likely to experience problems in these areas? Yes, in everyday life we can encounter problems in any area.

But John doesn't obsess in these other areas. So why not? Well, the answer, according to IBT, is because his self-theme does not make him vulnerable here. John considers himself the sort of person who could become unclear or could live in an unclear, disorderly environment which he does not wish to become. His extra obsessional concern is to prevent himself becoming such a person or a person who lives in such a state. John has never actually been such a person or ever lived in such a state, but OCD has convinced him he could become such a person if he doesn't obsess about it and perform his OCD rituals. In fact, when we ask John how he lives so cleanly, he will reply because he's obsessional and spends hours cleaning. Is he right? No, he's not. The OCD *as we know* has installed doubts in his mind which make him continuously fear he hasn't done enough or isn't clean enough. But these doubts *as we know* are based on an unreasonable story full of reasoning errors. In fact, doing the rituals simply reinforces and increases the doubt that he could become the person he fears he will. So he lives in a vicious circle where doubting produces more doubt which produces more rituals which reinforce the doubt and make real the real doubt seem real . . . so round and round the mulberry bush we go!

So where does the self-theme come from? Well, in the present, which is what concerns us here, the self is created and maintained by a story which bears all the hallmarks of an OCD doubting story. It draws on remote possibilities, abstract out-of-place facts and irrelevant events to make a convincing justification.

John's self-story was 'Well, my father was always forgetting to wash, he wouldn't change his clothes, and you inherit your father's traits. I'd help my mother clean up and she'd say, "Don't become like your father" '.

But how did this self develop in the past? We're not completely sure, but research suggests that people with OCD may have a tendency to compare themselves negatively to others and ignore their own needs and self-attributes. However, the important point is that we can change all this in the here and now without the need to look back to the past. It may be in working on your self-theme, you will recognize the origin of your story in a childhood experience. If so, fine, but the goal here is not to interpret the self- world but to change it.

Now repeat this exercise with your own doubts. List doubts, and then explore a common theme.

So obviously you consider yourself the sort of person who also could be:

This is your OCD theme, the person you are afraid you might become:

What is the evidence for this OCD possible self? Why are you so convinced you could become such a person that you need to invest so much time and effort to make sure you do not? Obviously the con trick of the OCD is to say to you, 'It's only because you do your rituals and are ultra-vigilant that you do not become your feared self'.

So now, justify your conviction in the OCD possible self. What convinces you?

Do you see the OCD reasoning here? Compare the reasoning related to self-doubt with the reasoning about your everyday obsessional doubts.

Client Training Card 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

Learning Points (Front)

- My OCD self is a possible self I'm afraid I could become if I don't perform my compulsions or rituals.
- The OCD self is based on a story.
- The OCD self is against my authentic self who I really am.
- My fear of becoming who OCD says I am or could be fuels my everyday OCD doubts and the OCD precautions I practice.

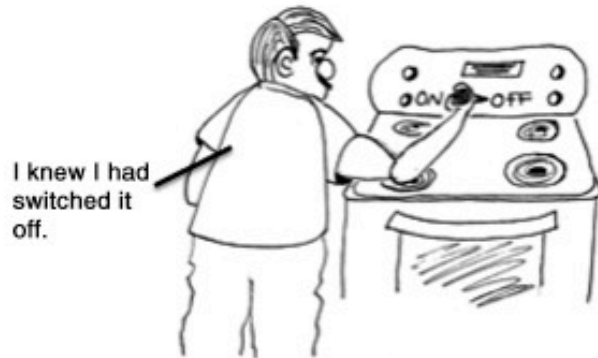
Daily Exercise (Back)

Become aware of how important a role your OCD feared self plays in motivating your specific OCD thoughts and actions. Would you be so driven if you possessed another self?

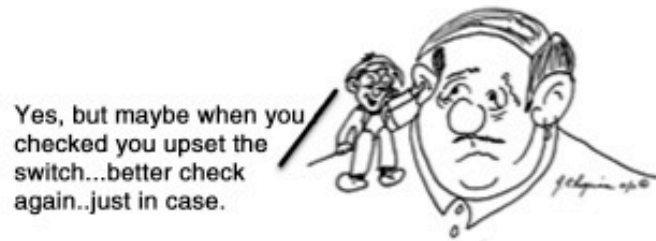
Monitor your actions every day, and from these actions (whether good or bad) build up a picture of the attributes you've shown during the day. How do your attributes and accomplishments support/not support, you becoming your feared OCD self? For example, Mary's feared self is that she will inadvertently commit or expose herself to danger. But actually, she is known to her colleagues as someone to consult if they foresee a problem. She is often invited to participate in forums to troubleshoot problems.



Are you really sure you
switched off the oven
Maybe...?



I knew I had
switched it
off.



Yes, but maybe when you
checked you upset the
switch...better check
again..just in case.

Cartoon 6. The hot spot.