

Client Worksheet 3

The Obsessional Story

Feeling Real

Why do doubts (or obsessions) *feel* so real? To answer this question, you will first have to understand why it is that something can feel real to us in the first place. For example, take the activity that you are engaged in right now, the reading of this page. Why does it feel real to you? It feels real not only because of the information that comes through your senses but also, far more importantly, because there is a story attached to this activity with a past, present and future.

Appealing Stories

Ask yourself, how did you come to read this page? Almost immediately a whole story will start to unfold that reads like a novel. You may see yourself in the past struggling with OCD, how you decided to seek help, your trips to the therapist office, the conversation and questions, the work you did at home, and the hope to overcome your OCD in the future.

Imagine for a moment you would be engaged in reading this page without the above story? How much would remain of your sense of reality in reading this page?

Listening to Your Own Novel

In a way, listening to your own thoughts is like reading a novel. This is not merely coincidental, but is part of how we organize our opinions and feelings about ourselves and how we experience the world around us.

While we are engaged with the world around us, a story is unfolding, and we add elements to this story which makes the world around us seem real and convincing, whether you are on your way to the grocery, going to work, conversing with friends or family or obsessing. So in a way, we go through life being storytellers, and the stories we tell ourselves have an important effect on our experience, what we believe in, and how real these beliefs feel to us. In the same manner, obsessional ideas also come about and appear real to us through the stories we tell ourselves. They have a history and a story attached to them, which make them feel very plausible and real.

We're All Storytellers

Aside from all being storytellers, we also reason, and weave our stories in a generally logical and coherent way. So in the story there are all kinds of seemingly logical and rational reasons behind the obsessional doubt. In fact, you are already quite familiar with the story behind your own obsessions and doubts. After all, in previous sessions, you have identified a lot of thoughts that appear to justify to obsessional doubt. However, all these bits and pieces of information that you have considered so far are really part of a more compelling story – the story you tell yourself when you think about why your doubt might be true. We also sometimes call it the *narrative unit* of your OCD. It is this narrative that makes the OCD feel so real