



THE REAL SELF

By Catherine Goldhouse, LICSW, LCSW



“An identity would seem to be arrived at by the way in which the person faces and uses his experience.”

--James Baldwin

Recap:

❖ False Self

❖ Narrative

People with OCD often have self-doubt and struggle to trust themselves or even know who they really are. This makes them especially susceptible to believing that imagined versions of themselves that they would never want to be could actually be who they really are or could one day become. In fact, compulsions (including avoiding, ruminating, researching, and replaying) are about making sure this feared imaginary self did not, does not, and/or will not come true.

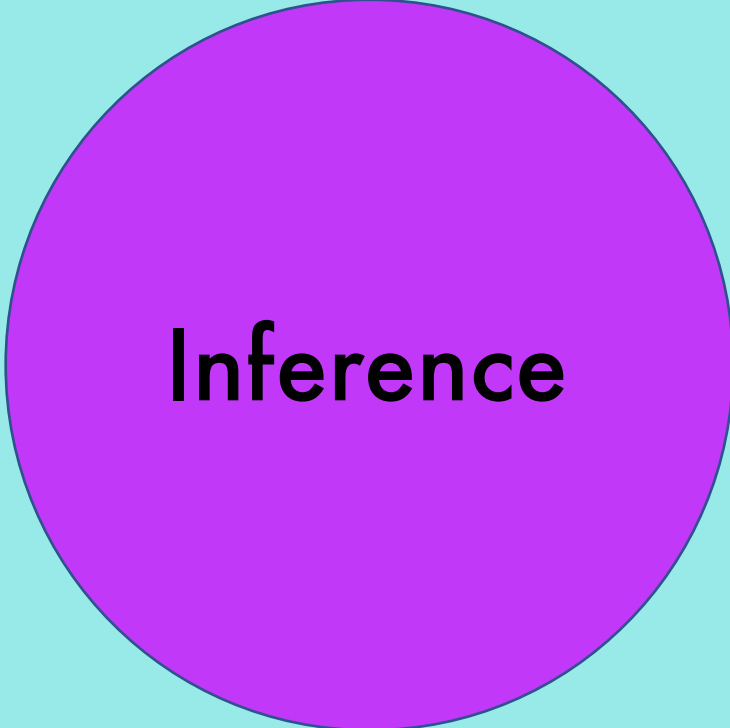


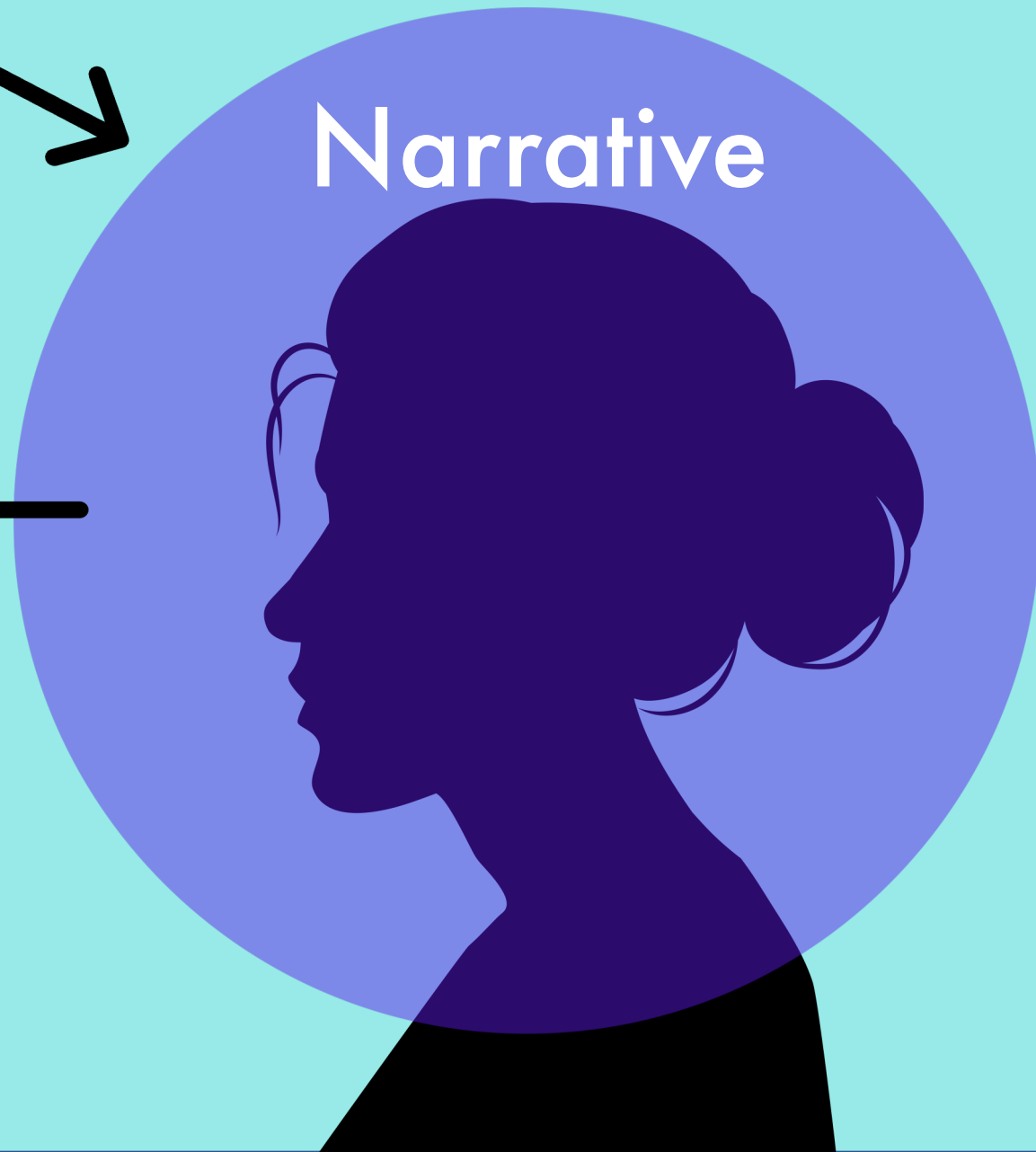
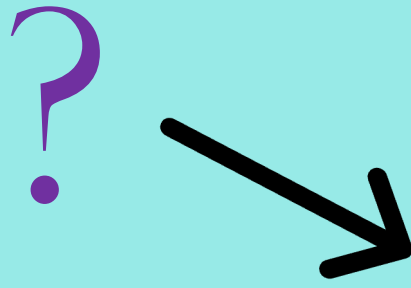
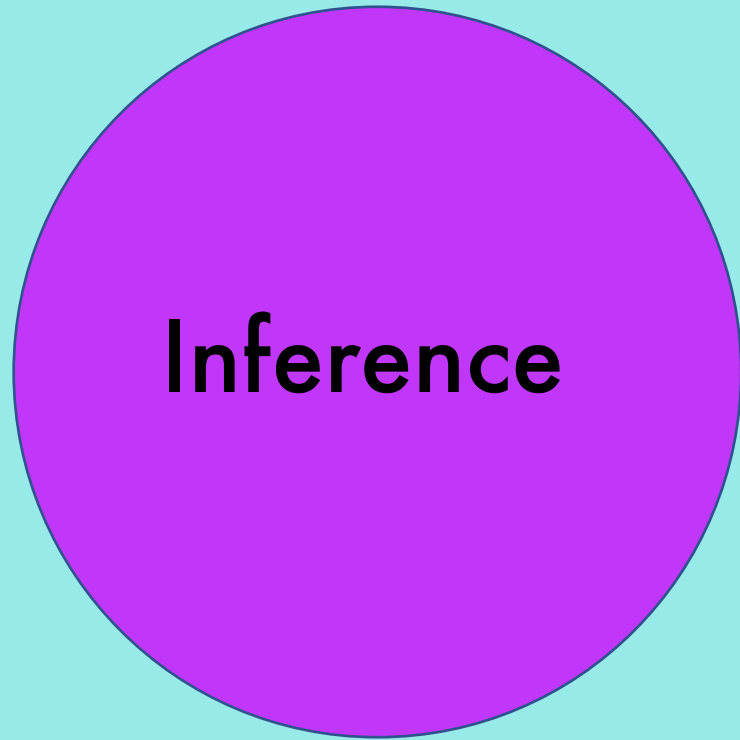
Feared self



Obsessional doubt

Our narratives create our inferences.
That is, they determine the way we
are likely to interpret things.





BREAKING THE SPELL



Think of the OCD story as a spell that has been cast upon you, making you believe something that is not true. When the spell is broken, you realize all your conclusions were made under the influence of this spell and so the conclusions become meaningless

Let's pretend you are under a spell that causes you to believe you are sick. This would mean that when the spell is broken, you would no longer believe you are sick. Instead, you would believe you are healthy. When creating the alternative story, you are writing as if the spell were broken. So in this case, it would be from the perspective of a healthy person.

If you still believe you might be sick and write a story about how it won't be so bad, then you aren't writing as if the spell is truly broken. **When the spell breaks, you will see reality in a whole new light!** When writing your alternative story, it can be helpful to ask, "is this the story of someone no longer under the spell? Or is this the story of someone still under the spell and trying to manage as best they can?"

Under the spell

"I go to the doctor and get infected by someone else's germs left over in the exam room. But my immune system is strong so I am able to fight off the disease. I also have excellent health insurance and so I would get the best medical care available."

VS.

Spell is broken!

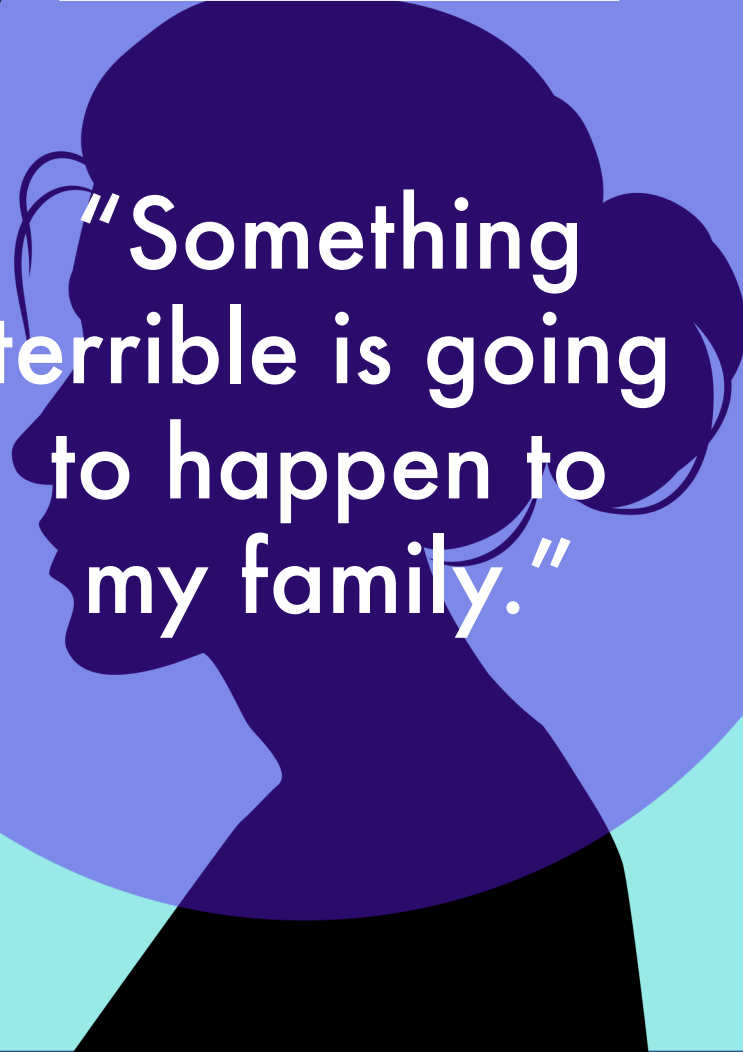
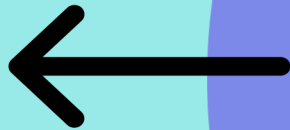
"I go to the doctor's office and sit in the exam room. It's lovely and incredibly clean. My gown is freshly laundered and I feel comfortable sitting in the exam chair. I feel that I am in good hands with a doctor who has staff that prioritizes cleanliness and safety."

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Inference
"My mother is not home which means she was probably kidnapped."

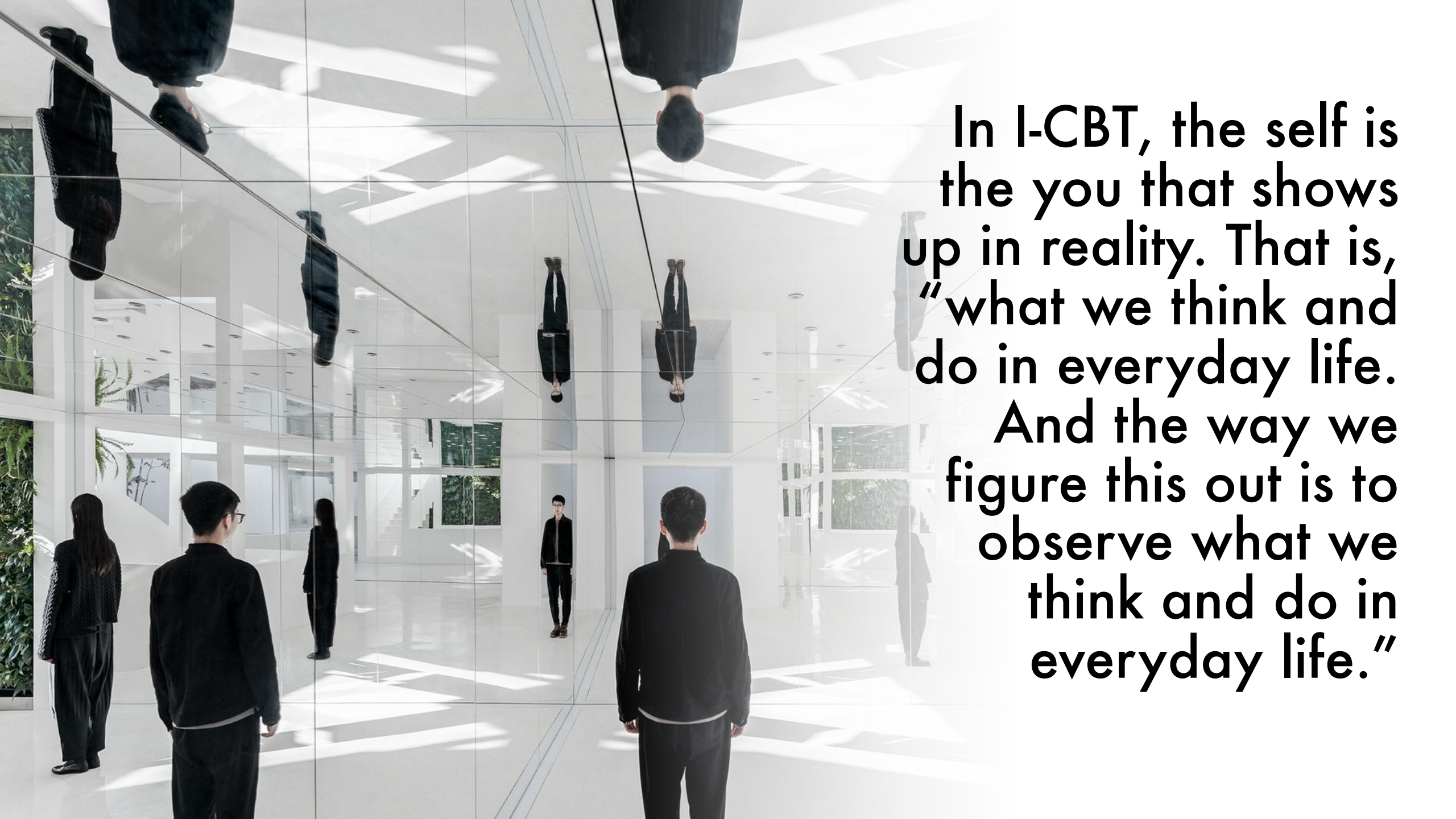
Self Story
"I am someone who always loses those whom she loves."

Narrative
"Something terrible is going to happen to my family."

A silhouette of a woman's head in profile, facing left. Inside the head is a thought bubble containing the text "Something terrible is going to happen to my family." The entire scene is set against a light blue circular background.

“Now we will find out who you really are..”

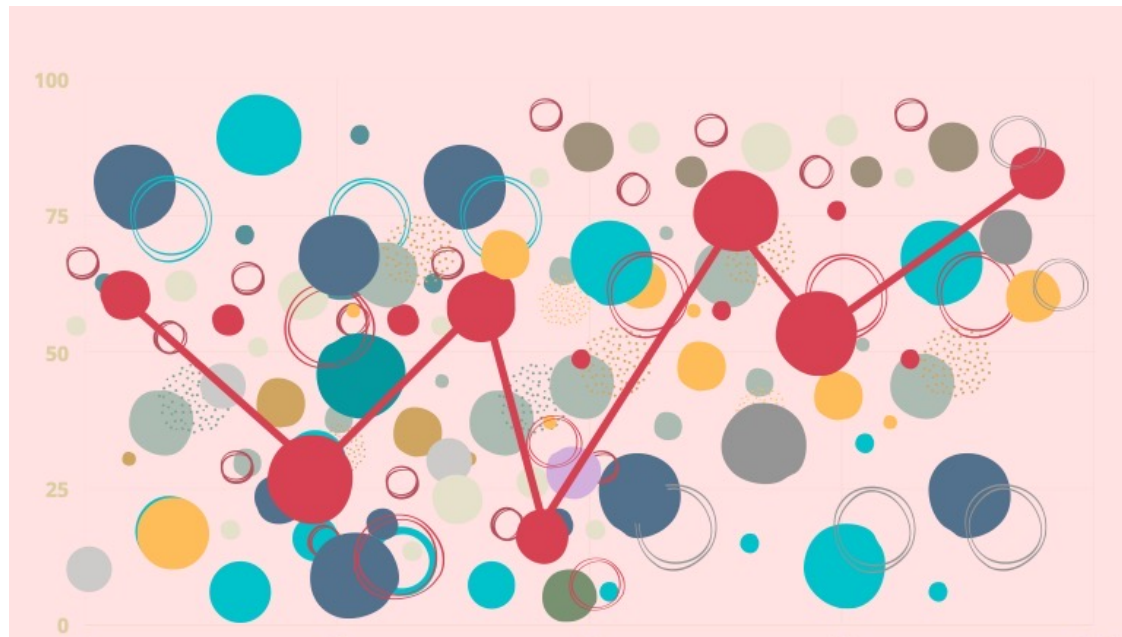




In I-CBT, the self is the you that shows up in reality. That is, "what we think and do in everyday life. And the way we figure this out is to observe what we think and do in everyday life."

Comparing Stories

- Start by spelling out your feared self and all the things the OCD says you really are or could be. (This would be in the form “I’m the sort of person who could be...”). Expand as much as possible on all the reasons why you could be the type of person as dictated by your OCD.
- After you have written down this story about who the OCD says you could be, write a second story. But this time, write down the reasons that show this story about you is unfounded. For example, if you wrote down in the previous story “I’m the sort of person who could hurt others,” then in the second story you would write down “I’m the sort of person who is kind and considerate to others.” Basically, for each reason you wrote down in the first story about why you are one sort of person, then write another reason in the second story why you are not that type of person.
- Put both stories next to each other and look at them with your commonsense. Which of the two stories most resonates with you when looking at it calmly? In all likelihood, the alternative story is likely to be far more accurate because you have come up with counter examples that come from real life in the second story whereas in the first you were drawing from hypotheticals and possibilities. Discuss your insights about who you really are with your therapist.



Prompts

Do you wait in line?

Have you opened the door for someone?

Do you offer to help?

Do you keep your word?

Do you have friends, and are you kind to them?

Do you appreciate good food?

If you wait in line,
then we can infer
you are a patient
person.

If you open doors,
you are a polite
person.

If you sometimes
forget dates or jobs,
then you are just
like anyone else.

Autobiography

- ❖ Write a short autobiography (500 words) and recount how these attributes have helped them in life.
- ❖ Next, describe future goals and plans from the perspective of this authentic self.

“What was meaningful
for you in that moment?”

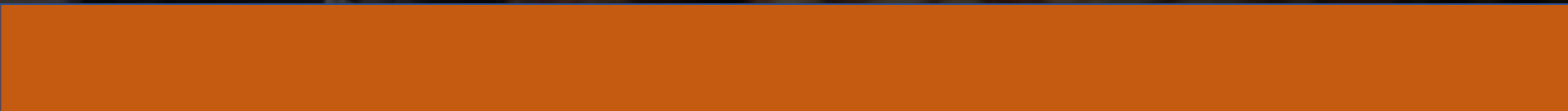


“What do you know for sure?”

— RIGHT HERE —
RIGHT NOW.



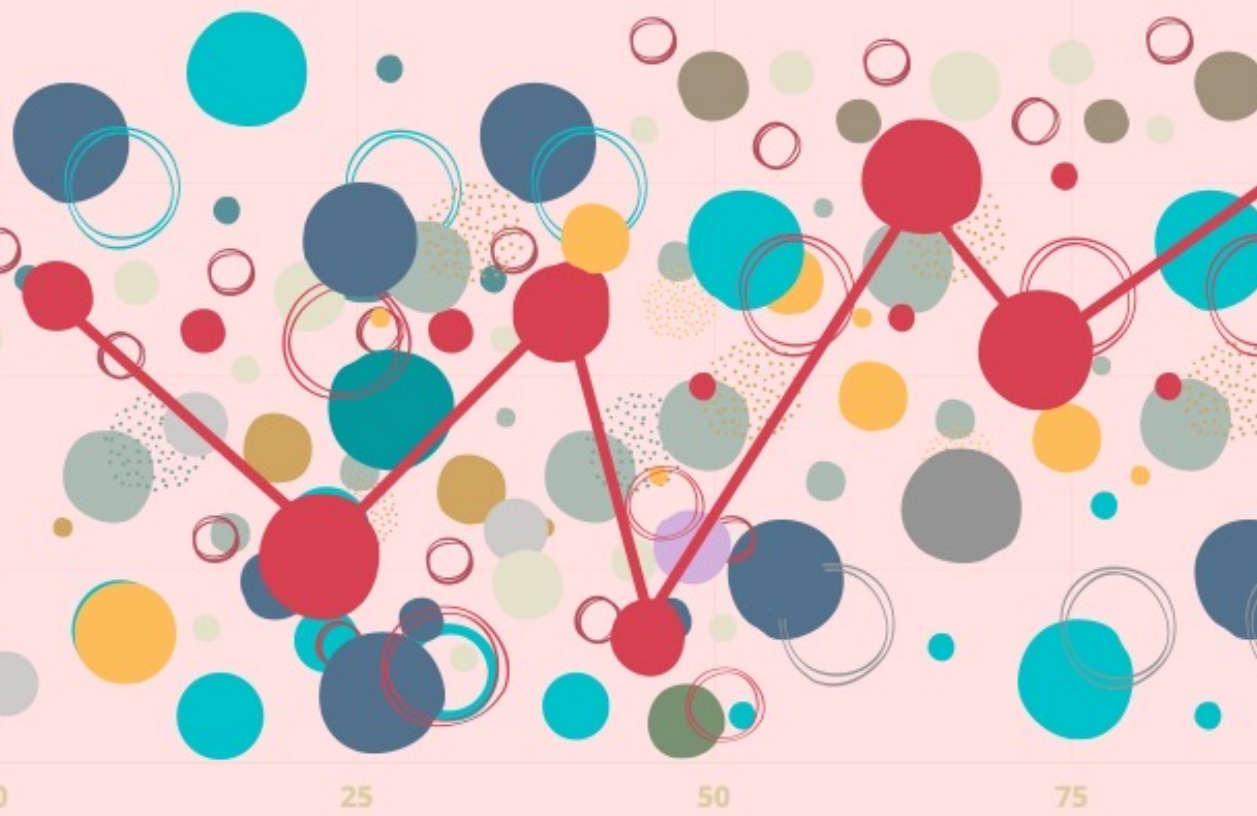
I'm curious to hear more
about the story of...



Clients are ready to move on when they have...

- ❖ Listed and recognized authentic positive attributes of self and identified authentic self feelings
- ❖ Realized that the authentic self is different from the attributes of the self that OCD was saying they would become
- ❖ At least accepted the need to reposition themselves towards the world based on seeing and planning projects in the light of the authentic self

Life



Life

