

Client Worksheet 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

This worksheet covers:

- How to discover your vulnerable OCD self by decentering your everyday doubts around you
- Understanding how the self-theme may dictate the type of everyday obsessions you experience
- Understanding how OCD is not a real self but, instead, an illusory self arrived at on the basis of inferential confusion.
- In other words, it is a *possible* self you are convinced you could become and who you do not wish to be, but convinced you could become on the basis of a very persuasive story.
- Your real self is the exact opposite of the OCD story you fear you could become.

Review the following doubts:

- Doubt that I checked the stove
- Doubt that I wrote down the correct number
- Doubt that I said the right word
- Doubt that the car door is locked properly

What do the doubts above share in common?

Answer: They involve checking to see if everything is fine.

What does this checking action tell us about this person's self-construct?

Answer: They fear that they may have made a mistake.

What sort of person would do this? (introduction of self-theme)

Answer: A person who is prone to gaffes or inattentive.

The self-theme is idiosyncratic and can be quite complex. It is important to cover all of the options of the self-theme and all of its components.

- Your doubts reveal your OCD self since you only doubt in areas that your self-theme says you are most likely to doubt. For example, a person who routinely checks to see if the lights in their home are off considers themselves to be a person likely to have left the lights on.
- However, this same person does not repeatedly check whether his car door is locked whenever he has parked in the grocery store parking lot. Clearly, this individual does not consider it is likely that he did not lock the door prior to entering the grocery store.
- Our OCD self-theme plays an important role in determining the type of OCD we experience. The OCD-self is not a real self that we can identify as having real positive attributes.

- Instead, it is the non-existent self that you are afraid you will become. More precisely, that you think you *may* become. It is another obsessional doubt that follows all the reasoning errors that make your obsessional doubt believable.
- The good news is that you will begin to identify all of the imaginary and illusory tricks that OCD uses to convince you that you could become the OCD-self you fear and do not want to be.
- The bad news is that OCD has done a really good job in the past of convincing you that this illusory self is really possible.
- The OCD-self is actually the complete opposite of who you really are, and in a later module, we will cover how to replace the OCD-self with your authentic self.
- Recognizing and changing your theme will comprise a huge step in helping you to manage your OCD. Why? Because if a theme makes you vulnerable to doubt, then repositioning yourself towards a more grounded self will make you far less vulnerable. You will begin to evaluate yourself on who you really are or what you are really likely to do and not on a self that OCD says you might possibly become.

Client Exercise Sheet 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

Steps to Discovering your Theme

Example of Joe's Obsessions and Common Theme

- Joe constantly doubts that he has not locked his car door. Joe believes that he is the kind of person capable of leaving his car doors unlocked.
- Joe also feels compelled to repeatedly check that he has turned off the lights before leaving his office at work. Thus, Joe believes he is the kind of person who might leave the lights on.
- Finally, Joe frequently becomes obsessed that he might have forgot to include some important details related to his work. Therefore, Joe thinks he could be the kind of person who is capable of frequently forgetting very important work details.

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

Example of John's Obsessions and Common Theme

John obsesses that he could become the sort of person lacking in good personal hygiene or live in a dirty and disordered home environment. His obsessional concern is to prevent this from happening. Interestingly, John has never been a person that is unkempt or lived in such a way, but OCD has convinced him that he could become that person if he does not obsess about it and perform his OCD rituals. In fact, when asked how he manages to live in such a clean and orderly home, he will say that he is obsessive about it and spends many hours cleaning. Is he right? Well, actually, he's not. OCD has planted doubts in his mind which make him continuously fear that he has not done enough to maintain a clean and orderly home. These doubts are based on a story full of reasoning errors. Doing rituals simply reinforces the doubt that he could become a disgusting, unkempt person living in an unkempt, disgusting home. This has become a vicious circle where doubting leads to more doubt which leads to more rituals that serves to reinforce the doubts and make them seem real.

So, where does the self-theme come from? The self-theme is created and maintained by a story which bears the hallmarks of an OCD doubting story. It draws on *remote possibilities, abstract out-of-place facts, and irrelevant events* to make a convincing case.

John's self-story was, "Well, my father was always forgetting to wash up after working around the house, he wouldn't always change his dirty clothes, and everyone knows that you can inherit your father's traits."

Fortunately, we can learn to change our self-story by being grounded in the "here and now" without the need to focus our attention in the past. While working on your self-theme, you may begin to recognize the origin of your story. But the real goal here is not to interpret the self-story but to change it.

What do John's doubts have in common? Well, they all involve obsessions about cleanliness.

Anything else? What about order? John clearly places a lot of importance to being surrounded by an orderly environment.

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

You consider yourself to be the sort of person who could... This will be your OCD-self theme. That is, the person you are afraid you might become:

What is the evidence for this possible OCD-self? Why are you so convinced that you could become such a person that you need to spend so much time and effort to make sure you do not? Obviously, OCD's trick is to say to you, "It's only because you do rituals that you are not the person you fear becoming."

Justify your conviction in the possible OCD-self. What convinces you?

Do you see the OCD reasoning here? Compare the reasoning related to your obsessional doubts with the reasoning from your normal doubts.

Client Training Card 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

Learning Points

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

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.

Client Quiz 4

The Vulnerable Self-Theme

1. My OCD self-theme is . . .
 - a personality trait.
 - the same for everyone.
 - a true story.
 - about who OCD says I could become.

2. My OCD self-theme . . .
 - is who I really am.
 - determines the theme of my obsessions.
 - can't be changed.
 - helps me be someone.

3. My OCD self-theme:
 - is all I've got.
 - cons me into doing rituals.
 - tells me the truth.
 - needs to be taken seriously.

4. My OCD self:
 - is based on doubt.
 - is how others perceive me.
 - is realistic.
 - should be the basis for my actions.

5. I'm basically empty, so:
 - OCD fills me up.
 - OCD gives me a true identity.
 - I could be nothing without OCD.
 - OCD hides my true self.

6. I can find my OCD self-theme by:
 - reading a novel.
 - noting the common thread to my daily OCD doubts.
 - meditating.
 - asking other people.

Please check your answers by referring to the Quiz Answers Sheet.