

The background is an abstract, textured composition. It features a large, dark, almost black, irregular shape on the left side that resembles a shadow or a silhouette. The rest of the background is a mix of vibrant colors: deep blue, bright red, and yellow, with a mottled, painterly texture. The colors are layered and blended, creating a sense of depth and movement.

The Feared Self

Presented by Catherine Goldhouse

Why this? Why me?

Why do you have your particular version of OCD? Why does one person with OCD have fears of getting contaminated while another may have fears that they could harm someone whom they love?

Based on our own values, we all have an ideal version of who we want to be and how we want to go through life, and this informs our behavior. Of course, we can also imagine a version of ourselves that we wouldn't like and wouldn't want to be. While we know, as humans, that we aren't always our "best selves," we try to do our best most of the time and that is good enough. We don't spend time imagining that other hypothetical version because it doesn't reflect who we are and the way we live our lives, and who we are is what we do in real life.



People with OCD, however, often have self-doubt and struggle to trust themselves or even know who they really are. This makes them especially susceptible to believing that these feared versions of themselves could be real or come true. 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.



Being aware of your own feared imaginary self (which we can also call your “OCD self”) and being able to distinguish between normal doubt and obsessional doubt are two critical skills that together will help you get over your OCD. Why?

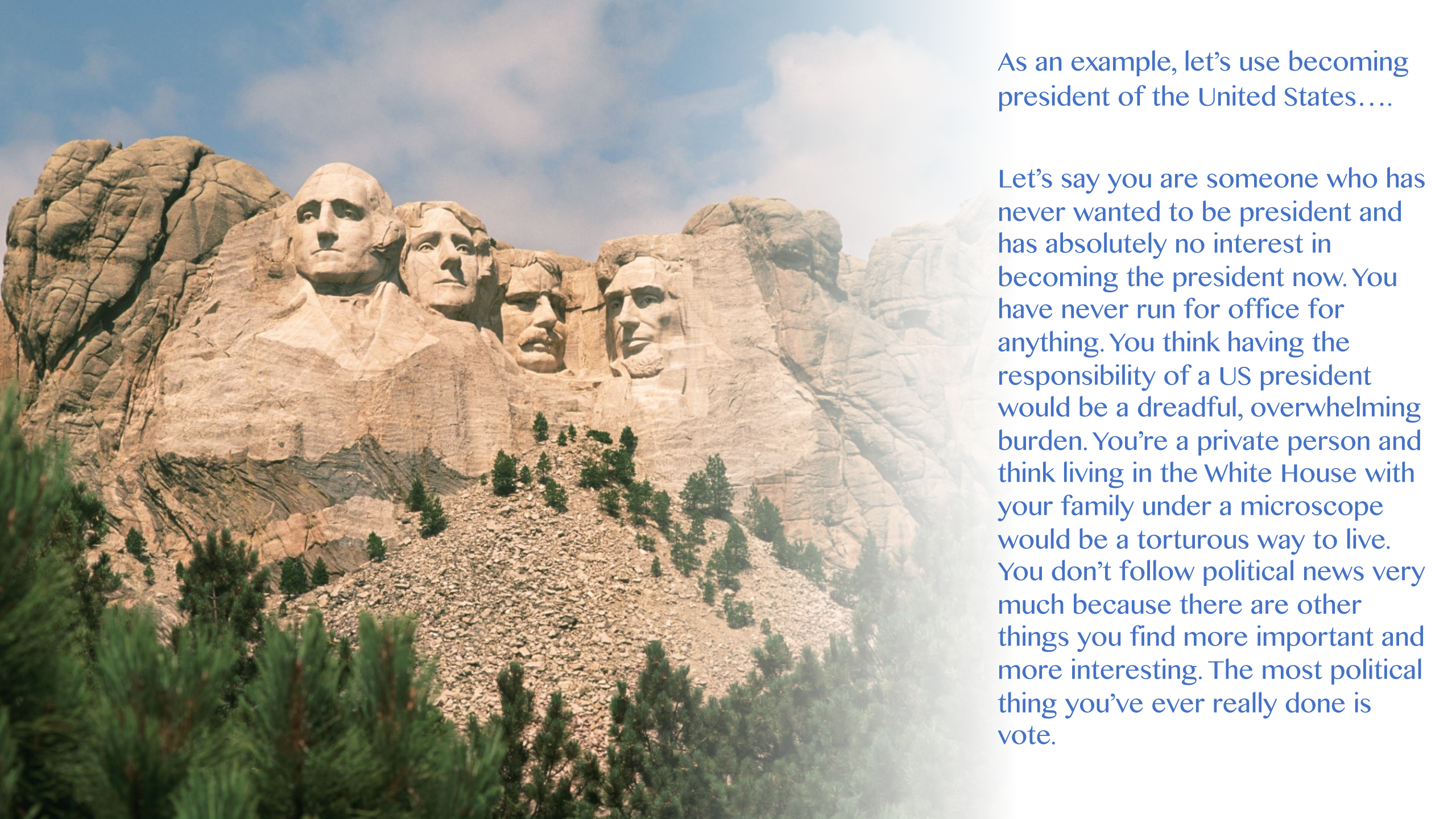
Because you only have doubts that are obsessional when they relate to your feared self!

Once you’re able to debunk your feared self, the obsessions will start to seem silly, unsolvable, and a waste of energy to spend even a moment on.

PRACTICE

What is something that you know you are not or never have worries about becoming? Perhaps you could imagine being someone of a different gender, a nonhuman animal, or someone with superpowers.





As an example, let's use becoming president of the United States....

Let's say you are someone who has never wanted to be president and has absolutely no interest in becoming the president now. You have never run for office for anything. You think having the responsibility of a US president would be a dreadful, overwhelming burden. You're a private person and think living in the White House with your family under a microscope would be a torturous way to live. You don't follow political news very much because there are other things you find more important and more interesting. The most political thing you've ever really done is vote.

Well, what if I told you that it's *possible* that you could become president one day? How would you respond to this?

You know that, sure, technically anything is *possible*, but given the reality stated above, would you consider that possibility relevant?

Why or why not?





“BUT MINE IS DIFFERENT!”

EXCEPT IT'S NOT.

Your obsession *seems* different because it touches on something about which you feel vulnerable. However, this makes it no less hypothetical and no more relevant than the example about being president.



Who is Jenna?

Jenna cares for her children's welfare. She's attentive to their needs. She's always on hand to take her kids to school or drop them off at friends' houses. She helps them with their homework if they need it and checks in with teachers regularly to make sure her kids are getting the support they need in school. She goes to her kids' games and often takes them and their friends to and from practice. It is important to her that her kids know they are loved and feel special, so she tells them this often.

Jenna's OCD Story

“I am convinced that I could do bad things to my children, like smother them with a pillow or strangle them. I am always hyperaware of my hands when I'm around them and I try as much as possible to avoid hugging or touching them. Whenever I hear a report on the news about a mother abusing or murdering children, I think, 'that could be me!' I read somewhere that deep down we all have two sides... you know, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and that often what we are on the surface is the opposite of what we really feel. I'm just not always totally sure of my motives and people can flip like that. Many murderers appeared to be nice people on the outside. So, I could be the opposite to who I think I am. I could be fooling everyone, even myself.”

Recentering Jenna's Doubts

What if I smother or abuse my kids?

What If I who I am deep down is different than how I appear?

What If I am lying to myself about my motives?

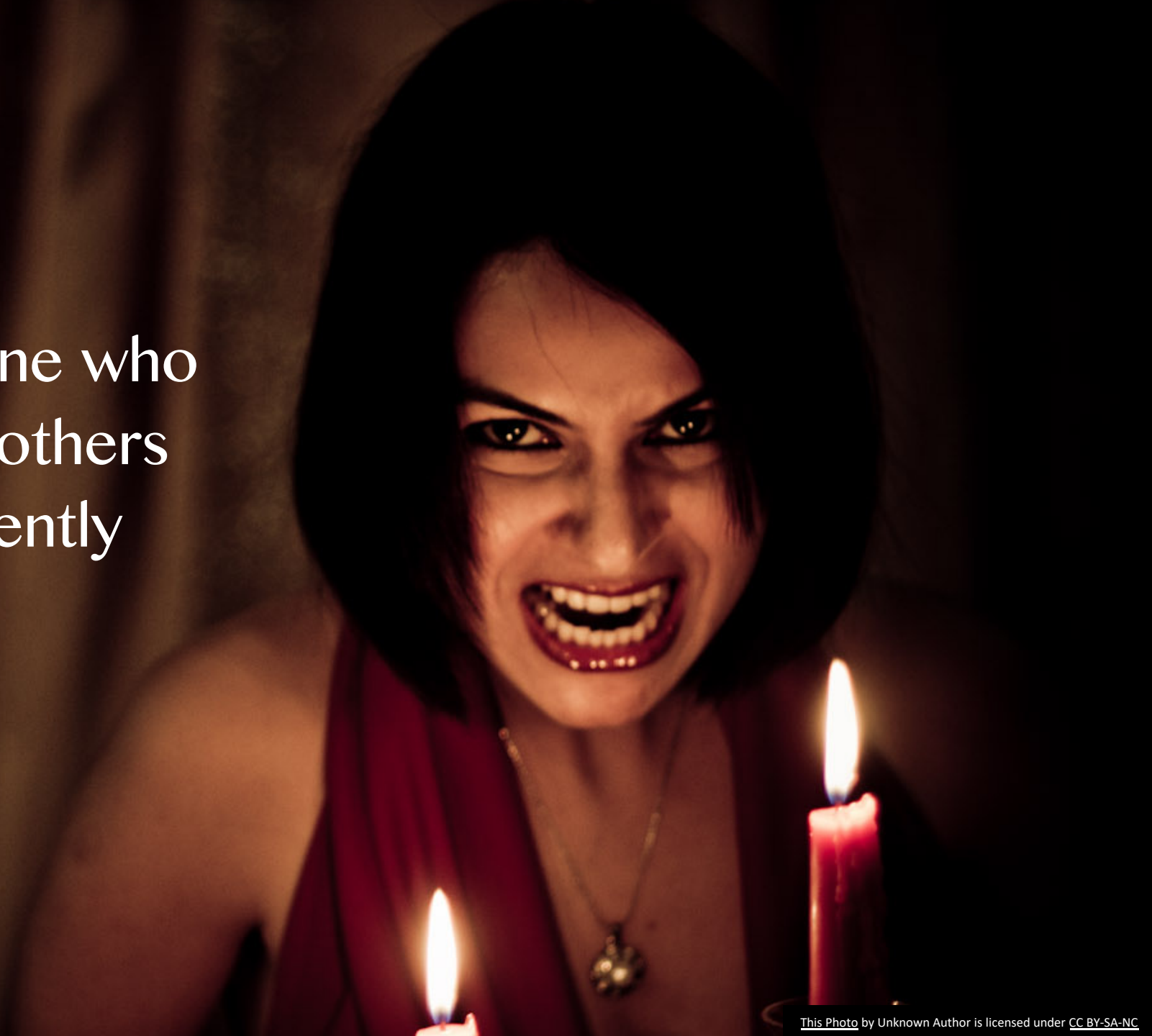
I am someone who could harm her children!

I am someone who could be different than how she appears to others.

I am someone who could be In denial about her motives.

What kind of person
would do these things?

The answer is someone who deceives herself and others and is capable of violently harming her children.



So, the next question to ask Jenna, of course, is “are you this type of person?”





All of Jenna's actions and her wishes align with her desire to be a good mother. Using its classic tricks like remote possibilities, abstract out-of-place facts, and hearsay, OCD has convinced her that she could become someone that she is not but *could* become if she doesn't take precautions. But Jenna's fears are clearly based on a hypothetical version of herself that is completely irrelevant to reality.



What is Your Feared Self?

WHAT IF...

I AM A PERSON WHO COULD...

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*What do these doubts
have in common?*

*What do they say
about the person you
fear you could
become?*

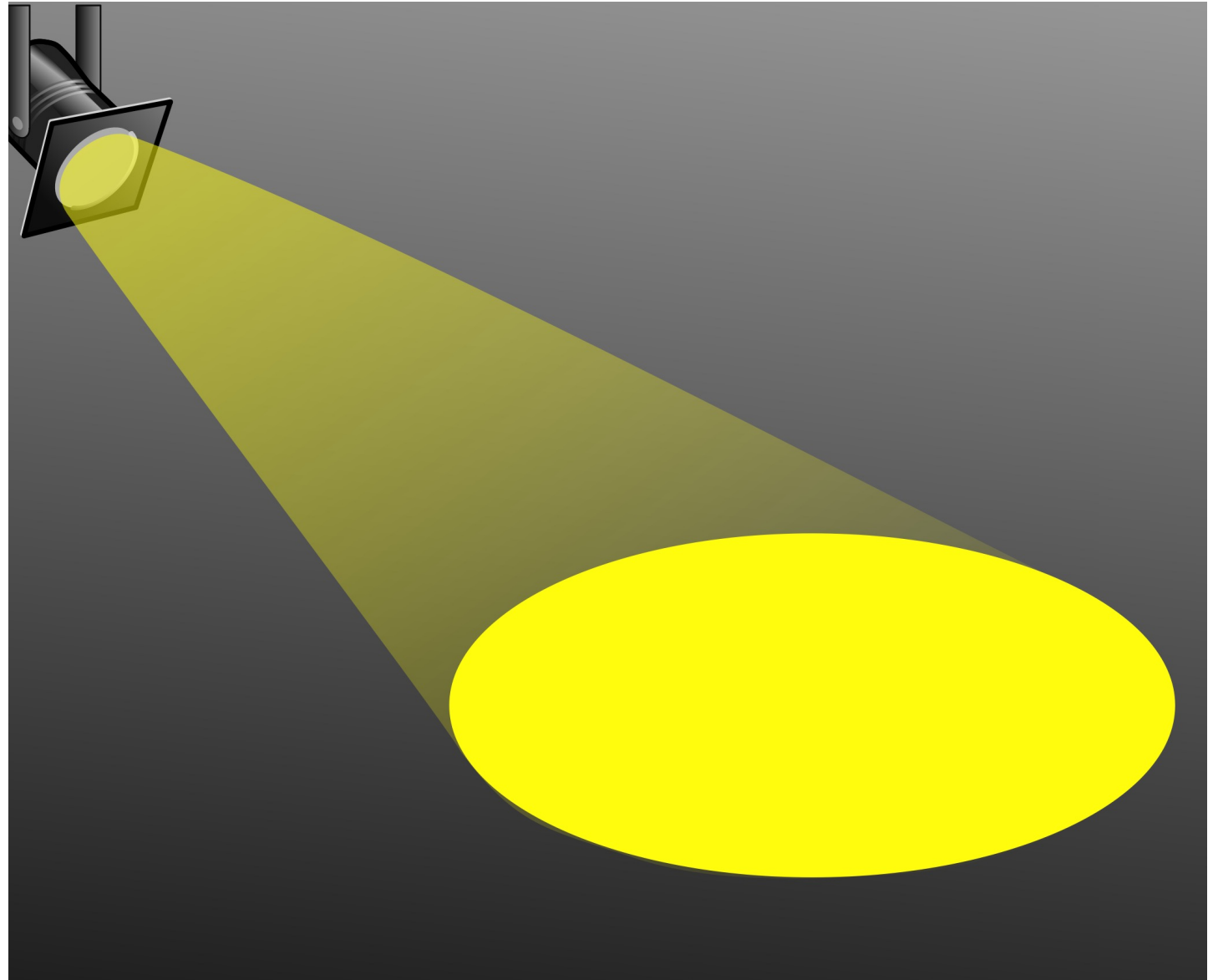
What is the evidence for this feared self?

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?

What reasoning tricks do you see in your explanation?



SELECTIVITY
OF
THE DOUBT



The End