

Table 7.2.
Non-Obsessional vs. Obsessional Feared Selves—How They Differ in Key Areas

Feature	Non-Obsessional Feared Self (Anxiety, depression, trauma, etc.)	Obsessional Feared Self (OCD and related conditions)
Source	Develops from cognitive distortions specific to depression, anxiety, or trauma (e.g., all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, catastrophizing, etc.).	Created by OCD's unique reasoning and imaginative distortions (e.g., distrust of senses and self, hypothetical reasoning, misapplied reality, and reversing causal direction).
How It Forms	Evolves over time based on patterns of experience, negative self-evaluation, and reinforcement from past events or external feedback.	Can emerge suddenly or without clear past reinforcement, by the interaction between existing insecurities and OCD's distorted reasoning and imagination.
Scope	Feels like an ingrained negative self-view that has built up over time. May persist but does not demand constant resolution.	Open-ended, unresolved, and framed as an identity crisis requiring proof or resolution. Feels like a question that must be answered.
Emotional Impact	Persistent but fluctuates with mood, circumstances, or life events. Can be reinforced by negative experiences but remains tied to one's broader sense of self.	Feels intensely real, urgent, and distressing in the moment, even if it contradicts past experiences or logic.
Response to Reassurance	May temporarily lessen with external validation or personal reflection but can return when triggered by new self-doubt or experiences.	No amount of reassurance ever feels sufficient; leads to compulsions, mental reviewing, and endless doubt.
Flexibility	Allows for personal growth, change, and adaptation over time, even if distressing.	Feels like an unsolved problem that must be figured out immediately, reinforcing obsessional rumination and compulsions.
How OCD Uses It	Not shaped by OCD. Often reinforced through self-appraisal, life experiences, or emotional states but remains part of an evolving self-perception.	OCD hijacks an existing vulnerability, removes it from context, and distorts it into something unrelated—making it feel like an urgent and identity-defining crisis.
Typical Activation Pattern	Often reinforced by past experiences and negative feedback but remains a background belief. Activated by life events, self-reflection, or emotional states.	Triggered suddenly, out of context, without concrete evidence, often in contradiction to past experiences or logic. Feels urgent and overwhelming in the present moment.
Response to Self-Doubt	Self-reflection can be helpful, as examining beliefs and patterns may lead to a shift in self-perception over time. Cognitive restructuring (actively challenging the feared self) may help lessen its influence.	Self-reflection is helpful if it involves seeing through OCD's faulty reasoning. However, cognitive restructuring—debating or trying to "disprove" the obsessional feared self—can backfire, strengthening the illusion that the doubt is valid and must be resolved.