

How do I stop thinking about this?

Talk 2: Common Pitfalls in Response Prevention for Compulsive Rumination

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Overview

- What this talk is about:
 - 5 common pitfalls in response prevention of compulsive rumination
 - Important to identify bc otherwise you/your therapist might think treatment just isn't working for you
- What this talk is not about:
 - Strategies
 - These issues can come up no matter what strategy you're using
 - Exposure
 - Exposure is always key, but RP can be very confusing in CR

(1) Trouble Separating Obsession from Compulsion

- In ERP we accept the O (the uncertainty) and stop the C
- You might think CR is a string of O and C, bc the O keeps coming up
- Actually, the initial uncertainty that pops up is the O, and **everything** after that is the C
 - Why? Because the whole process is aimed at eliminating the uncertainty and avoiding the anxiety
- (The term "obsession" adds to the confusion)
- Why is this crucial?
 - If you think the whole thing is O, you'll just let yourself do it
 - If you think it's a string of O and C you'll stay in your head as you try to accept the intermittent O

(2) Misapplying "Thought Suppression"

- Who's heard that "If you try not think about something, you think about it more"/white bear/pink elephant
- Examples of thought suppression: Don't think about mom dying; Don't think the F word; Don't think that guy is hot"
- Thought suppression does not apply to purposeful, directed thought
 - A cognitive perspective: Kahneman's System 2 (like solving a math problem)
 - A mindfulness perspective: disengaging from monkey mind
 - GAD research on worry
- Why is this important?
 - When hijacked it justifies/encourages compulsion
 - Discourages self-efficacy and use of strategies
- The goal is to accept the uncertainty without analyzing

(3) Ambivalence

- What do I mean?
 - Definition
 - May sound invalidating, but really no different from any other compulsion in terms of not being 100% sure you want to stop, and being able but not being able to stop
- **Not inherently an issue, unless it prevents the person from making the choice to stop the compulsion, and to do so consistently (next topic)**
- Often outside awareness!
- If outside awareness, try asking yourself, "**Why is it important that I think about this right now?**"
 - Anticipating, planning, preparing, preempting, preventing a problem
 - Preventing a problem from getting worse, catching something early (e.g., health, ROCD)
 - Problem-solving
 - Figuring something out, answering a question, needing to know/accept something (e.g., HOCD)
 - Feeling on the verge of figuring something out or knowing/accepting something
 - Trying to prevent future anxiety (different from avoiding current anxiety) (e.g., thinking about OCD)
 - Needing to be honest or authentic (e.g., existential thoughts)
 - Needing to be a good person (e.g., reviewing)
 - Needing to maintain an identity
 - Needing to remain in control
 - And the ever-popular:
 - What if it's not OCD and this approach is the wrong one or denial?
- Consistent with Borkovec's functional view of rumination and worry

(4) Back-and-Forth

- Definition
- Very different from physical compulsions because in compulsive rumination, you might not be aware you're going back-and-forth
- Can undermine treatment while the patient and/or therapist thinks they're doing everything right
- No matter what strategy you use to eliminate the compulsion, you have to commit to eliminating it
- Build awareness by self-monitoring and address underlying ambivalence about compulsion

(5) Lack of Awareness

- Sometimes people don't *notice* that they are engaged in compulsive rumination
- Sometimes people don't *identify* their thought process as compulsive rumination
 - If they are used to a certain thought process and never thought of it as compulsion
 - If there's no anxiety preceding or during it
- Educate and build awareness by self-monitoring

Summary

- Label the compulsion
- Use a strategy without worrying about thought suppression
- Address ambivalence
- Address back-and-forth
- Build awareness
- Practice, and hang in there

You can find more information at:
www.drjgreenberg.com

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