



You, Me, & Relationship OCD:

Diagnosis, Treatment, & Intimacy with rOCD

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RELATIONSHIP OCD

- Intrusive thoughts surrounding
 - rightness/compatibility of relationship (current or past)
 - strength of feelings towards the partner
 - perception of partner's feelings towards self
 - perceived deficits of partner (appearance, intelligence, sociability, and morality)
- May surround familial/non-romantic relationships as well
- May interact with other OCD subtypes

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

- Tolerance of uncertainty
 - No relationship is 100% certain
- Tolerance of mistakes
 - Expectations
 - Rupture and repair
- Human experiences of attraction don't change when you're in a relationship
- Relationships evolve over time

ROLE OF UNCERTAINTY IN RELATIONSHIPS

- There is no way to be certain regarding
 - feelings about a partner/partner's feelings for you
 - intent in each thought or feeling you have
 - desires for partner or others
 - the future (and success) of a relationship

DOUBT VS. ROCD

- Functional doubt vs. obsessions & compulsions
 - “Even though it can be scary and uncertain to begin a new relationship, I’m open to seeing where this goes.”
 - “What if I’m never certain they are the one for me and then I will never be happy and could miss the right relationship.”
- rOCD symptoms are “less self-congruent, more likely associated with compulsive safety behaviors, and perceived as less rational than a worry”
- What is the goal of treating rOCD?

PRESENTATION OF SYMPTOMS

- Partner-focused symptoms
 - Ruminating on a wide variety of partner's perceived flaws
 - Appearance, intelligence, sociability, and morality
 - e.g.: "What if I'm not actually attracted to her? I can't stop thinking about her nose." "What if he's not smart enough?" "What if she's a liar?"
 - Ruminating over partner's past sexual history
 - Need to know
- Relationship- focused symptoms
 - Can come in the form of thoughts, images, urges
 - e.g.: "Are we happy enough?", urge to leave relationship, "I'm not feeling enough of the right emotion".

- **Event/Situation:** Spending time with couple-friends who appear happy.
 - **Intrusion:** "What if we're not as happy as they are?"
 - **Fear:** I'm not in the right relationship and am missing "the one" and will never be happy.
 - **Compulsion:** Thinking back on all happy experiences in your relationship. Asking others how they view the relationship. Avoiding the "next step" in the relationship.
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- **Event/Situation:** Having a lighthearted conversation with partner about musical preference.
 - **Intrusion:** "What if he is pretentious because he thinks classical is the best type of music?"
 - **Fear:** He is pretentious.
 - **Compulsion:** Reading dictionary definition of words. Asking friends what they think of pretentiousness.
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- **Event/Situation:** Seeing an attractive person (who is not your partner).
 - **Intrusion:** "What if I am more attracted to them than my girlfriend?"
 - **Fear:** I don't really love my girlfriend and should break up with her.
 - **Compulsion:** Reading dictionary definition of words. Checking physical signs of being "in love". Avoiding attractive individuals.

COMMON COMPULSIONS

- Repeatedly checking one's feelings (emotionally, physically, mentally)
- Comparing physical, mental, emotional characteristics of partner to other individuals
- Neutralizing thoughts/emotions
- Reassurance seeking
 - via other individuals, self, partner, or the internet
- Avoidance

IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS

- guilt and shame brought on by compulsions
- ego dystonic vs ego syntonic
 - having thoughts, images, impulses that are repugnant
 - “I know appearance is not the most important thing and yet I cannot stop obsessing about it.”
- Can lead to relationship dissolving or avoidance of relationships

EXPOSURES

- Behavior bans
- Read stories about people who have “scammed” or “fled” their partner (or whatever the feared consequence is)
- Watch movies about cheaters, “runaway brides” and disruptive relationships, tv shows about dating
- Commit to partner (using authenticity)
- Imaginal exposures
 - “Maybe I’m not attracted to my partner.”, “Maybe this isn’t an everlasting relationship.”
- Fear narratives
 - Worst fear written as if it’s true

MINDFULNESS IN RELATIONSHIPS

- Increase awareness of thoughts and become an observer to them
- Allow the thoughts to be there, without fusing with them
- Willingly allow physical discomfort
- Practice non-judgment for thoughts and feelings
- Stay present (no processing past or future events)
- Willingly allow intrusive thoughts
- Practice mindful communication

CASE STUDY

- 45 yr old man
- Multiple “successful” relationships, that were ended once rOCD returned
- Client would ruminate over the morals of his partner
- Onset was random
- Client would question his partner about her past relationship and sexual interactions
- Client would end relationship and then be overwhelmed with loneliness
- Exposure: Look at old photos from before they were dating where partner was doing “questionable” things.
- Response Prevention: Reduction of reassurance seeking with partner, reduction of mental rumination using mindfulness, introduction of sexual intercourse when struggling with intrusive thoughts (using sensate focus for arousal)

CASE STUDY

- 29 year old female
- Had been dating fiancé for ~4 years
- History of sexual orientation and relationship OCD/ had never done ERP
- Sought therapy when fiancé proposed
- Client would compare relationships to others, avoid seeing attractive people, physically check arousal/attraction, avoid planning her wedding, avoid things associated with sexual orientation
- Exposures: watching movies/shows with couples arguing, making Pinterest board of lesbian weddings, wedding planning, read stories about coming out, fear narrative
- Response prevention: avoidance (people, events, wedding planning, tv), checking (physical arousal, feelings of love/anger), reassurance (google, others, self)

Questions?

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