Perfectionism and OCD

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Overview of Training

-Defining Perfectionism and Perfectionism Subtypes

-Building an Understanding of OCD and Perfectionism Overlap

-Applying ERP, ACT, ICBT to Perfectionism

-Case Examples

How common is perfectionism?

-Drive to perform as a therapist? Belief that there is a way to help every client...

-Need to get the documentation done correctly?

-In your personal life?

What is perfectionism?

Definitions abridged from dictionary.com

-Perfect(adj): matching in every detail the definition of an ideal type of something; excellent or complete beyond practical or theoretical improvement; thorough or complete; absolute

-Perfection(noun): the state or quality of being or becoming perfect; the highest degree of proficiency, skill, or excellence (as in some art); a perfect embodiment or example of something; the act or fact of perfecting

-Perfectionism(noun): any of various doctrines holding that religious, moral, social, or political perfection is attainable; a personal standard, attitude, or philosophy that demands perfection and rejects anything less.

Clinically Speaking...

-Perfectionism is NOT a diagnosis in DSM, but a personality trait

-Perfectionism tendencies (like poor sleep, lack of dietary flexibility, etc.) can INFLUENCE symptoms across a variety of DSM diagnoses (anxiety, depression, OCD, ED, etc.) and can impact physical health, relationships, and self esteem

-Perfectionism is often driven by fear of failure and self imposed internal standards, while OCD is often driven by an over-inflated sense of responsibility and internal expectations

Clinically Speaking...

-Perfectionism can manifest in various areas of life (work, relationships, personal achievements, fitness, etc.)

-Perfectionists tend to be highly self or other critical depending on type of perfectionism

-Perfectionists fear failure, and are often stuck in black and white thinking

-Perfectionism is linked to burnout and, often, to avoidance, when the individual feels unable to execute as perfection demands

Where does perfectionism come from?

-Genetics: twin studies have shown high genetic correlations, as is a high family history of anxiety

-Family of Origin: attachment anxiety and avoidance are linked with perfectionism

    -Kids raised with high expectations, critical parenting, lack of emotional support

-Outside Influence:

    -Relational(teachers, friends, coaches, employers, coworkers, etc.)

    -Societal (social media, TV, etc.)

    -Cultural

Where does perfectionism come from?

-Personality and cognitive factors

- -Black & White Thinking
- -High Self Criticism
- -Fear of failure
- -Focus on negative emotions
- -A high degree of conscientiousness

Perfectionism Themes

-People pleasing

-Difficulty with tolerating uncertainty

-Need for control

-Procrastination/avoidance

-Criticism of self, others

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (some themes)

-People pleasing

-Difficulty with tolerating uncertainty

-Need for control

-Procrastination/avoidance

-Criticism of self, others

—YES, this is the same slide!

-OCD is *MUCH BIGGER* than just these obsessions and the compulsions associated with them, but these themes have similar behavioral responses to those of a perfectionist.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder & Perfectionism Overlap

-Organizational Perfection and “Just Right” OCD

-Appearance Perfection and BDD Symptoms

-Romantic Perfectionism and Relationship OCD

-Moral Perfection and Scrupulosity

-Both those with OCD and perfection have high standards, fear of making mistakes, control and order, repetitive behaviors.

Subtypes of Perfectionism

-Self Oriented

-Other Oriented

-Socially Prescribed

- -Performance
- -Organization
- -Emotional
- -Moral
- -Identity
- -Romantic
- -Appearance

Self Oriented Perfectionsim

ATTRIBUTES:

-Struggles with making mistakes

-Hard to accept personal flaws

-Unrealistic and unattainable personal standards

-Difficulty tolerating uncertainty

-Indecisive, full of self doubt

ATTITUDES:

-Failure is not an option.

-I cannot make mistakes.

-Mistakes are a sign of weakness.

Self-Oriented Perfectionism, cont.'d

ACTIONS:

-Overworking (to the expense of one's physical health and one's relationships with others)

-Compulsive list making, checking, re-doing

-Lying to deny mistakes were made

-Procrastination and Avoidance

Other Oriented Perfectionism

ATTRIBUTES:

-Holding others to unattainable standards

-Struggles to trust others opinions or advice

-Low frustration tolerance

-Need to feel in control

ATTITUDES:

-Everyone should meet my expectations.

-Other people are always failing me, which is unacceptable.

Other Oriented Perfectionism, cont.'d

ACTIONS:

-Refusal to delegate tasks

-Incessant, excessive demands of other people's time, energy, effort to meet individual standards

-Micromanaging

-Being openly critical of others

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

ATTRIBUTES:

-Assume others have exceptionally high expectations of you

-Excessive worry about how others perceive you (assume automatic negative judgment is occurring)

-Excessive need to gain approval from others

-Excessive self doubt and difficulty tolerating uncertainty

ATTITUDES:

-No one can ever see my flaws.

-I must live up to everyone’s standards.

-I must live up to society’s standards.

-Gaining approval and being liked is of utmost importance.

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism, cont’d

ACTIONS:

-Goes to great lengths to please others

-Seeks reassurance and approval from others

-Sacrifices personal needs/wants for others

-Excessive apologizing

-Procrastination and avoidance

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism– Subtypes

-PERFORMANCE: Must get everything right; must meet the expectations that are set for me

-ORGANIZATION: I/they must be perfectly organized and planned; need for a strict schedule with no deviation; will be viewed as lazy/incompetent if seen as unorganized

-EMOTIONAL: Must always be in a good mood; must always appear calm and in control; other moods are not tolerable

-MORAL: It’s unforgivable to not meet personal or the standards of others; not worthy of anything “good” unless perfect

-IDENTITY: Vulnerability is weakness; can only feel good about myself if I am perfect; no one would accept me if they knew my flaws

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism– Subtypes, cont.'d

-ROMANTIC: My partner should perfectly understand me; my partner cannot mess up or disappoint me in anyway; I have to have the best partner and a relationship without any issues; others must approve of my partner

-APPEARANCE: Must look perfectly at all times; must have the perfect body or "not good enough"

Treatment for OCD and Perfectionism– Cognitive Behavior Therapy

-Teach and label cognitive distortions so that client can begin to challenge them

-Practice reframing and developing new attitudes and beliefs (set realistic expectations, focus on process and progress not outcome)

-Internal language shifts from absolutes to preferences

Treatment for OCD and Perfectionism– Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

-Identify “helpful and unhelpful” perfectionism

-Focus on the present and ALL of your individual values to make changes using SMART goals

-Build acceptance around mistakes, vulnerability, feelings of fear

-Diffusion: thoughts are not always true; feelings are not facts

Treatment for OCD and Perfectionism– Exposure Response Prevention

-Engage in ERP to:

-increase tolerance of making errors

-increase ability to tolerate sense of embarrassment

-build awareness that feared outcome may not be the “real outcome” to prompt learning (reinforces CBT and ACT skills)

Treatment for OCD and Perfectionism– Inference Based Cognitive Behavior Therapy

-Challenge the inferences OCD/Perfectionism themes are relying on

-Explore the Vulnerable Self theme

-Engage in reality sensing in the here and now to develop new narratives around the OCD/Perfectionism themes while learning to recognize attempts to get pulled back into previous forms of thinking/acting

Treatment for OCD and Perfectionism– Compassion Focused Therapy

-Teaching self compassion by reducing self criticism

-Practice shifting personal standards from perfectionism to realism which can influence self belief

-Would you speak to someone else as you are currently speaking to yourself? *not going to help with all types of perfectionism!

Treatment Goals for Perfectionism

-Instead of perfectionism, work on “healthy striving” or a goal of being “excellent”

    -This allows clients to work towards real rather than idealized goals

    -This approach shifts to working on high quality work and accomplishing things rather than doing things perfectly

-Helping clients rebuild relationships that perfectionism has disrupted

    -For self directed perfectionism: giving grace to self and reducing reliance on reassurance

    -For other directed perfectionism: work to shift rigid rules to a more flexible outlook

Treatment Goals for Perfectionism

-Working on mindfulness and ACT skills–values driven goals rather than perfectionism driven ones to avoid burnout and avoidance

-Exposure to “small, planned failures” in regard to the specific perfectionism presentation

-Providing grace to the individual (or others) when rules are or are not followed

Case Example: Sarah

Sarah is a SAHM of four kids who works hard to make sure that everyone's needs are met by providing her children daily transportation to their unique schools and activities, balancing care of the home and the family's pets along with the care of her aging parents. Sarah experiences crippling anxiety when she is not able to meet the needs of her children or husband, as she feels there is no "right" decision for her because her "job" is to be available to everyone at all times to meet their needs. Prior to becoming a SAHM, Sarah had a role as an accountant at a nationally recognized firm and found great satisfaction in her work and her interactions with coworkers and clients. Now, she struggles to talk with others on the sidelines at her children's sports and relies on Instacart so that she does not have to concern herself with any encounters with people she may know at the store.

Case Example: Perfectionism/OCD Themes

-Socially Prescribed Perfectionism:

-identity(SAHMs must do X)

-performance/organization (must be able to meet the expectations of family)

-Self Oriented Perfectionism: overworking for needs of family and excluding her own

-Possible OCD: people pleasing, avoidance related to fear of judgment from others and social anxiety about interacting with them, need to know in order to meet performance expectations from perfectionism; “just right” ways of being a SAHM

Case Example: Treatment Options

-CBT: label and challenge “should” thoughts re: role of SAHM.

-ACT: explore values outside of caretaking for family, practice diffusion and mindfulness.

-ERP: set a limit with kids/husband about how many places she can take them in a day? Encourage kids to complete household chores and practice tolerating them not being done “right.”

-ICBT: how did we get here–uncover the thoughts and the vulnerable self theme the behaviors are designed to protect, and then begin to deconstruct this story (e.g. may believe that a SAHM meets all needs based on cultural expectations, and if not can be divorced. Her vulnerable self fears this outcome, but reality sensing may uncover a totally different story.)

Resources

Our website:
pittsburghocdtreatment.com

My email:
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