

Think No Evil

Clergy Responses to Religious
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

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About Annie

- Life-long interest in clinical psychology
- Anxiety Disorders Laboratory at UW since 2010
- Anxiety, Stress, and Chronic Disease Laboratory at Southern Methodist University this summer
- Entering Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program at SMU

Overview

- Nature of anxiety disorders, including OCD
- The best way to treat anxiety disorders
- How religious OCD is unique
- Why religious OCD presents unique challenges in the context of the recommended treatment
- How clergy members can help
- Current attitude clergy members hold towards recommended treatment for OCD
- What you can do to help

Anxiety Disorders

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Specific Phobias (e.g. closed-in places, heights, water, flying, dogs, and injuries involving blood)
- Social Phobia
- Panic Disorder



Treating Anxiety Disorders

- Exposure therapy is supported by science as most effective treatment



- Step 1: Formulate a hierarchy of feared stimuli



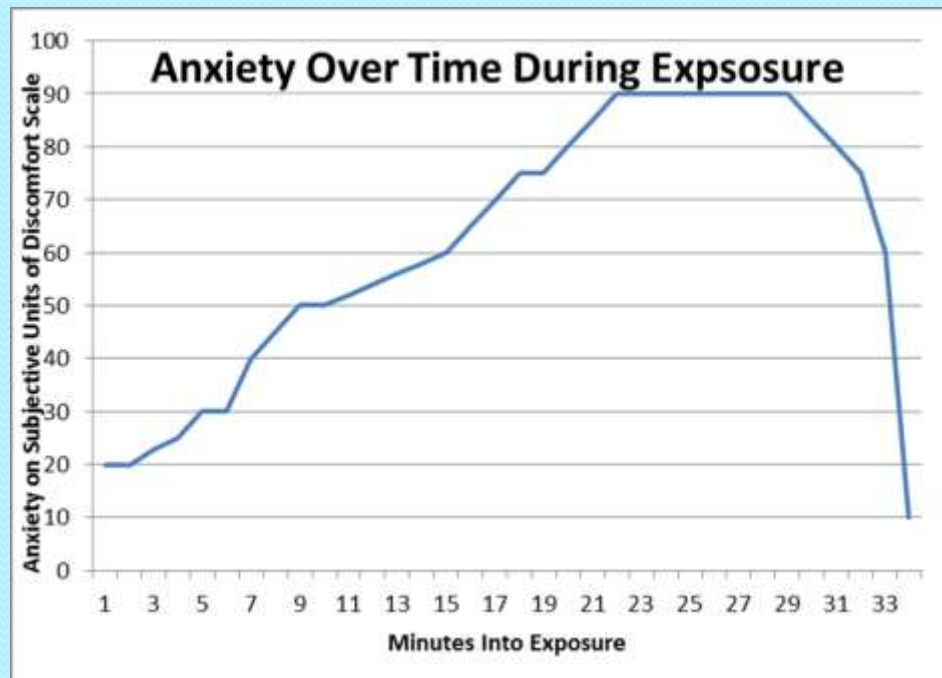
dreamstime.com



- Step 2: Exposure to first item on hierarchy



- Step 3: Allow anxiety to increase, then decrease
 - Anxiety increases
 - Fight the temptation to escape
 - Boredom sets in, anxiety decreases



Learned Outcomes

- I am able to tolerate my anxiety
- Anxiety will eventually decrease
- My feared outcome (death via bite by spider) is unlikely to happen



- Ready for next item!

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

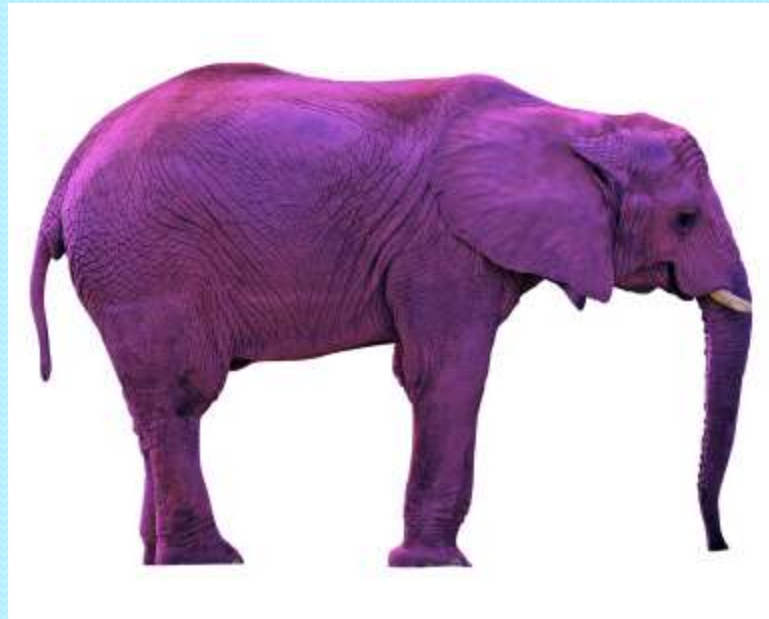
- Obsessions – an intrusive, repetitive, and unwanted...
 - Thought,
 - Image,
 - Or impulse
- Compulsions – repetitive behaviors which...
 - Cancel out an obsession
 - Or obeys a set of rules which must be applied rigidly

Common Obsessions

- Contamination
- Harming
- Symmetry/Order
- Hoarding
- Religious

Your Turn!

- Try not to think of a purple elephant



Examples of Compulsions

- Cleaning/hand-washing
- Checking
- Ordering
- Counting
- Repeating
- Praying

Normal vs. Abnormal

- The obsessions and compulsions must cause...
 - Marked distress
 - Are time consuming (take more than 1+ hour per day)
 - Interfere with occupational or social functioning

Thought-Action Fusion (TAF)

- Thoughts are equivalent to actions
- “If I think of a relative/friend being in a car accident, this increases the risk that he/she will have a car accident.”
- “Having violent thoughts is almost as committing violent acts.”

Exposure Therapy for OCD

- Formulating a TAF hypothesis and testing it
- Recording unwanted thoughts on a tape and playing it repeatedly until habituation is achieved
- Setting limits on compulsive behaviors

Religious OCD (“Scrupulosity”)

- Common obsessions
 - Sexually immoral
 - Blasphemous
 - Otherwise sinful
- Common compulsions
 - Making the sign of the cross excessively
 - Praying for forgiveness many times a day
 - Repeatedly asking clergy members for assurance of salvation

Exposure Therapy for Scrupulosity

- Formulate TAF hypotheses and testing them?
- Purposefully provoke blasphemous thoughts, and even record them on a tape to listen to?
- Set limits on the amount of times a person can pray each day?

How Clergy Members Can Help

- Give patients the theological assurance that God can differentiate between unwanted bad thoughts and deliberate bad thoughts
- Assist therapists in setting guidelines for what can pass for a reasonable frequency of prayer/attendance at confession, etc.
- Give permission to do exposure therapy?

The Study

- Deacon, B. J., Vincent, A. M., & Zhang, A. R. (2013). Lutheran clergy members' responses to scrupulosity: The effects of moral thought-action fusion and liberal vs. conservative denomination. *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*, 2, 71-77.

Participants

- National survey of 70 clergy members
- Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS)
 - 38 participants
 - “Conservative” denomination
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)
 - 32 participants
 - “Liberal” denomination

The Survey

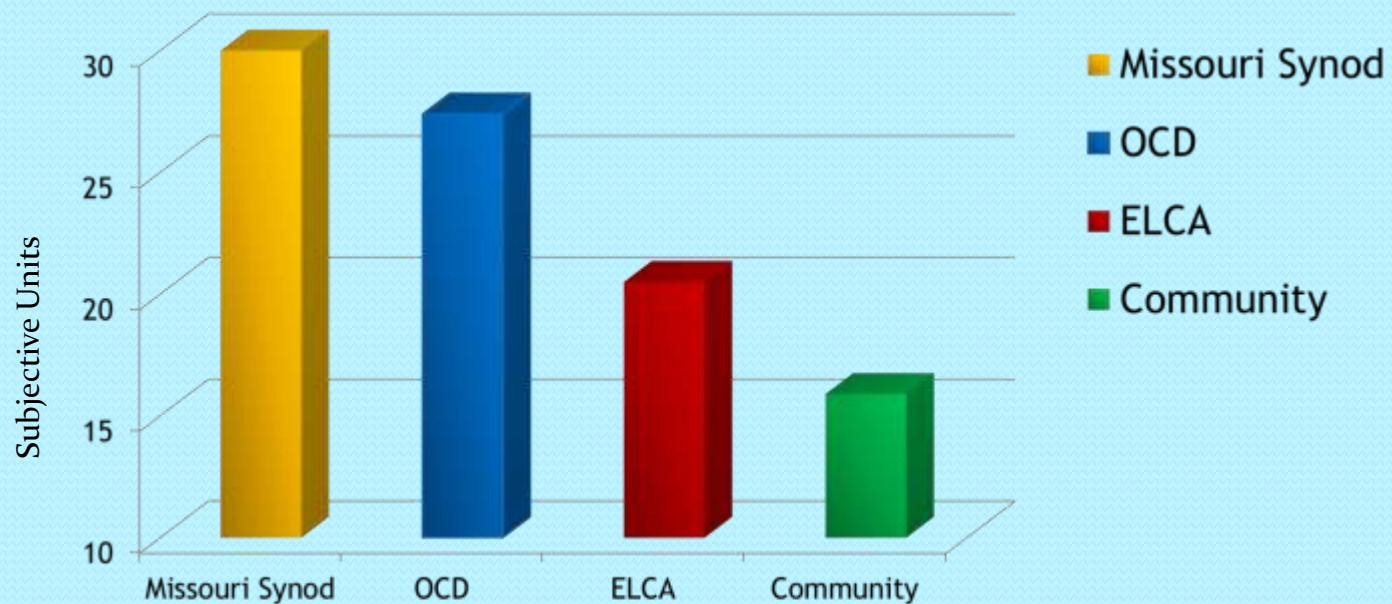
- Thought-Action Fusion Scale
- Views of God
- What would you do if...? (Case Vignette)
- Experience with Scrupulosity

Results

- Higher TAF and viewing God as more strict → less likely to endorse exposure therapy
- More experience with scrupulosity → more likely to endorse exposure therapy
- More conservative → more likely to have higher TAF, stricter view of God, and less endorsement of exposure therapy

Thought-Action Fusion

Endorsement of Thought-Action Fusion



What you can do to help

- Research scrupulosity 😊
- Look out for friends and fellow attenders at place of worship
- Recommend exposure therapy

Conclusion

Thank you!

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