

OBSESSIONS & COMPULSIONS

Obsessions are repetitive thoughts which resemble worry and are accompanied by anxiety. Compulsions are behavioral acts designed to eliminate the obsessions...”

Sometimes “obsession” is arbitrarily used to suggest that someone is being extreme about their worry; we say “they are obsessing about...” What is more realistic about obsession is that it cannot be eliminated by reasoning; according to the medical dictionary, obsession mixed with compulsion can be a disorder, called obsessive-compulsive neurosis.

If you saw the movie about Howard Hughes – the aviator, inventor and movie mogul – you may recall that, in one part of the movie, he would: obsesses over the details of a project to the degree of being indecisive or insatiable; in another part (of the movie), he would scrub his hands to the degree of making them bleed... Howard Hughes was experiencing obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

When I was in jail, one of my room-mates was admittedly diagnosed with some form of autism (call Asbergers). On a recurring basis, he would anguish over and repeat his need to get *in shape* and to develop (or recover) his short-term memory. Again and again he would *cover the same material or topics* – which left me with some confusion on what he remembered or acknowledged from hours or days earlier. Why does he go over the same thing again and again? He was compulsive about these few things that, somehow, offset the obsession about his charges and impending sentence.

His life (and mind) was much more complex than I could understand or accurately describe. I use this person to underscore a firsthand observation of OCD while excusing my inability to understand it.

What cause OCD or similar behavior is beyond my understanding too; but from limited reading, it affects about 1 in 50 adults and – with the compulsive, offsetting behavior – can be very disruptive and irrational.

The man that I describe had a brilliant mind; he could memorize lots of information in a short period of time; and he could recite long passages of the Bible with limited learning time; but he suffered at the same time with this disorder as part of his autism.

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