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What Causes OCD?

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In terms of causes, OCD still poses a challenge for both researchers and therapists. While Sigmund Freud considered OCD a neurosis, derived from unresolved childhood issues, contemporary researchers focus on biological and environmental factors. As with any other mood disorder, most experts agree that it's 70% environment and 30% genes.

Not everyone who suffers from OCD is interested in knowing the true nature of their condition. Some just want an easy way out, but without knowing what's hiding underneath our obsessions, all efforts to alleviate the symptoms would be in vain. With OCD, as is with any other challenge, you need to get to the root, before you can make a real change. So, let's take a look at four possible explanations for obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it, the text 'EXPLORABLE' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, with 'Quiz Time!' in a smaller, white, cursive font underneath. Three quiz cards are displayed in a row, each with a white border and a black shadow. The first card shows a pair of red roller skates on a wooden deck, with the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2' below it. The second card shows a fan of colorful pens, with the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2' below it. The third card shows a Ferris wheel at sunset, with the text 'Quiz: Flags in Europe' below it. To the right of the cards is a white arrow pointing right with the text 'See all quizzes =>'.

Culture

Whether we like it or not, culture has and will always influence our personalities. It's simply impossible not to be influenced by what goes on around you.

Let's picture it...

Imagine living in an authoritarian society where norms and rules must be obeyed at all costs. People are taught to value order and discipline, as well as to punish every mistake severely. Someone living in such a strict environment will inevitably develop a rigid mindset, which can

easily translate into obsessive thoughts. For a clearer example, there are some societies and groups where respect or religion are held so high on a pedestal that people are more prone to OCD. Of course, having something to respect or look up to can certainly be beneficial, but only in moderate doses.

Counteract

Since culture is such a huge part of our lives, we cannot prevent it from shaping our personality and nor should we. However, we can easily counterbalance the less beneficial effects of cultural influence by setting reasonable standards and adopting a rational way of thinking.

Genetics

It might sound strange but our genes hold the answer to why some individuals develop OCD, while others don't. Studies, conducted on twins, suggest that monozygotic, or identical twins, have a greater probability of developing OCD, than dizygotic, or fraternal twins. Studies have also shown that if one of our first-degree relatives has OCD, the chances of us having to face the same problem is slightly higher, compared to other people. However, an additional explanation to that may be that we have been raised in similar ways and circumstances, as our relatives.

Predisposition Is Not Detrimental

Keep in mind, however, that the topic at hand is predisposition and not a certainty. Being more prone to OCD doesn't necessarily mean that you will suffer from this condition. It just makes you a bit more vulnerable to it. In fact, being aware of your genetic predispositions gives you the chance to prevent such conditions from interfering with your life.

Last but not least, in some rare cases, patients with meningitis, epilepsy or encephalitis have also developed symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Authoritarian Parenting Style

We all know that children who were raised by very strict parents will eventually end up having some sort of issues. No matter how much we hate rules, discipline and order, if someone is constantly pushing us to accept a certain lifestyle, we'll eventually give up, especially if we're just kids, and embrace obedience. Parents who constantly feel the need to control every little aspect of their children's lives are not malicious. In fact, most of them do it out of love and concern. For instance, they might believe that safety and security can only be ensured by strict boundaries.

Room for Flexibility

Sadly, living in an authoritarian environment leaves little room for flexibility and adaptability. If we have been raised that way, it is likely that sooner or later, we'll cling to all kinds of obsessions, in hopes of controlling every little aspect of our lives, because this is what we have become familiar with. Life is usually unpredictable which means that, no matter how hard we try, we will never be able to gain full control. The only reasonable way to deal with life is by

knowing when to give up and when to persevere.

A key point to remember, is that even if you have been raised in a stern environment and that has established some foundation for developing OCD symptoms, you are now an adult and your life is in your own hands. You can act consciously and purposefully in order to change and live better.

Trauma

Traumatic events, like abuse or punishment during childhood, may occasionally cause obsessions during adulthood. A child who was severely punished for not keeping their room tidy, is more likely to develop a cleaning obsession when they grow up.

Words Can Be Traumatic

However, trauma doesn't settle in only as a consequence of punishment or abuse. Sometimes, a few words, repeated over and over again, are enough to traumatize a child. For instance, if your mother constantly told you to wash your hands because "there are germs everywhere", you might eventually grow up to fear germs so much that handwashing becomes a compulsion.

Find the Trauma

When obsessive-compulsive disorder is caused by a traumatic event, it's imperative that we reach the root of the problem, or the trauma, first. We simply can't work on our obsessions and compulsions, until we make peace with our painful past.

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