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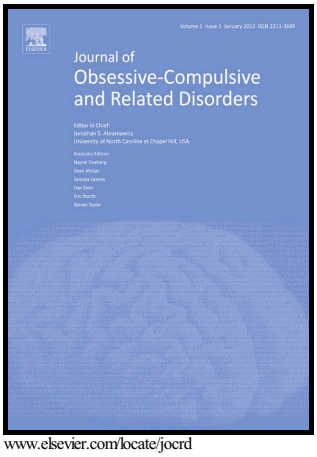

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When our Train of Thought Goes Off Track: The Different Facets of Out-of-Context Thoughts in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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Abstract

Obsessions are often described as aversive thoughts that come out-of-nowhere. Indeed, several models of obsessive compulsive symptoms postulate that obsessions are characterized by being unrelated to several levels of context (e.g. self-concept, external stimuli). In the current study we aim to broaden this notion by presenting a multidimensional concept of out-of-context thoughts and developing a self-report instrument measuring its different facets, the Out-of-Context Thoughts Questionnaire (OCTQ). Across 3 studies (total N = 599) we demonstrate the reliability and validity of the OCTQ in predicting obsessive compulsive (OC) symptoms and more specifically, obsessions. Critically, we show that the degree to which thoughts are out-of-context is independent of these thoughts' absolute content, such that people who experience more negative out-of-context thoughts, also experience more neutral out-of-context thoughts. Furthermore, we show that OC symptoms predict elevated negative and neutral out-of-context thoughts, highlighting the often-overlooked role of the context and predictability of thought in OCD, in addition to their content and appraisals. Clinically, these results suggest that obsessions

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