

Who's Searching For Bad News:

A Special Note to the "*You Did Something*" Group

As a follow-up to my article, "*Searching for Bad News*" – a piece I wrote about individuals who desperately try to prove something dreadful – I wanted to respond to a particular group of people who bravely reached out to me. This is the self-identified group of '*You Did Something*' OCD sufferers that think their partners are guilty of cheating or hiding something – even when the obsession is unfounded.

This group was only one-third of the clients I had described in my article: the other two consisting of *I Did Something* (as in, "I think I ran over someone with my car"), and *I Have Something* (as in, "I think I may have cancer"). The *You Did Something* group stood out from the other two, in the sense that these individuals *projected* the source of badness onto others rather than believing the aberration lived inside of them. For making others' lives so difficult, these individuals even got a mild tongue-lashing from me, and I certainly came down hardest on this group. And, while the *You Did Something* category didn't receive too much space when considering the hefty pages of my longest article, it definitely got the most play. Well. . . sort of. At least, not at first.

It was three years ago that I wrote that article, and for the first year that it was posted on my website, I was certain that nobody liked it! Even though I had shared this article with some of my clients, they never gave me a response about whether or not it was helpful. Likewise, there didn't seem to be any on-line readers who were reviewing this article, so far as I could tell. I simply heard nothing, and interpreted the silence to be a bad review.

Since that time, however, I have received an outpouring of heartfelt messages of gratitude, especially from distant readers who have visited my website. Amazingly, it seems that the ones who have benefitted the most from my "*Searching for Bad News*" article have been from "your" group – the ones who were suspicious of their significant others. And, as a result of this article, I have received more of *you* as clients than ever before. And I have since learned a ton. So, to this special group, I want to say three things:

Who is Contacting Me (OCD meets PTSD)?

First, if you're interested in the demographic of who has reached out to me from this *You Did Something* group, I feel it appropriate to share that *all* of them so far have been women. At the beginning of every message, each of them made initial introductions by "outing" themselves as being in the *You Did Something* category.

Without conducting an actual study, I am unable to fully explain why only women have identified with this group. However, I would like to still try to offer some discussion around this, along with a few working hypotheses. And while I don't wish to stereotype around genders, I do want to be able to consider the significance of this occurrence. Simply stated, it was only women who reached out to me, and all with marked similarities – so much so that I considered this discovery to be important.

The fact that women seek psychological services more frequently than men could be one possible explanation as to why only women have reached out to me regarding this section of my article. However, I am contacted about equally from men and women alike, with both genders commenting on various pieces of my writing. To that end, there still seems to be a disproportionate number of women who have self-identified as the *You Did Something* OCD sufferers. So again, it seems fair to ask, “why women?”

One consideration might be whether women have a transactional style that is more internal, complicated, indirect or discreet. (Please don't interpret that I'm suggesting women are “manipulative.”) What I'm thinking is far less pejorative: it is something along the lines of whether there is an evolutionary propensity for women to rely on our wits and our will, if it is intended (even unconsciously) to be an equalizer between the sexes. Whether or not this sounds “politically incorrect,” women are typically smaller than men, and often physically weaker. We also have different brains than men, and for sure, different ways of processing and relating.

As I listened to these women, I also discovered that many had some trauma in their histories. There were several narratives about a parent cheating or abandoning the family, or a previous relationship that included some form of sex addiction, cheating, lying, or abuse. I got the sense that there was a connection between their underlying fear and helplessness on the one hand, and the *indirect* ways they were behaving on the other. These women seemed to be doing things in their relationships that were intended to make them feel more powerful, but it wasn't working. Even when they reported how good the relationship was in all other respects, they still succumbed to insecurity and distrust. Disoriented by the vulnerable feelings that were awakened by intimacy, they began their covert operations. Looking in all the wrong places for safety and security – phone records, internet history, or anything else they could monitor – they searched for bad news to orient them and give them back their bearings.

If you resonate with these other women, you may also consider whether you have some trauma in your past that exacerbates your OCD. While I still recommend that you see

an OCD specialist first and foremost, your therapist will need to appreciate this nuance. This can get very tricky, in terms of trying to sort these issues out.

But I truly believe that regular “talk-therapy” won’t help your OCD, and you may be in treatment far too long without getting the results you so deserve. Many of my clients have told me that their individual or couples therapists have actually encouraged *more* reassurances from their partner, as if these constant assurances would eventually work to satisfy the obsession. But as you can confirm, reassurances don’t last, and this compulsive “checking” behavior should never be encouraged. You do need to see an OCD expert so that you can nail this thing, but your therapist should also give you some extra care to help you heal around the issues of your past. While your obsession is unreasonable, your suffering is valid, and your trauma is real. With the right therapist, you can move forward, overcoming both your trauma and your OCD.

I’m Sorry.

Second, I confess I may have misjudged you. Before having so many of you as clients, I often heard from people who were on the other side of this – all the partners who were unable to provide enough reassurances and were constantly being accused of something they didn’t do. Before knowing you as well as I do now, I was guilty for privately thinking that your loved one was suffering more around this than you were, and I may have been more sympathetic to the other side. I now know this is not the case.

I was also unsure as to how hard you might work in therapy, in terms of owning your own suffering. Before working with some of you, I anticipated that you might be tempted to *project* onto others, hoping to change *the other’s* behavior instead of your own. I thought you might be somewhat inflexible, or lacking in insight, since your partners’ alleged wrongdoings were often the focus of your obsessions. But I couldn’t have been more wrong. I really do know how bad this is for you, and I’m very sorry if I misjudged or underestimated you. At a minimum, please know that I regret this and deeply sympathize with your pain.

I Admire You.

Third, I want you to know that I respect the hell out of you. You researched this problem, you asked for help, and you looked for a better path. How easy would it have been to continue to blame the other – to insist that they jump through hoops for you in order to take your pain away? You have clearly tried that, and saw that it wasn’t the answer. You started to look within, and attempted to address your own your suffering. If anyone has ever owned their sh*t, it has been you. I have never seen anyone work so

hard in therapy, have such amazing insight, and receive such positive treatment outcomes – especially regarding your relationships.

What has impressed me the most was your decision to trust, which is the bravest thing any of us can ever do. And you did this *while you were afraid*. You took a huge leap of faith, while your intuition was taking you in the other direction. You did all this because your love is strong, because you care about others, because you have integrity, and because it was the right thing to do. *Bravo*.

So, it is *you* whom I wish to thank – for changing my mind, for giving me the chance to learn more, and for helping me own my own biases. Because you work so hard on yourself, I will work harder on myself as well. Thank you for helping me understand when I was wrong. I am, without a doubt, your biggest fan. Thank you for reaching out to me, for your lovely feedback, and for working so hard. You make my work and my writing a joyful surprise.

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