

A Patient's Struggles with HOCD

I am a 21-year-old student living in Montreal who has battled different forms of OCD throughout my life. I can safely say without a doubt in my mind that HOCD (Homosexual Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) was the most mentally draining and challenging form of OCD to overcome. I will start off by giving a background on my experience with HOCD up until I decided to seek therapy with Dr. Dennis Kalogeropoulos (Dr. K) and then a description of how I overcame it with his help and attending sessions. I would also like to state that I am a completely LGBTQ friendly person and I come from a very accepting family who love and who supported me through my HOCD journey.

As long as I can remember I have always been an extremely sexually active person who is only attracted to females. I lost my virginity at 15 and have been having regular sex since then. Around the age of 13, I developed an addiction to porn. This addiction led me to watch different types of pornography which slowly led me to watch more taboo sex scenes and eventually led to me watching gay porn. I did not enjoy it, but I watched it a few times and then moved onto something else. I completely forgot about this until I got to my second semester of university. I was engaging in sex with girls around that time and one day I was scrolling on a pornographic website and saw gay porn. I then remembered what had happened when I was 13 and started asking myself the questions over and over in my head "have I been gay this whole time and not known it?" and "what if you have been gay this whole time and are just in denial?" This was the only thing on my mind from that day onwards over the next four months.

I became depressed as I felt as if I had been lying to my friends and family and I truly did not understand what was happening to me. I did not feel any attraction to men and I was still attracted only to females. However, each day the doubts would not leave my mind and I would feel so overwhelmed with anxiety that I could not eat, sleep, or live my life properly. Things that I once enjoyed, such as playing sports and seeing friends, I no longer did as it seemed that nothing mattered. I felt like I was watching myself live my life from a third person perspective and although I was carrying out the motions of everyday life my thoughts were completely consumed by HOCD ruminations. My whole identity had been lost and I did not recognize myself anymore.

When I returned to university for my second year, I managed to distract myself enough to not think about it however it still flared up from time to time. Two years later, COVID had hit giving me a lot of time to myself. The obsessive thoughts came back stronger than ever when to a gay friend of mine made the sarcastic comment "you have to be at least 20% gay." At this point I decided to research what I was feeling as I hadn't previously due to the fear of what I might find. I stumbled across a reddit page about HOCD and realized everyone's experiences lined up exactly with what I was feeling. I now understood that it was a form of OCD that was taking over my life and that I desperately needed to seek help.

I thank my lucky stars every day that Dr. K was able to make time for me because without him I have no idea what state of mind I would be in today. When we first met, I was scared to tell him what I was going through as I had never said it out loud to anyone. When I finally explained it and spoke to him about how I felt and my past sexual experiences he knew that this was HOCD. Throughout the sessions that followed, he walked me through the many different strategies I could use to overcome my problem using a combination of traditional cognitive-behavioral (CBT) and third-wave CBT techniques. Motivated to better understand my problem and psychotherapy, I researched all these strategies and eagerly applied them to my ruminative thinking and to better manage my anxiety.

I believe what helped me the most was having a supportive and knowledgeable professional explain how HOCD functions and how it is a form of OCD preying on your thoughts and intensifying your insecurities and anxieties. I came to understand that a person's sexuality will not simply change overnight. I also became aware that I had made the mistake of defining myself largely through my sexuality and ignored the different parts of my being that defined me as a person. I believe my over-reliance on porn at such a young age may have played a role in the emphasis I placed on sexuality.

I saw Dr. K regularly and slowly got better overtime. My HOCD ruminative thinking became weaker and weaker, my libido returned and I felt comfortable again engaging in sex without having doubts about who I was. Therapy enabled me to not only overcome my HOCD, it also helped become more insightful and more in touch with the whole person I am and will continue to evolve into. I have become more mindful and appreciative of my relationships with my friends and family, more engaged in my academic studies, have resumed pursuing the sports, activities and hobbies I once enjoyed. I am finally at peace with who I am.

Despite what on-line forums and chat rooms say, HOCD is real and I am a perfect example of how you can recover from it. I did not fix the problem overnight. It took time and many sessions to overcome it, but I am glad I put in the work and sought therapy as I feel like a completely new person. Although my journey with OCD and HOCD is not completely over, I cannot put into words the benefits therapy had for me and my mental health and I will forever be grateful for that. If you are reading this and experiencing HOCD your feelings are valid and you should not search for the answers on online forums. Seek out a qualified and knowledgeable therapist and get help because you deserve to be happy and at peace with who you are.