My life with maladaptive daydreaming

Almost everyone indulges in the occasional daydream. They’re typically fairly innocent and likely to occur when you’re doing a mindless task, like washing the dishes. The difference between daydreaming and the condition known as Maladaptive Daydreaming is that the condition is not just something that happens when you occasionally allow your mind to wander. Maladaptive Daydreaming is when daydreaming happens so frequently that it interferes with other areas of life.

Maladaptive Daydreaming has been part of my life for years. One moment I am out doing an activity, or sitting at the table doing homework, and the next, my mind is off in my own little world. I recognized early on that it wasn’t healthy. It’s great to have an active imagination, but this was interfering with my academic goals, relationships, hobbies, and much other aspects of my life.

For a long time I had no idea what was wrong with me. Thanks to the Internet, I discovered that other people struggle with this as well. Eventually, I found out that Eli Somer, a professor of Clinical Psychology, had discovered people with similar problems and named the condition Maladaptive Daydreaming. It was a tremendous relief to learn that someone recognized this problem.

I didn’t tell anyone except my mom for years. Finally, I started telling a few people close to me, but it was difficult to explain. Some people would say, "What’s wrong with that? I do it too." I’m sure other people struggle with Maladaptive Daydreaming, but of the 96% of people who daydream, it is often a perfectly harmless thing. In my case, however, I am prone to falling into a daydream anytime I am alone and daydreams often interrupt my daily activities. It doesn’t prevent me from doing the things I normally do, but it makes it more difficult to be fully engaged and competes for the time I wanted to invest in other things in my life. Other people wondered that I would miss a stop sign due to daydreaming. Thankfully it doesn’t cause that, I can still do the task I am performing, such as stopping at a stop sign, though my mind is engaged elsewhere.

I have never liked the label of having a mental illness. I wasn’t sick. It definitely wasn’t as severe as many mental illnesses. I didn’t want people to mock me for having a mental health problem, especially for something as strange as Maladaptive Daydreaming. In all fairness, it’s difficult for people with a perfectly healthy relationship to both fantasy and reality to understand.
Part of the reason I didn’t like the label of having a mental illness was because I feel like it is something I should be able to handle. Surely I should be able to control my own mind. The problem is, Maladaptive Daydreaming is like an addictive drug and it is extremely difficult to control. It is in the brain, so there is no shutting off the laptop or turning off the TV to get rid of it. It is there from the moment I wake up to the moment I fall asleep at night.

After finding out what Maladaptive Daydreaming was, I looked for a cure. I tried lifestyle choices such as cutting out media for a time. I eventually tried counselors who offered me a few techniques for dealing with it, but nothing could help me get rid of it.

Through research, I discovered that Jayne Bigelson, an attorney in New York, also has this condition and has spoken out about it, and even written about it in The Atlantic. She said that medication changed her life. I had shrunk from this option partially because it sounds strange to try to explain my problem to a doctor, but I decided to give it a try. The doctor didn’t know what it was but read an article on it, put it under the category of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and gave me a prescription. Apart from being more mentally slow due to tiredness, it didn’t work. It made me so tired I had difficulty staying awake to drive for 20 minute at a time. I stopped taking it. Upon doing more research, I discovered that for some people, including Bigelson, Maladaptive Daydreaming is related to OCD and medication can work very well. In some cases, and evidently in mine, it isn’t related to OCD, so medication does not help you control it.

The first counselor I went to and the doctor I saw assumed it was related to my personality and my lifestyle as a student. But since I’ve been dealing with the problem since I was about 12, that answer didn’t make a lot of sense to me. I felt the issue was deeper than their methods of therapy. I felt like a hopeless case that no one knew how to cure.

Many psychologists have not heard of Maladaptive Daydreaming and there is debate over whether or not it should be considered a mental disorder. Eli Somer is making an effort to have it recognized as a mental disorder, but it is difficult to diagnose and there are degrees of it. In short: it’s messy.
Though there is no quick cure to Maladaptive Daydreaming, I have figured out a few things about dealing with it. First of all, accepting my fantasy-prone mind is extremely important. I’ve learned to avoid frustration for lost time while not giving up on controlling it when I can. I have also learned to live with the condition rather than being angry at it, which only leads to frustration. Every day is a gift, and my life is full of things to live for.

Though counseling didn’t provide me with a cure, I did learn something from a counselor when I asked the question that has often been on my mind. Why do I have it? I know there is genetic component to this being a problem for me, but I still wonder why it seems more severe with me than anyone else in my family. She simply said that it doesn’t matter, unless that helps for the treatment. I think this is valuable advice for anyone with a persistent mental health problem. It doesn’t matter what caused it. It doesn’t matter that you have it and other people don’t. Do your best to treat it, strive for the best quality of life possible if you can’t cure it, and be patient with yourself while actively doing everything in your power to be free of it. If you suffer from this condition or any other mental health condition that makes you feel isolated or hopeless, you are not alone.

Comments
0 comments

Sort by Oldest

Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin

PREVIOUS POST
Sports & Idolatry
— February 22, 2017

NEXT POST
From the editor: vice + virtue
— February 22, 2017

AUTHOR: ADMIN

RELATED ARTICLES

Mars Hill Reviews: Fashion
— February 22, 2017 | No Comment

Culture Maker: Charlotte Elson
— February 22, 2017 | No Comment

From the editor: vice + virtue
— February 22, 2017 | No Comment

Sports & Idolatry