Eli Somer coined the term "maladaptive daydreaming," an act which interferes with reality and may even be used as a replacement for human interaction.

JoelValve/Unsplash
We are constantly told to live in the moment, to appreciate and experience it. But the human mind does wander from time to time, during boredom or even in the middle of a task — and who knows, you might even be doing it now. So when does this act of daydreaming go from a normal component of daily life to something that might not be too healthy?

Now, researchers have found that it’s not always a bad thing. Many studies have suggested that daydreamers may actually be more creative and more efficient. In a research experiment performed at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, participants who daydreamed often were found to have a better memory than those who did not.

But daydreaming could be a problem when it begins interfering with real life, affecting a person's productivity, social life, or sleep quality. The term “maladaptive daydreaming” was first used by an Israeli professor named Eli Somer who published a paper in 2002, defining it as "extensive fantasy activity that replaces human interaction and/or interferes with academic, interpersonal or vocational functioning."

After studying a small group of child abuse survivors, he suggested that maladaptive daydreaming (MD) could be used as a coping mechanism by people who experience traumatic situations. As a way to dissociate oneself from the present moment, to be exact.

This, however, is not necessary as many people may engage MD without having experienced any trauma. As Somer notes, some of us are just "born with the capacity for immersive, vivid daydreaming."

Other researchers have also suggested that MD is not a unique condition but a potential sign of other illnesses such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Somer points out that schizophrenia, which may seem similar, is characterized by the inability to differentiate between reality and
fantasy. People with MD, on the other hand, do recognize that their daydreams are not real. The problem is more about being unable to stop the fantasizing as it becomes an obsessive ritual.

The internet has certainly brought more attention to the condition in recent years, with cyber communities like the **Wild Minds Network** supporting people who believe they are suffering from compulsive fantasizing.

Given that MD itself is not formally recognized as a psychiatric disorder, is that there is no universal method to diagnose or treat it. The challenge lies in the fact that daydreaming is a normal mental activity — so defining how and when it is excessive or "maladaptive" is largely subjective.

According to **Healthline**, symptoms appear to involve real life disruptions caused by the daydreams, including insomnia or the inability to complete tasks. One may also find themselves performing repetitive and unconscious movements while fantasizing.

Somer hopes to see MD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* someday, a move that would improve research and encourage mental health professionals to diagnose it correctly.

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