Depression and How To Escape

Saul Youssef Physics Department Boston University November 7, 2016

NOTE: I am not a medical professional!



- Feedback from professionals.
- One year of daily interactions on an on-line psych self-help forum
- 30,000 on-line readers of the forum thread about this.
- Feedback from three groups of real patients at the Brigham and Women's hospital.
- 7475 downloads of the notes to 1586 sites in 44 countries.

In 2014, it occurred to me that everything that was happening in my depression could be explained by a single process which had no name. I will call it:

Unconscious Withdrawal

By someone in "unconscious withdrawal," I mean someone who:

- ...has withdrawn participation in their own internal decisionmaking process, without choosing or realizing it.
- ...does what they always do, says what they always say, thinks what they always think and feels what they always feel.
- ...thinks, but in an uncontrolled manner without realizing it.
 Someone who thinks, but thinks without deciding to think.

This is someone who has slipped into a kind of "autopilot" without realizing it where they basically stop making conscious decisions.

Now suppose that someone is perfectly fine biologically, genetically and mentally except for one thing: they consistently slip into unconscious withdrawal. What would you expect to happen?

What Would You Expect from Unconscious Withdrawal?

Suppose something new comes up that HAS to be done. How can a person with unconscious withdrawal do it without deciding? Instead of deciding, such a person will wait until a rising tide of negative emotions FORCES them to act.



Procrastination of anything not habitual



Chronic stress

Since unconscious withdrawal means a person does not decide anything, they will not take any NEW actions, even if a new action would be beneficial.



Helplessness, in a sense, even if "busy"

If a person doesn't decide anything, that means that everything they do has been done many times before. Especially in the early stages, we can expect boredom or feeling "in a rut."



Boredom, being "in a rut"

Thinking without deciding makes a person vulnerable to rumination – out of control, self-reinforcing thoughts and feelings.



Rumination

Rumination strengthens whatever you are ruminating about, so



Emotional responses become magnified, out of proportion and long lasting



Hypersensitivity to criticism or setbacks



Out of proportion anger, fear, or irritation



Strongly holding grudges



Resistive, controlling or obsessive behavior

Do you recognize yourself here?

- What I have been describing is depression.
- Unconscious withdrawal is the mechanism by which depression propagates itself into the future and amplifies itself over time.

Let's see how this might work in practice...

Example: You are not invited





Your co-workers are attending an important meeting that you usually attend.

This time, however, you were not invited.

For a depressed person, this can cause...

FEAR...ANGER....FRUSTRATION....HELPLESSNESS...repeating again and again.

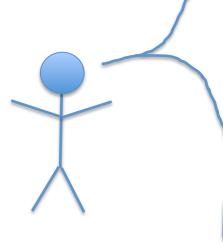
Recall of similar slights in the past.

Projections of bleak futures.

Negative thoughts and feelings follow to all other areas of life you might be thinking about.

Leaks into every part of your life

These thoughts are only partly conscious



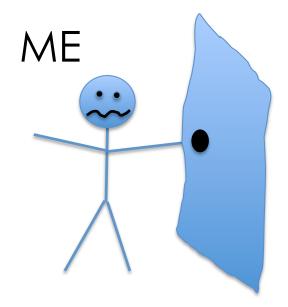
Did they forget to invite me? Am I overreacting? Are they plotting against me? Is my career ruined? Am I about to lose my job? Is my email broken? Are people upset at me? Am I going to be fired? How dare they treat me this way? Why did Bob look at me that way? Is my career ruined? Are there other meetings I have missed? Is it just an oversight? Who is behind this? Am I about to lose my job? Am I losing my job? How will I pay my rent? How can I tell my family?

...

Why does this happen?

Example: My girlfriend is late for everything!





I am anxious to go to some event. I am afraid of being late. GF is late for everything. I feel:

ANXIETY → FEAR → ANGER → FRUSTRATION → HELPLESSNESS → ANGER → FEAR → ...

Here I am, almost completely incapacitated.

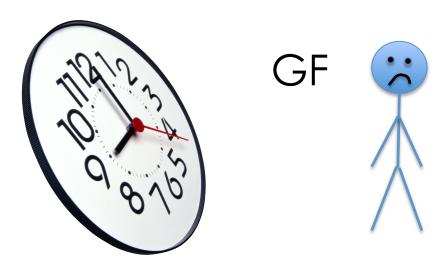
My focus is on:

- GF: Why does she do this??
- Specific fears
- Solutions: Two cars? Break up??



Conflict with others

Example 2: My girlfriend is late for everything!



I am anxious to go to some event. I am afraid of being late. GF is late for everything. I feel:

ANXIETY → FEAR → ANGER → FRUSTRATION → HELPLESSNESS → ANGER → FEAR → ...

ME

Here I am, almost completely incapacitated.

My focus is on:

- GF: Why does she do !!..
- Specific fears
- Solutions: Two cars

This is the BIG TRICK



Conflict will

Notice that this happens again and again. When you are depressed, almost every part of your life turns into a source of pain. WHY??

THE BIG TRICK:

- The problem was not my girlfriend.
- The problem was not that my perceptions of the situation were not accurate (they often are).
- The problem was not whether my feelings were justified or not (they often are).
- The underlying problem was the way thoughts and feelings were coming into my mind in general.
 The true hidden problem was unconscious withdrawal.

It is very hard to realize this while it is happening.

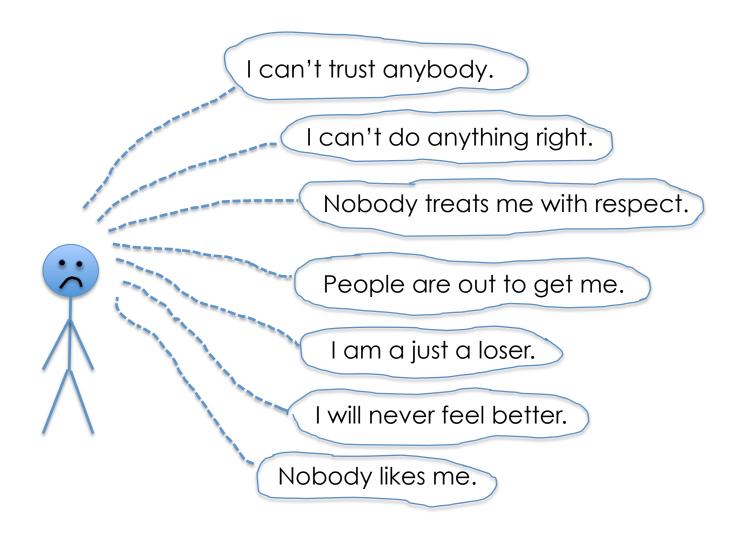
The election tomorrow is another example of this:

Q: Do you **decide** to think about politics?

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Or are you pulled into rumination without realizing it?



These thoughts are self-reinforcing. Thinking them repeatedly makes them true.



Vulnerability to self-reinforcing negative thoughts and feelings

The Downward Spiral





Bad things happen to depressed people.



Depression happens when circumstances change.

These are predictable consequences of unconscious withdrawal

- Procrastination of anything not habitual
- Chronic stress
- Helplessness even if busy
- Boredom, being "in a rut" or feeling "burnt out"
- Rumination
- Emotional responses become magnified and long-lasting
- Hypersensitivity to criticism or setbacks
- Out of proportion anger, fear or irritation
- Conflicts with others, holding grudges, negativity, social withdrawal
- Vulnerability to self-reinforcing negative thoughts and feelings
- Bad life events; being a "loser"
- Life changes trigger a downward spiral

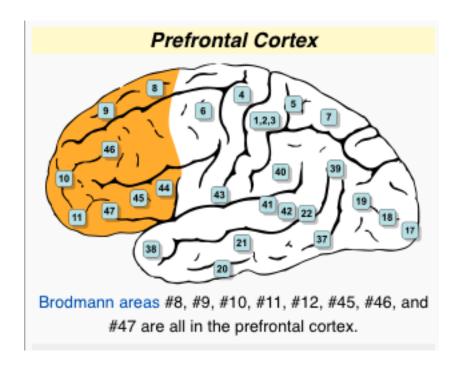
Could it really be that unconscious withdrawal is behind everything?



If depressed people have unconscious withdrawal and have stopped deciding, then the part of the brain that makes conscious decisions should be underactive for depressed people.

Is that really true?

Are the "conscious decision making" parts of the brain suppressed for depressives?



In mammalian brain anatomy, the **prefrontal cortex** (**PFC**) is the cerebral cortex which covers the front part of the frontal lobe. The PFC contains Brodmann areas 9, 10, 11, 12, 46, and 47.

Many authors have indicated an integral link between a person's personality and the functions of the prefrontal cortex.

This brain region has been implicated in planning complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making, and moderating social behaviour.

The basic activity of this brain region is considered to be orchestration of thoughts and actions in accordance with internal goals.

At a finer level:

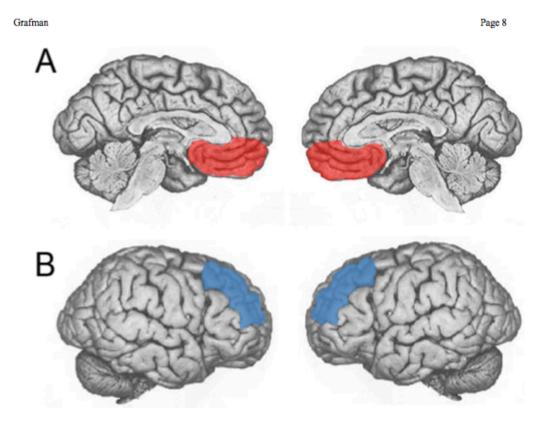


Figure 1. A. Depiction of vmPFC (in red) in midline views of each hemisphere. B. Depiction of dlPFC (in blue) in lateral views of each hemisphere.

vmPFC:

Mediates visceral autonomic activity associated with emotion, reward and motivation.

dIPFC:

Working memory, intention formation, goal-directed action, abstract reasoning and attention control.



dIPFC should be suppressed in depressed people.

But is that really true?

Table 1 Functional and structural changes in the limbic and PFC areas implicated in depression.

Substrate	Volume	Histological changes	Metabolic activity	Antidepressant effects
Orbital/VMPFC	↓	↓	↑	
Anterior cingulate cortex	↓			↓ Metabolic activity
Hippocampus	↓	↓		↑ Volume
Amvgdala	↓?			↓ Metabolic activity
DLPFC	↓	↓	↓	•
			YES	

Table 2 Neurochemical/hormonal abnormalities in depression.

Substrate	Concentration/activity
Cortisol, CRH	
Proinflammatory cytokines	↑
BDNF	↓
5-HT neurotransmission	↓
NA neurotransmission	↓

Behav. Brain Res. 2009 August 12; 201(2): 239–243. doi:10.1016/j.bbr.2009.03.004.

SNAP CLUB

The rules:

- 1. Do anything you want, any time you want.
- 2. When you decide to do something, at the moment when you decide, SNAP YOUR FINGERS.

GETTING STARTED

- 1. No will power is involved in this game!
- 2. You can do it no matter how bad you're feeling.
- 3. When you SNAP, STOP...and FEEL the decision.
- 4. Choose silly things to do that you would not normally do.
- 5. SNAP
- 6. Let each snap bring present moment awareness.
- 7. Allow yourself a little smile when you decide 🙂
- 8. You should be feeling what these people are feeling...



The magic of snapping your fingers

http://egg.bu.edu/SNAP_CLUB/index2.html

I AM HERE. I AM NOT AFRAID. I AM DECIDING.

Some Things that I Personally Do

- SNAP! I'm going to stand up now.
- SNAP! I'm going to go for a walk now.
- SNAP! I'm going to look at that tree for 5 seconds.
- SNAP! I'm going to text my friend.
- SNAP! I'm going to touch that stop sign as I walk past it.
- SNAP! I'm going to touch my nose.
- SNAP! I'm going to put my left sock on before the right sock.
- SNAP! I'm going to pee now.
- SNAP! I'm going to go through the left door of a set of double doors.
- SNAP! I'm going to buy that book.
- SNAP! I'm going to do the laundry now.
- SNAP! I'm going to take these stairs two at a time.
- SNAP! I'm going to have a hot chocolate instead of a coffee today.

We are living in a sea of tricks that help depression somewhat. If this is right, we are looking for something different: SNAP CLUB should be able to make dramatic specific improvements.

Does this really happen?

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Threads in Forum: Depression Success Stories Forum Tools ▼ Search this Forum							
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Re: How I understood and then escaped

So I just wanted to say that I joined SNAP club two days ago and the drastic change in my mood for the better is astounding!

Over the past 10 months, I've been hospitalized twice (my first times in the hospital) and my mental illness (whatever it is) has literally taken over my life. I took off work for as much time as I possibly could before being forced to return or lose it. I was out of energy, dragging myself to work everyday knowing deep down that this was just not sustainable. It hurt to breathe - it really did. Trying to get out of bed, trying to take a shower....like being in cement or quicksand. Wondering how in the world did I end up this way where every little thing I do feels too much? I said to myself it's like I'm barely going through the motions. On autopilot. Everyday is the same cruel, painful fate that I have to suffer through. Each minute I have to push past. It's heavy.

And then I tried to google my feelings again. Maybe someone would relate. Or something.... And I found this thread. SNAP club. Hmmmmm.....I'm desperate. I will try ANYTHING at this point. So why not? What have I got to lose? It took a little effort at first, it did I will be honest. The first snap I made was when I decided to go into the coffee shop and buy a hot chocolate. I snapped. And I felt a bit lighter. I smiled. It didn't feel like going through the motions but more like a choice that I was not negative about at least. And I've kept on snapping. For little things like staying in bed, getting up, putting my shoes on, lighting some candles, turning on the radio, changing the channel, cloudwatching even lol walking in the leaves, picking up leaves as I go, etc. etc. And how quickly this has worked is amazing and almost frightening. Will it continue to work? Man, I hope so 🚆 I've even noticed myself changing my thoughts. I have never been able to get CBT to work for me mainly because my anxiety gets in the way I think. But this snap game seems to work for my thoughts too. I literally snap them away if need be and the relief is immediate.

Only now I'm starting to get a little scared. I have been diagnosed with bipolar in the past (this diagnosis crap is ever changing for me) but if I do have bipolar could the snapping thing trigger me into mania? Is that even possible? I know that antidepressants can trigger mania....ok, I hope I don't sound completely out there lol

But I can't really find much beyond this forum about the snapping thing and my depressive mind is trying desperately to prove it wrong while I'm in turn fighting the depression because I need hope. Please reassure me that this works long term and won't trigger mania, or if it does, that there's some other trick I can use at that point.

Thank you thank you thank you!

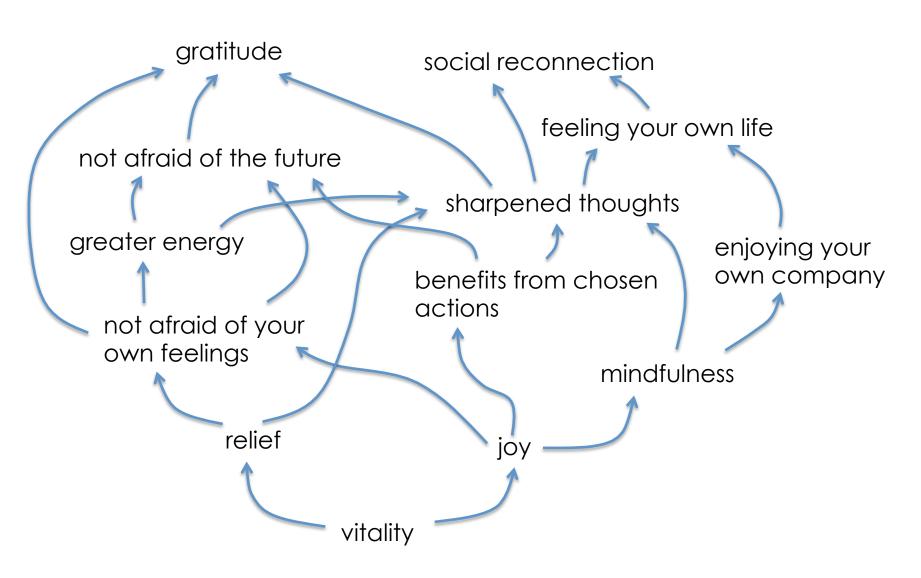






This person went from needing hospitalization for depression including strong psychomotor retardation symptoms to feeling fine with two days of nothing but doing SNAP CLUB.

There is an Upward Spiral



http://egg.bu.edu/SNAP_CLUB

http://facebook.com/mysnapclub

One more important point

Once you are started, I highly recommend seeing an M.D. to check for purely medical issues that may be dragging you down.

Mark Hyman M.D. http://drhyman.com/ points out that there are quite a few medical issues that can cause mental problems: vitamin deficiencies, omega 3 fat deficiency, hypothyroidism, infection, gluten allergy, heavy metal toxicity, gut problems,...

Go get yourself checked out. SNAP!





