A Posting about Anxiety, Depression and PTSD from a learner in Learning How to learn

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I know these are topics that many might not want to talk about. My family and friends certainly do not want to talk about these topics with me.

I am dealing with trauma and suffer from severe depression, anxiety and PTSD. Until recently I was working full time (currently I am on sick leave) and by many I was considered to be completely healthy and high functioning and in a sense, from certain perspectives, I was. In social contexts, peer and manager reviews at work and family gatherings I did everything that everyone expected of me and what I understood as being 'successful' in the eyes of the corporate and academic world. I excelled in university, a top performer at my job and also my friends would ALL describe me as fun and outgoing and smart and a hard worker. But I have suffered from these major afflictions for much of my adult life and have just never really been able to make strong headway despite all the investigation, doctors, medication, self awareness programs, years of meditation, research studies and experiments I have tried on myself and undertaken.

Now, through Barbara Oakley and Terrence Sejnowski's course, I have learned that procrastination is strongly tied to my afflictions. Procrastination for me is linked to 'experiential avoidance' and a strong internal critic that is at many times not quite capable of being flexible or kind when faced with product outcomes. To say I am a perfectionist is an understatement, and perfectionism is a label that unfortunately does not do its human companions justice. The word 'perfectionist' in my opinion is too easily applauded by some and too often considered 'cute and neurotic' by others. In my case perfectionism is a label that covers up a deep underlying need for safety, understanding and avoidance of shame and uncomfortable experiences.

Through this course I have found the information on habits, focus on process vs product, using willpower ONLY to overcome the first bit of response to the cue, Pomodoro technique, rewards, diffuse mode, and importance of sleep, to name just a few concepts explored in Learning How to Learn, so immensely useful and applicable to my symptoms. Each of these concepts keep me grounded to a theory that avoids mental health labels and instead values accessible work process steps.

I have cancelled several commitments since this course has started so that I could stay home and take notes on video lectures and do my Pomodoros (on my to do list I write down the number of Pomodoros I am going to apply on each topic instead of a length of minutes or hours, I just like writing '2 pomodoros' ;) And I feel fantastic! Really, there is nothing that has helped my mood, sleep, eating, anxiety, feelings of guilt/shame etc than making small 'process oriented' to do lists for myself and accomplishing them without focus on the actual product. After doing two Pomodoros with a break in-between I feel like I can just keep going, bring it on, bring on more (okay, well it took a few days to get to that level of excitement, but I got there).

Depression/anxiety/trauma/PTSD (I am not comparing them or putting them in one group, its just easier to write them like that) greatly affect one's ability to concentrate, read, focus and keep things in memory. The fact I am retaining and understanding and making links through my work in this course is simply blowing

me away. It is a testament to the evidence and facts presented via this course and the techniques that are advocated.

One of the key reasons this course and the information presented has had such an impact on me and touched me so deeply where other books/group therapy etc could not is that Dr. Oakley has a very gentle, smiling, kind demeanor to her that I felt extremely safe with. Meaning I literally found it a pleasure to listen to her voice and watch her and see her presence in the videos. I felt like I was working with a kind teacher and, for me, it took me back to grade school days where I felt like I could do anything and the teachers really believed in me and I was not afraid of them. Dr. Oakley's voice tone, facial expressions and body gestures all helped contribute to a sense of safety and authenticity I valued and believed as I listened to and watched her video lectures.

I have learned in this course various ideas about how habit, pain avoidance, procrastination have all made my depression and anxiety worse. Yes I knew these things 'intuitively' but to have them presented by a professor from a major institution working in a non-mental health domain while simultaneously providing us links to numerous research articles and doing this all with a gentle and encouraging voice and approach has made all the difference to me. (I also do not underestimate the value of 'good timing', meaning the timing/occasion of coming across this course and its approach to learning strategies in this stage of my life is fortunate.) Knowing that Dr. Oakley was faced with her own challenges and discomfort when learning math to which she applied self compassion and kindness alongside science and theory makes the messages and concepts taught in her lectures quite believable. Dr. Oakley actually comes across as though she practices what she preaches and that makes a huge difference in the eyes of individuals who have tried a whole gamut of techniques and in some ways feel they are always being sold the 'next bill of goods'.

I am so moved by this course and the way the material was presented. The additional lectures/interviews with third parties and other professors at other institutions has further made me trust Dr. Oakley and Dr. Sejnowski and believe in the material and therefore really apply it to my own life. To be willing to summon up the 'will power' to make a different choice when the cue is presented is very challenging when battling major depression etc, but it is not impossible and I am so thankful to the instructors, TA's and everyone participating in this course.

(I am of course posting this anonymously because of the stigma around the topics. Hey, if my own family and friends don't want to talk about it, you can pretty much understand what stigma is capable of doing. So please forgive me for having to post anonymously. I am sure there are other people in the same boat as me and I do not wish to disrespect them by posting Anon. I hope they will understand.)

So for me, this course is life changing in a very fundamental way. I will never look at the diagnosis of 'depression, anxiety, PTSD' the same again. I am seeing and feeling in myself all sorts of links between experiential avoidance, pain tolerance and reaction to cues and I am wondering how many others like me are battling the medical system and mental health care system and we just haven't come across the message in a way that has made sense to us. I feel there are many of us that can benefit from a course like this focused on habits, concentration modes, memory, response to cue, pain tolerance etc from a 'general learning' standpoint rather than a 'mental health' standpoint, in order to understand and make links to our own experience. Getting these messages presented in a different way, a different context has hit home for me. THANK YOU, more than I can articulate in this post.