

Aaron Walters

Mr. Greco

English 3

9 April 2019

### Mental Disorders

Running down the asphalt parking lot under the blazing hot sun, a boy who could be no older than 13 turns his head to look behind him. He sees a horde of other children on his heels, rapidly gaining on him. His gaze returns to facing forward as he lowers his head in a desperate attempt to accelerate himself away from his pursuers. It works. He now has the time and space to fully turn his body around and call for the frisbee. A significantly large, burly man, the current possessor of the frisbee, sees his teammate calling for the frisbee and cleanly makes the toss. It took many tries for the man to perfect his tosses. Years of playing ultimate frisbee in the park with friends, who taught him how to accurately throw the disk. In this situation he threw the frisbee high and hard with a flick of his wrist, causing it to soar over the heads of the defending team and straight towards his teammate's hands. The term "butter fingers" is often used to tease kids who miss easy catches such as the one the boy has the opportunity to make now. The next point will win the game and the boy is in a perfect situation to close it out with an easy catch. Time slows as the frisbee approaches him. The boy has everyone's attention now. He feels the stares of all the other children surrounding him. He panics.

You see, this boy suffers from a mental disorder called anxiety which makes him crumble in situations of high stress. In the children's eyes, and especially the boy's, winning the game of ultimate frisbee is a big deal. Making the winning play is a big deal. How could the boy not feel the oncoming wave of anxiety at this moment? His breathing quickens as he feels his arms tense up. But suddenly the words previously spoken to him by the burly man pop into his head, reminding him that everything is going to be alright. His arms relax and he easily catches the frisbee. The man cheers in delight, having won the game. The man's name is Matthew Morton, and he works as an educator for children with mental disorders.

Matt is 27 years old and a recent college graduate who suffers from a combination of ADHD, depression and anxiety. After graduating with a degree in math, he now works as a math teacher at the Hope Technology school in Palo Alto, California. It wasn't by coincidence that Matt ended up working at the Hope School. Unlike traditional schools, the Hope school was created with the purpose of being an inclusive area where kids with mental disorders from depression to ADHD could go to school with kids without any disorders. Matt, having disorders of his own, says that he feels a special connection with these kids since many of them share a similar backstory to his own. He feels he can empathise with them because of it. Due to this empathy, his current goal in life is to help his students overcome whatever struggles they may have due to their disorders. Many people with such disorders go to therapy or a sort of trained professional for their problems, considering the fact that the average person has no idea how to deal with the often unpredictable behavior of those with mental disorders. The therapist, having

gone through years of training, can better handle the fluctuating conduct of those with disorders.

Matt, although untrained, offers help to his students in a similar fashion. Using his past experiences, he guides his students to take the best possible path and works to help them avoid any serious mishaps.

In his 27 years of living life along with his disorders, he has picked up on quite a few methods of managing whatever disorder-fueled issues that may arise. School projects, in particular, have caused Matt a great deal of problems throughout his educational history:

When I was in sixth grade, it was very difficult for me to pay attention and be motivated internally to do this science camp project. What happened was that we were given the assignment and it was laid out a lot of what we were supposed to do page for page.

When it was presented to me, it was very difficult for me to comb through what to do because I saw all the steps and I needed a broken down from anymore. (Morton)

In other words, (summarize the need for assignments to be broken down - connect emotional challenge of that - find another source - paraphrase quote) What was difficult was that I called on assignment as the whole and not as pieces and I worried about not getting it done right away and I thought I was going to be slower than all the kids. And so most of the time it's a, what had happened was that I got overwhelmed and I ended up getting it done late because I didn't know that for one, that I had ADHD. It was very difficult for me to break it down myself... It was very, very frustrating. It made me not want to do the assignment. So I ended up barely getting it done, but it made me very insecure about getting work done at all.

These sort of problems don't ever just disappear, however. Even in recent years his depression has been hampering him from living his ideal, happy life. Unfortunately the methods he usually uses to suppress his depression do not always work. Matt describes his challenges within the past year: "The first week of November I was very depressed and thinking that I couldn't do anything at all," he says. "I did not think that I was going to be able to exist the rest of my life normally. I was afraid that I would be, um, permanently sad and that I would have to be admitted to a hospital" (Morton). He goes on to talk about how those feelings were "very difficult for him to process" and had at times thought that there had to be something wrong with him. He got to the point that he had no idea what to do anymore. He wanted to fix it, but he just couldn't. "And so I felt very helpless... And um, weak" (Morton).

Occasions like that are the reason Matt goes to see a psychotherapist semi-frequently. He wants to make sure that he can manage his negative thoughts opposed to succumbing to them. When he was younger, around age 22, he was prescribed medication to deal with his disorders. But a year after taking them he stopped. It wasn't he felt as if he had overcome his problems for good, but rather he, over time, became more and more apathetic towards taking the medication and gradually fell off of taking it. Whenever his depression hits him hard he takes the medication, but for the most part he doesn't bother taking it.

Despite his improving mental health, Matt isn't confident that he can avoid bouts of depression forever. This poses problems for Matt considering his career. If he were to have pessimistic thoughts while trying to comfort one of his depressed students he would only make

the situation worse. He is scared of how his disorders affect those around him and is extremely cautious to make sure he keeps the occasional negativity of his thoughts away from his students. Still, Matt lacks the ability to see into the future and can't be sure that he will never slip up. For that reason he can't be sure of his future. He fantasizes about continuing to teach at the Hope Technology school, but often feels like being there is similar to there being a ticking time bomb – a disaster waiting to happen. He is considering changing professions but has no idea where to go. Could he find a profession as spiritually fulfilling as his current? Only time will tell. In the meantime Matt will continue helping students at the Hope Technology school. He wants to make it known to those with disorders that they are normal and not to suppress their emotions. Matt ends the interview emphasizing that emotions “don't need to be controlled, they need to just be felt. That's what helps the most.”