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MIND FIELD: PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL EXPERIENCES EXPLAINING THE EFFECTS OF OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER ON LEARNING

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MIND FIELD:
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL EXPERIENCES EXPLAINING THE
EFFECTS OF OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER ON LEARNING

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A Capstone Project Submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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ABSTRACT

This project is going to be a creative writing endeavor that explores the effects of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) on learning. By using personal and statistical research I am going to bring awareness to how OCD limits a student's ability in the classroom. I will be using my firsthand experiences before and after being diagnosed with OCD to function as my own test subject; showing the good and bad sides of how OCD played a part in my education. To add my research component I will be studying scholarly journals on OCD and how it can prohibit learning, including the percent of students affected, OCD tendencies, classroom affiliation, and student differences. With this project I am attempting to spread awareness about OCD. Most people believe that OCD is simply a disorder that involves intense organizational aspects, but in reality it is a very prominent anxiety-related disorder that affects thoughts, memory, and day to day actions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I chose that my project was going to be on this subject I immediately began to think about the people that helped me through my self-discovery. I want to thank my parents and my siblings for always being there for me. My sister, Nicole, for allowing me to try and discover new things. I would not be where I am without her guiding and influencing me from the very beginning.

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Lastly, I want to thank my friends that have stood by me for the past four years. Hanna, thank you for listening to me and supporting me while I was finding myself. Margaret, Larry, Anthony, and Chris, you all were my comic relief and best friends through a time that was really hard for me, while writing this you guys have given me an outlet for my stress and you'll never know how much I appreciate it. While it may seem that we merely worked together, every day I spent with you guys made me realize how lucky I am to have met you all.

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BACKGROUND

What is OCD?

Obsessive compulsive disorder, or as everyone calls it OCD, is an anxiety-related disorder. It is best described as having unreasonable thoughts or fears that lead to compulsive behaviors. A lot of people refer to this disorder as only dealing with organization, but there is so much more to it than meets the eye. OCD can affect concentration, attention spans, individual behavior, and self-confidence. I want to highlight that OCD shouldn't just be known as the disorder that makes people be organized, but rather a disorder that makes people obsess over details that to others would seem irrelevant, the word overthinking just begins to describe OCD. In this memoir I hope to prove that OCD is something that hinders a person's learning ability, but that it is possible to be successful while having it, it just takes a lot more perseverance than the average person.

Why OCD is Important to Me?

I have OCD. Which is a sentence I was sacred to admit when I was going through college, and it has taken me a very long time to acknowledge that fact still to this day. I was diagnosed with OCD in 2019, which was my freshman year at UCR. I kept that part of me hidden for a very long time, and it wasn't until I started this project that I openly started to tell people that I have it. I was afraid that people would treat me differently or that they would feel bad for me, but what I needed to realize was that denying it to myself was making everything worse than it already was.

This memoir is displaying my hardships on a silver screen, not to attract pity, but to reach an audience that may be going through or has gone through the same experiences I have. When I was thinking about how I was going to write this, I needed to realize that I am imperfect, I am

someone who strives for perfection, but in reality that's not how the world works. Nobody is perfect, and I know that that phrase has been used too many times, but actually accepting that fact has started to help me move forward. OCD is important to me because I have first-hand experience with the challenges a person who has it faces. I hope that this writing opens the door for conversations that can lead to things that can help people like me in the future.

INTRODUCTION

It took me a while to actually figure out how I was going to format this project. I wanted it to be informative yet factual and I think I was able to accomplish that. There are three major parts of this project. The first, is going to be the statistical support. The statistical support section will deal with all the research I have done on the subject matter split into four subsections. The four subsections are as follows: amount of students affected by OCD, OCD tendencies, How OCD relates to learning, and student differences. People affected by OCD will take a dive into the percentage of the population that currently have OCD while also listing the ages of students when symptoms began to make themselves known. OCD tendencies will be a guide to what OCD does to a person and how OCD affects decisions and day-to-day life. How OCD relates to learning will show how having OCD can affect a student in the classroom, from distractions to obsessions. And the last subsection, student differences, will highlight how each student that has OCD have different experiences with the disorder. OCD is very unique to each person, and it is important to understand that not all people with the disorder are on the same journey as another.

The second part of this project is personal experience. The personal experience section will hold my firsthand experiences while having OCD. Like the first section there are also subsections to this part; the beginning, early cues, journal entries, acceptance, and path to recovery. The beginning will go over when I started to know something wasn't right, and how I started to do research that led me to being diagnosed. Early cues will take place in my past and list signs that I missed when I was younger that could have led me to being diagnosed sooner, but since I didn't know what to look out for they got pushed aside. Journal entries is personally my favorite because it shows raw emotion and pain. It contains pieces of writing that I wrote before and after being diagnosed that show my pure struggle and frustration because I couldn't

understand what was happening to me. Acceptance will be how I began to fully become aware of what being diagnosed meant for me and actually believing that I found an answer to what I had been questioning for a substantial portion of my life. And the final subsection, path to recovery, will explain what I have been doing or plan to do to try and break the habits of this disorder.

The Final part to my project is career impact. This part will focus on how OCD has shaped my future. It has two subsections future plans and lifelong goals. Future plans will explore how OCD has led me to choosing what I want to do for my career, and what my plans are for graduate school. Lifelong goals will address what I want to accomplish with my career and how I hope to bring about change in the education system regarding students with disorders like OCD.

STATISITCAL SUPPORT

People Affected by OCD

OCD is more common in the population than most people think. According to the article, “Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Children and Teenagers,” posted by the International OCD Foundation about half a million children in the United States suffer from OCD. That averages out to about 1 in every 200 children. In adults, it averages to about 1 in every 40. And overall, the total amount of the population affected by OCD is 2.3% (Wagner 1-2). If you were to put that into perspective based on the average size of a college lecture class here at UCR, which is three hundred students, that would mean that around 7.5 or 22.5% of the students in that class have OCD. Now, it is evident that 22% isn’t half of the class, but the 7.5 students that do have OCD shouldn’t be pushed aside because they aren’t the majority of the class. Those students are actively suffering, and their struggles deserve to be recognized and addressed.

In an article called, “OCD Statistics 2022,” posted by SingleCare, even though children are affected by OCD the average onset age for being diagnosed is 19.5 (Sinson). That means most of the people that are being diagnosed are around the age of a freshman in college. Gender also has a part in the onset age of being diagnosed as well. In the same article it is stated that females are usually diagnosed later in adolescence (after the age of 10), while men are usually found to be diagnosed under 10 (Sinson). Speaking from personal experience I was diagnosed right before the average onset age at nineteen. It is also interesting to find out that females have the latest diagnose rate but the highest rate for actually acquiring the disorder. Females have a rate of about 1.8%, which is 1.3% higher than males (Sinson).

Along with the amount of people affected and the ages/genders of the people affected it is also important to note that 90% of the people that have OCD also have been diagnosed with at

least one other mental disorder. “The conditions that are often comorbid with OCD include: Anxiety disorders, including panic disorder, phobias, and PTSD (75.8%), Mood disorders, including major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder (63.3%), impulse-control disorders, including ADHD (55.9%), and substance use disorders (38.6%) (Sinson 2). Since many people that suffer from OCD also are suffering from other mental disorders as well, it is so important to make sure people are aware just how much this disorder can affect a person’s ability to do everyday tasks.

The Factors of OCD

There are two very important parts that make up obsessive compulsive disorder, and they are obsessions and compulsions. OCD obsessions are seen as persistent thoughts, impulses or images that are unwanted and often disturbing. Most of the time, obsessive thoughts are supplemented by very strong feelings of fear, doubt, or hate. Even though a person with OCD may realize their thoughts are ridiculous, they have no control over them.

Compulsions are acts that can be, purposeful, physical, or mental that the individual feels compelled to engage in according to their own strict rules that are brought upon them when having certain obsessions. The acts are often repeated because the person needs reassurance that they was completed.

In an article titled, “OCD Statistics and Facts,” Dr. Karen Vieira lists the most common obsessions and what each one contains. The first out of seven is contamination. An obsession with contamination can involve a person being overly paranoid about body fluids, germs, disease, dirt, or cleaning chemicals. The second is loss of control; this person may have fears of violent or disturbing images, hurting oneself or others, or a fear of stealing. The third, and my personal obsession, is perfectionism; this person has a fear of losing important things, has a need

for exactness or evenness, and has a fear of forgetting valuable information. The fourth is unwanted sexual thoughts; this person has perverted thoughts concerning children or family members, forbidden sexual impulses or thoughts, obsessive thoughts about homosexuality, and obsessive thoughts concerning aggressive sexual behavior toward another. The fifth is moral/religious concerns; this person has concern over moral right and wrong, and excessive preoccupation with offending God. The sixth is harming; this person has a fear of causing harm or damage to others. And the final obsession is hoarding; this person has extreme attachment to old and useless possessions and experiences intense anxiety when deciding to throw things away. It is possible for someone with OCD to have experiences with multiple types of obsessions, but usually a person will align more with one and have small aspects of another. For me I connect the most to perfectionism, but I do have overlapping aspects of loss of control and harming. Each person who has OCD is different though so being able to pinpoint what obsessions you have can help you find the right sort of method to break the habits.

In an article posted by OCDUK, The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published a list of compulsions that were experienced by people who had OCD in one of their studies. There are seven types of compulsions, just like the seven types of obsessions. Some are covert and some are overt. Covert means that they are compulsions that are experienced by the person in their mind and overt means they are compulsions that can be seen by others.

The first is checking; checking is when a person has to physically look if something was completed. An example of checking would be someone checking if a door was locked. The second is cleaning/washing; this person would obsess over making sure they are washing their hands or bathing. The third is repeating acts, this is when a person keeps checking something

they already did to get reassurance. The fourth are mental compulsions; which are when a person repeats certain words or phrases over to their selves. The fifth is ordering/symmetry/exactness; this person has to make sure that everything is following their own form of organization. The sixth is collecting; this person will obsess about collecting certain things because it calms them down. And the final compulsion is counting; this person obsess over order and may repeat things a certain number of times each time they do it. For example, pushing the lock button on your car key several times even though you only need to press it once. Like obsessions, people with OCD will have different compulsions as well, and they can change over time. I used to lean more towards cleaning/washing, but as I grew older repeating acts and ordering/symmetry/exactness were the ones that I spent the most time on.

How OCD Relates to Learning

Having OCD does limit a student's ability. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America: "Although students with OCD typically have average to above-average intelligence levels, they may be unable to learn the same way others do because their focus is frequently on their obsessions or compulsions. Depending on the severity of the symptoms, some students find it difficult to learn and, for some, it's almost impossible to concentrate on and complete schoolwork" (ADAA). I found that even though I wanted to learn I would often find myself mentally blocking out or forgetting information that was being taught to me. Many students feel the same way as well and it greatly affects academic accomplishment. In a 2018 study done in Sweden it was found that those with OCD were 40% to 60% less likely to meet educational milestones in their mid-teens. And the gap continued at the college level, where students with OCD were 28% less likely to start a degree at university. If they did begin a degree, they were 41% less likely to finish a degree and 48% less likely to finish post-graduate

education (Valentine). It hurts to know that all these students have the mental capacity to do well in school, but because they learn differently or have a hard time concentrating due to OCD symptoms they are falling behind.

Another big thing that affects the students is motivation, since they are having such a challenge just to get top grades, right when they fail they see it as defeat even though they couldn't have done anything to prevent the outcome. "The stress of having difficulty in learning may also start a negative influence and promote inflexible habit learning" (ScienceDaily). That quote from ScienceDaily really does sum up what happens when you just can't understand something, you start to try and find ways to help the situation, but they are not long term solutions so you end up falling back into the same spiral. Having OCD while you're a student really tests how much you are willing to go through to reach a certain goal because you are basically in a constant war with your mind and on certain days you just can't win, so you have to decide if you're willing to get up the next day and try again.

Student Differences

As I stated before OCD symptoms are unique to the person who has it, so there are many different ways a student can struggle in school if they have this disorder. I am going to list the most common symptoms students exhibit in the classroom while having OCD. In the article, "What does OCD look like in the classroom," by Jerry Bubrick Ph.D. the three most common symptoms are repeating, distracting, and reassurance seeking. Now, it is important to note that a student can experience multiple symptoms at once, but it really varies from person to person.

Repeating can take multiple forms, it can be the student asking the teacher to repeat a process, like writing something multiple times because it didn't seem right to them, or tapping a

pen in a consistent way over and over. By doing these things it brings the student relief, and without completing them the student doesn't feel as though they accomplished anything or they fear something will happen if they don't complete it. For example, a student might tap their pen five times on the desk, but if they don't tap it exactly the five times they think they'll die or they'll experience this nagging form of obligation to finish that last tap. It may seem rather dramatic or excessive but that's just what this disorder causes a person think.

Distracting is when the student's actions are keeping them from completing tasks. This can be anything from retracing letters on their notes because they think it looks wrong, reorganizing the placement of things on your desk because you are getting stressed by them being out of place, or writing things down that you have to do later because you fear that you will forget to do them. These things keep the student from fully focusing on what is right in front of them which can cause them to miss important details of that class and fall behind. This leads a student to become frustrated or stressed because the student isn't choosing not to focus, they just are mentally and physically being controlled by their OCD symptoms. This certain symptom often gets confused with ADHD because it has to do with attention, but it there is a slight difference. Students with OCD have obsessive thoughts that they try to hide by engaging in certain compulsions, while students with ADHD actively show their hyperactivity and have trouble focusing on one task at a time.

Lastly, reassurance seeking is when a student has to receive confirmation or praise that they did or are doing something correctly. This can look like a student asking a teacher if their work looks correct even though they might already know it is correct and or showing off their work to others to receive feedback. It causes a student to do a lot of second guessing, and it usually leads to self-doubt. It is a weird feeling knowing that you are right while simultaneously

thinking that there is a chance that you are wrong. Me personally, I always need to show people what I accomplish and get feedback from them because I need that vocal confirmation that I did something good. Sometimes that can lead to a person being seen like they're bragging or boasting, but I have to remind people that I don't feel complete unless I am getting that vocal confirmation. Overall, these three symptoms are the ones that appear the most in a student while in a classroom setting. It is possible to show signs of all three or in some cases just one but again, that really is going to be based on each person individually.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The Beginning [DISCLAIMER: Blood and Self-Harm Discussed]

I first started to notice my OCD symptoms when I started my first year of college. I made a lot of stressful decisions and began a very compact busy schedule within my first few months, and I believe that is what jumpstarted my cycle of self-discovery with OCD. I started college having four jobs, 4-5 classes a quarter with an added double major, and one extracurricular club on campus. My free time was basically non-existent and I spent every moment of my day working, driving to school, or working on homework. I became engulfed in a whirlwind of stress, obligation, and anxiety. This led to me finding ways to deal with my stress, and the way that I found is what led me to being diagnosed with OCD. I began to notice that whenever I was stressed I would start to pick at my skin. Whether it was scabs, nail beds, or raised skin, I would scratch until I bled and to a lot of people's surprise and my own, it actually gave me a sense of relief. This led to me being obsessed with picking on places of my body that my mind viewed as imperfect. It got to a point where I developed major body dysmorphia, and still to this day I struggle with my body image. I took a real long look at myself in the mirror one day after one of my picking episodes that left me hating myself, and as I sat there I told myself that this wasn't normal, so I started a deep dive on the internet trying to relate my symptoms to some sort of illness or disorder. I came across something called dermatillomania, an excoriation disorder brought upon by OCD. Right when I found and read the articles about dermatillomania I knew that's what I had, and when I went to my next doctor visit I was diagnosed with both dermatillomania and OCD.

I kept my diagnoses a secret for a very long time, and to this day only a handful of people know. It has taken me a long time to come to terms with it because at first I didn't know how much the

diagnoses was actually going to change my look on life. To me, when they said I had OCD I simply took that with a grain of salt because I was so used to living what I believed to be a “normal life,” but in reality OCD had affected me in so many ways that I didn’t know were even out of the norm. As I started to learn more what OCD and what it really was I found out that I was living a life that was being controlled by my symptoms. This project really opened up the doors for me to explore my disorder and life in great detail, and it had helped me come to terms with what I have and how it has and still is affecting me day by day.

Early Cues

My obsession with being busy started very young, I remember loving to perform, the best word to describe me was probably non-stop. I was involved in everything, from soccer, band, and tennis, to musical theater, and I loved it. I set these crazy goals for myself, I went from school to musical rehearsals, to soccer games, to theater practice, and then home to do homework. My days would start at seven in the morning and end at ten at night. I started soccer in kindergarten, musical theater in first grade, band in third grade, and tennis in middle school. Those things I continued to do almost all the way through high school; even my summers as a child were filled with extraarticular activities. I entered multiple art, science, and writing contests; competed in soccer tournaments, and performed in music and theater productions. Before I was diagnosed I thought it was normal to be that busy and restless, but when I started doing more research I realized that by doing all those activities I was giving myself an outlet for my OCD. By having all these activities to attend I was able to organize my schedule the way I wanted and in a way prove to others that I was hardworking. I basically forced myself to do all these things so that I could avoid being stuck in my mind.

I was often described as intergenic and hardworking. Two words I look at now and realize they represented a little girl that saw the world as hers, she was determined to conquer it. I still to this day have those ambitions, but that innocent naïve mind is something that is long gone. How crazy it is to think that that little girl made the decisions that affected her so much as an adult at such an early age. That little non-stopping girl has turned into an ambitious overworked adult. I often wish someone would have picked up on my symptoms sooner when I was little, but I also blame myself for pushing myself past my limits on multiple occasions where I could've backed down and told myself it was too much. It was crazy to me how many warning signs of OCD were in my childhood, but since mental health awareness wasn't as mainstream as it is now most of these conditions like OCD are getting diagnosed way later in life for students my age.

Journal Entries

In the following subsection I will be presenting five pieces of writing that were written before and after I was diagnosed with OCD and some during the time I didn't know what OCD was. Some are short and some are longer, but they all show the raw emotions I was feeling during a time when I didn't understand myself. They will be put in order of written completion from oldest to most recent followed by a brief explanation of their meaning.

Betrayal

“I gave you my faith and my life, but I'm left feeling empty and lost. What more can I possibly lose in order to gain happiness. You say believe and you will be rewarded, and I'm sorry but I feel like I'm being punished. I ask you every day to guide me, and each day I'm following deeper into water. I'm not built to be able to lose so much to win one race. I will keep following you until light overtakes my darkness. Just promise me it won't stay dark.” (April 23rd, 2019)

Betrayal is about how I was struggling with failing and it was written to my mind from the perspective of my body. I was at the end of high school towards the beginning of college and I was having a hard time explaining why I couldn't process certain information and why my test scores were so low even though I scored the highest in class grades. I felt like my mind was betraying me because there wasn't anything more I could do to help myself understand. In a way I was using this piece to try and call out for help but I didn't know what I needed help with.

Why?

“It's hard to go through life labeled and punished for things you can't control; how frustrating it is to hear the words “You're just not strong in this area, or you shouldn't be here.” How you can try so hard to learn and process information just to fail and be treated like you didn't learn anything. How hard I want to learn but just can't. Or how hard I study and repeat just to fail another exam. I want to push forward, follow my dreams, but I'm held back by a force that can't be controlled. Why is this happening, why to me, all my life I will still be asking why?” (October 29th, 2019)

This was written when I was in my first year of college. I was reflecting on statements I heard from a teacher and a friend I had in high school during one of the lowest points in my education. I remembered what they said to me because it made me feel weak and stupid. So, I sat down and wrote my frustration down on paper, and since I didn't understand what was happening to me I was questioning everything, and that's how 'why?' became the title and theme of this piece. I just couldn't understand why I was pushing myself so much just to be continuously plastered with negative degrading comments from people I trusted and people that should have been helping me.

A Game of Chess

“In this world there are people composed of hearts, lungs, and bodies. So, what are we supposed to possibly do to be considered unique? This is something that I want, but never can understand. Perhaps it's because even the word used describe being different was made-up by one mind, one being, in a sea of trillions, so how can we believe someone we never knew. Or, maybe it's because we don't even understand our own minds. How can we possibly explain how someone is unique if our purely existing is, in itself, unexplainable? We are here on a game board, just pieces, stagnant or moving, advancing or receding, but we will never reach the end. One piece will break, another will take its place. So, what makes us unique? Does emotion? No, I don't believe so. Emotion is just a feeling made-up by our mind just like unique is just a term made-up by a being, but then again you are reading something written by being. I am not unique I am simply a piece in a game, just trying to win a world filled with other pieces, eventually I will break and be replaced, so tell me what will make me unique?” (February 14th, 2020)

This was a piece that I wrote when I was angry with myself after I had been diagnosed. I tried so hard in school to be the person that was different, the overachiever that everyone looked at as successful, but in reality I was slowly murdering my mental health. I was so mad at myself for trying to be different my whole life because I didn't want to be labeled as normal but that all switched when I found out I had OCD because all I wanted to do was be normal again. I didn't want to have something that set me out from the crowd in a way I used to believe was negative.

Paradise

“It's weird to know that you can feel like you belong somewhere you have never been. The overwhelming feeling of attraction and hope pulls you towards somewhere that is a complete mystery, but you cling on to the idea that there may be somewhere that you will be

completely happy. Somewhere you can wake up every morning and feel at peace.” (April 4th, 2021)

I wrote this very late at night one day after having a day out where I completely was able to relax and forget about my problems. I was thinking about the feeling I had and how I never got to experience it long term, so I was wondering if it was normal to long for something like that. I was questioning whether or not people without my disorder had the same thoughts as I did or if this was something that only I dreamed about. I have had these experiences a lot in my life where I will have an amazing day and feel utterly happy but the feeling fades when I would wake up the next morning. I found out that this had to do with how my OCD affected me mentally, when I was out I could fully relax and be at ease but, right when I would get home my thoughts would immediately go to overthinking the day, trying to come up with things I could’ve done different or play back the times I regretted.

Half Alive

“My mind is a machine and because of that my body has tried to transform into one as well. The gears keep turning, but without the ease of being oiled, making the machine slowly breakdown one project at a time.” (December 25th, 2021)

This something I wrote after being diagnosed, but before I actively started to try and get help. I was still doing my normal routine and I was becoming more and more burnt out. I started to realize it was affecting my physical appearance as well as my mental state so I felt ultimately powerless in that moment, I felt like I was slowly breaking down without a way to be fixed. I knew if I kept going at the rate I was I would keep hurting myself even more.

Acceptance

When I found out that I had OCD there was a sense of relief because I finally had an explanation as to why I struggled so much, but I also didn't take it as seriously as I probably should of. It wasn't that I didn't accept I had the disorder, but I kept it a secret from most of the people in my life because I was embarrassed. I didn't want to give people a way to say I was using the crutch of having OCD to get out of doing things, so for a very long time I kept doing the same routine and I spiraled more out of control. I needed to realize that to fully accept that I had OCD I had to be willing to openly discuss it with others, and this project is the most progress I have made on the track to fully accepting my condition.

As I look back on my life so far all I have wanted is a place to feel at peace. Until recently I didn't know why I couldn't find one, I have been so busy wanting everything to be perfect. My mind is trapping me from experiencing life as it should be, one that is filled with hope, love, and adventure. Finding myself has been one of the hardest things I've had to do. I looked at myself and I didn't like who I was becoming. The harder I tried to succeed the more I'd fail, and it took a toll on me emotionally and physically. I was, and still am in a constant war with my mind, and I don't know if I will ever win, but I think that's what I have to realize. The war may never end, but the sun still shines behind the clouds. It's all about celebrating the little wins, and knowing when to take a break.

Path to Recovery

I am still in the process of working out recovery options, but I have tried a few different things to try and lessen some of the symptoms I have. One thing to note is that OCD does not have a cure and I don't know if it will ever have one, but there are ways to try and break OCD habits. It isn't proven that one of the ways suggested will work for everyone though, just like

disorder, the ways to try and break the habits are unique to the person. It is a giant game of trial and error, which can take a long time, so recovery is a multiple year long process.

Since I have both dermatillomania and OCD one thing I do is to make sure my hands are always occupied. My hands are often restless so I have to find ways to distract them. That process can include using fidget toys, pens, pencils, or wearing rings, to make sure my hands focus on something less damaging than picking at my skin. I use these things in settings where I am stagnant for long periods of time, so in class, working on homework, or down time watching tv or playing games. It is a relatively easy way to try and break certain habits.

Another way that I use is to limit all distractions. My attention span is somewhat selective so sitting for long periods of time working on papers or reading is a real challenge for me. In order for me to try and stay focused I have to eliminate all possible forms of distractions around me. That includes making sure my phone is across the room from me where I can't grab it, turning off any music or tv background sound so that my workspace is silent, and making sure my desk is completely organized before I start on my work. By doing those things I'm able to suppress the compulsions I would normally have like organizing the pens in my desk or checking my phone every ten minutes to make sure I didn't miss a call.

The last way I use to counteract my symptoms is to go out and do things where I don't have to focus too much on stationary tasks. For me, going to work, out with friends, or amusement park days are the best forms of distracting my brain from overthinking things. Of course I can't totally eliminate what I think but distracting myself for a certain amount of time does help a little. I just have to be able to find a small balance where I can have some peace.

CAREER IMPACT

Future Plans

It is kind of ironic but having OCD is what led me to the career path I am pursuing. In my junior year of high school I was enrolled in an advanced placement world history class and it was run by one of the teachers that to this day I still deeply admire and respect. We had an assignment in that class where we had to become prosecuting or defense lawyers in a case against one of the former presidents, and me being the overachiever/annoyingly organized student that I was I signed up to be a defense lawyer with a group of about three people. We had about a week to prepare our cases and witness list with questions, and I took that very seriously. I met with my team outside of school and created a whole folder filled with information and questions I researched about our topic. When we had to run the case like we would in court my team was way too overly prepared to the point where none of the other students knew how to respond to our questions. In that moment I feel in love with law, the preparation, the delivery, and feeling of winning something purely based on effort and organization. I felt comfortable in that role and I gained a confidence I didn't know I had, and that is when I decided that law was the path I wanted to pursue because it was the one job where I could use my overly organized and anxious mind to my advantage.

I officially decided the type of law I wanted to go into towards the end of my first year of college. I bounced from intellectual property and entertainment law to finally land on educational law. I made that decision after I was diagnosed with OCD because I wanted to be part of what I hope to be a big change in the education system regarding how to accommodate students with learning disabilities and learning disorders. Since I struggled so much throughout high school and college I want to be able to try and make sure no other student has to go through what I did

in order to be seen as successful. I am going to use my OCD to my advantage and make education more accessible to people just like me.

Lifelong Goals

After I finish my J.D. degree I plan to work at a firm that deals with the education system. I want to be able to fight for students like me in a law setting, and being able to use my passion for good is really a motivation for me. During my time as a lawyer I want to also be a part of creating programs for teachers that informs them about learning disabilities and disorders so that they will have the knowledge to notice signs in students and get them help early on in their education. Paired with informing teachers I want to work with local school districts to plan speeches and informational presentations for students that address symptoms of learning disabilities and disorders so that students are able to identify anything they relate to and ask any questions they may have on the subject. The more people are informed about this very prevalent issue the more help students will receive. Later in my professional path I want to eventually go for my Ph.D. and write my thesis on learning disorders so I can continue the research I have already begun as an undergraduate student, and I hope that it will lead me to writing a book in the future based off of what I find and my personal experiences. I still am on my own journey of self-discovery so I hope to keep finding out more about myself in the future.

CONCLUSION

Mental health awareness is something that is slowly becoming more of a priority in this decade, but there still is a lot that can be done in that area. Students everyday are suffering in school and their daily lives because of conditions they can't control. I believe there are many things schools and individuals can do to make the world a little bit easier for people that live in it. After doing research for this project I have been able to learn more about myself and the disorder I have, and it has further inspired me to continue doing the work I plan to do in the future. I hope that I will be able to change some aspects of the education system and help students that are just like me. Even though there isn't a cure for my disorder it will not stop me from making my life and others lives a little bit better day by day. The progress that I have made within the last four years of my life has been anything but easy, but has shown me that I am strong and worth fighting for. I look at myself now, and though I am not fully healed, I have a greater understanding of who I am than I ever have before. I appreciate the support I have received, and hope this project raises awareness for the students that are struggling each day to keep moving forward. You are seen, you are heard, and you will not be overlooked.

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