

What About Daydreaming? - IASD 2023

Naomi Kimmelman, M.A., LMFT #116653, she/her
(510) 761 - 7011 naomi@welcomingsoul.com welcomingsoul.com

Daydream Definition: When the mind wanders and attention shifts from a task at hand or an external focus, towards a more private, internal stream of consciousness. (Adapted from R. McMillan's 2013 definition).

Jerome L. Singer: "The Father of Daydreaming" (1924–2019), laid the foundations for current mind wandering research regarding investigating the costs and benefits of daydreaming. He showed that daydreaming is a pervasive, normal aspect of the human experience.

3 Types of Daydreams: Jerome Singer (1975) differentiated between three daydreaming styles:

1. Positive-Constructive Daydreams

- Characterized by playful, wishful imagery, and playful, creative thought and are usually upbeat and include imaginative thoughts

2. Guilty - Dysphoric Daydreams

- Characterized by obsessive, anguished fantasies; including visions of failure and punishment.

3. Poor Attentional Control

- Characterized by the inability to concentrate on either the ongoing thought or the external task (Singer, 1975).

Study: "A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind" In 2010, a Harvard study by Killingsworth and Gilbert, titled "A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind," reported that, on average, participants' minds wandered 46.9% of the time and no less than 30% during waking hours.

Default Mode Network: A group of regions in the brain known as the Default Mode Network (DMN) is active when the mind is at rest, and when daydreaming occurs. The DMN is thought to be the brain's "default mode" or baseline state of operation when we are awake, but not actively engaged in a cognitively demanding task. The Default Mode Network operates in concert with the Executive Attention Network (EAN); brain regions previously thought to be anti-correlated.

- **Brain Regions involved:** Medial Prefrontal Cortex, Posterior Cingulate Cortex, Parietal Cortex.

Link Between Dreaming and Daydreaming: *The Emergence of Dreaming: Mind-Wandering, Embodied Simulation, and the Default Network* by William Domhoff (2017) provides an explanation of the neurocognitive link between dreaming and daydreaming. Dreams originate in the same parts of the brain now known to be most active during mind wandering (the DMN).

Daydreams and Mental Health

Positive Impacts of Daydreaming: Schooler et al. (2011) suggested that daydreaming serves 4 broad adaptive functions:

1. **Future planning.**
2. **Creativity**, especially creative incubation and problem solving.
3. **Attentional cycling**, allows individuals to rotate through different information streams to work towards meaningful and external goals.
4. **Dis-habituation**, enhances learning by providing breaks from external tasks.

Negative Impacts of Daydreaming: McVay and Kane, (2010) shared that “the majority of the research conducted over the last two decades portrayed mind wandering as a cognitive control failure.”

Daydreaming’s consequences can impact:

- Reading comprehension, academic performance, IQ, test performance
- Mood, mental health, memory, sustained attention
- Task-related processing
- Physical safety with reduced motor control

Areas of Current Mental Health Research: Impacts in the Default Mode Network, and daydreaming on ADHD, autism, Alzheimer’s Disease, addiction, anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia.

Maladaptive Daydreaming: A condition where a person regularly experiences daydreams that are so intense and distracting, that they interfere with daily life; negatively impacting relationships, work or school performance, and sleep. It is not an official diagnosis, but may be part of a mental health diagnosis such as with Dissociative Disorders.

Working with Daydreams

Mindfulness & Meditation: Studies found that meditation does influence activity in the DMN, suggesting this may be part of its mechanism for improving well-being.

- Many psychotherapists, therapeutic approaches - involve teaching mindfulness practices.
 - Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), DBT, CBT, and Somatics.
- Many religious and philosophical traditions teach about living in the moment and being present in the here and now as a key to happiness and enlightenment.
 - We cannot stop mind wandering. It’s what the brain does.
 - What we can do is become aware that we are having thoughts, that our minds are wandering, and then choose what we do from there.

Meta-Awareness: Meta-awareness is our explicit awareness of the contents of our thoughts or thought processes. Recent research indicates that task performance is more disrupted by unaware (unconscious) mind wandering episodes than conscious ones.

Volitional Daydreaming: Daydreaming can be intentional. Immordino-Yang et al., 2012, noted volitional daydreaming as central to the task of meaning making, and the development and understanding of oneself in the world.

Active Imagination: A practice developed and used in Jungian Depth Psychotherapy.

- May be applied to working with night time dreams, day dreams, art works, and bodily sensations in somatic psychotherapy.
- Dreaming the dream forward.
- Intentionally following our imaginations, intuition and depths while in a relaxed, receptive state.

Things to Do at Home to work with Daydreams:

- Set aside time each day for daydreaming.
- Start to track your thoughts (use a thought record - CBT) to notice how thoughts make you feel.
- Practice mindfulness meditation or awareness building activities.
- Work with a psychotherapist.
- Realize that you have the power to change.

