

Anger, Shame, and Other Drugs

by Nourhan Elsayed

THE TINY, YELLOW PILLS WERE SPILLED all over the big pouch of my book bag.

At first, I thought I forgot to close the pill bottle correctly the last time I'd taken my medication. As I continued to look through my backpack, I realized that half of my prescription for Ritalin, a stimulant drug, was gone. I poured the contents of my book bag onto the floor of my room, frantically looking for the pills and the other bottle of medicine. I tried to convince myself that the medicine hadn't been stolen, but there was no other explanation. I considered calling the Duke Police, but the embarrassment of admitting I had Ritalin prevented me from doing so.

Ritalin helps me focus and offers me aid with the working memory issues that are caused by my ADHD.

The effects of the medicine are

quickly as the majority of my peers and often struggle with working memory issues. It's a detriment to my pride when I have to admit that, without these stimulants, I probably would not be as stable as I believe myself to be. There has been more than one occasion when I've stopped taking my medication in an attempt to rid myself of my unjustifiable shame of ADHD. Despite a clinical diagnosis, it's difficult not to feel like I'm cheating or giving myself an unfair advantage. The embarrassment I feel when I need to ask for extra help or tell my group members to slow down in class is terrifying. All these emotions consumed me as I began to think about the person who stole those tiny, yellow pills. I was devastated that someone was probably going to be taking this medication to attain an unfair advantage, and I was in a situation where all I could do was accept what had happened.

While reflecting on the incident, a close friend suggested that the desperation of someone who steals medicine not prescribed to him is probably more concerning than that person's thievery. Once the initial anger had passed, I became worried about the emotions of that someone who is willing to take such drastic measures to reach potential success. Adderall and Ritalin



clear: Without it, I need a pen and paper to solve basic arithmetic, and I cannot complete mundane tasks like writing a logical paragraph.

The anger I felt toward the person who stole my medicine consumed me for a few days. I was upset with the thief. I was upset with myself for needing the medication. And I was upset with the people who abuse prescription drugs on a regular basis.

As my anger grew, I became horrified that someone would do something so shamelessly. I myself am ashamed of my ADHD. I was disgusted that someone who likely did not have ADHD would not feel ashamed enough to stop him- or herself from taking the pills.

Admitting that I need to fill a prescription in order to achieve my full potential is at times as exhausting as the ADHD itself. Even when I am taking the medication, I am not able to process information as

are dangerous drugs that can have deadly side effects when used improperly. If students are consciously willing to take these drugs because they are ashamed of their abilities, and if they have self-efficacy that dangerously low, then there is more than the issue of drug abuse at hand. On more than one occasion, I have overheard infuriating conversations about Adderall on campus. This time, I came to realize that there has to be a bigger issue at play. There is something in society or in this school that makes perfectly capable students feel as though they need external and arguably unethical methods of assistance.

As a Duke student, I realize that the pressure to succeed is overwhelming. Each one of us feels insecure about our intelligence at times, and the average workload can sometimes feel unmanageable. It's easy to forget that, just to get into Duke, we all demonstrated some quality that made admissions officers believe we were capable of succeeding here. It's important to doubt ourselves so that we don't become complacent, but it's equally important to stay grounded in the strengths that allowed us to get to Duke in the first place.

I came to realize that the shame that sometimes made me abstain

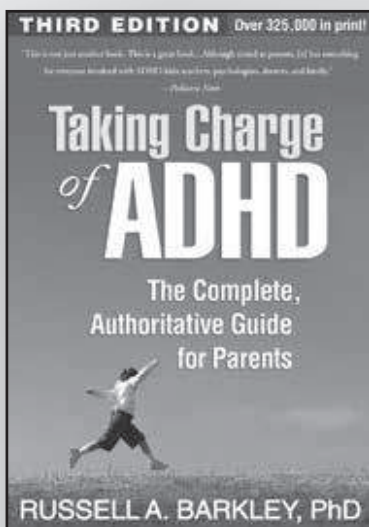
from taking my medication is the same shame that would motivate someone to steal those yellow pills in the first place.

I hope that the student who stole the medication from my book bag, and anyone else who's ever felt the need to enhance him or herself in a way that could become harmful, recognize that insecurities are common to many of us. If feelings of shame and guilt are enough that they become hurtful and blinding, then maybe it's time to reflect more consciously on how to lead our lives in ways that allow us to see our strengths more clearly. 🗣️



Nourhan Elsayed is sophomore at Duke University. This article originally appeared on May 23, 2013, in her column, "a world unveiled," for Duke's student-run newspaper, The Chronicle. It is reprinted with permission of the author.

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