



Mind Matters

articles on mental health from experts in the field

MATTERS OF THE MIND

Conquering Challenges

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Eleanor Roosevelt said, “Do one thing every day that scares you.” I couldn’t agree more. I think that many of life’s most important lessons are waiting for us right outside our comfort zone. It’s when we challenge ourselves to leave our comfort zone and face our fears that significant personal growth occurs.

I had the opportunity to face one of my biggest fears about a week and a half ago. Perhaps more important, I faced the fear instead of faking an illness (such as the bubonic plague – which, I hear, can be contracted from the common prairie dog) and wimping out. Funny thing is, I’m not talking about jumping out of a plane, public speaking in front of a crowd of strangers, or even dying...none of those are among my biggest fears. I’m talking about stand-up comedy. I did it. Me. Up on stage, without wetting my pants in fear.

Many of you who have read up to this point are probably wondering how stand-up comedy got to be one of my biggest fears. It’s probably not a common phobia, to say the least. In fact, I can’t find a word for that particular phobia anywhere, despite the fact that there are words assigned to fear of gaiety (cherophobia), fear of work (ergasiophobia), and a fear of gaiety at work (ergasiocherophobia).

I take this as an invitation to coin a word for the fear of doing stand-up comedy....I think lackahumorophobia is a pretty good word, and it’s enjoyable to say. If you’ve got it, at least you can have fun pronouncing your disorder. It would stand to reason that lackahumorophobia would be related to the

estimated number one fear of people across the world: the fear of public speaking (glossophobia, in case you're interested).

The estimation is that 75 percent of humans suffer from a fear of public speaking. As Jerry Seinfeld said in his own stand-up comedy routine, "Most people attending a funeral would rather be in the casket than delivering the eulogy." The fear of doing stand-up comedy in public (because why fear being a stand-up in the privacy of your own home?*) seems to be a more specialized fear of public speaking, one that carries even more pressure with it. I also happen to be amongst the 25 percent of those who are not scared of public speaking. But, I have been a lackahumorophobic for all of my adult life.

You see, making people laugh has been a part of my personality for as long as I can remember. Even when I haven't felt pretty enough, popular enough, or intelligent enough, I have always been able to rely on eliciting laughter. My sense of humor has allowed me to cope with a wide array of difficult life experiences, and, at times, I'm sure it has helped me to avoid dealing with those experiences. I had come to define myself as a funny person, first and foremost. I'm sure that my fear of failing at stand-up comedy has been related to an all-encompassing feeling of failure: if I proved myself un-funny on stage, what would that say about who I am? I wondered what my identity would be if I failed to make people laugh.

I'm glad I fought through the initial overwhelming fear that manifested itself in weird ways in the days right before I actually got to the stage. (For instance, I was convinced I needed to be hospitalized at one point because my liver had developed some type of very itchy rash.) Once I was on stage, I didn't hear any laughter. It's been explained to me since then that people were laughing hysterically, but I was in some kind of "comedy zone" and I actually started having fun up there. It no longer mattered whether people in the audience thought I was funny or not. After the fact, I realized that my "success" or "failure" on stage for that short amount of time meant nothing. I'm still the same person whose sense of humor is a hugely

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prominent part of my personality whether I am able to cause mirth or threatening demands for getting admission fees refunded.

With one more shout out to my girl Ellie Roosevelt, we should all leave our comfort zone – and essentially “scare” ourselves, for a few minutes every day. These daily challenges don’t have to be earth-shattering to make a difference, but maybe, when they are taken together, they will be. Take it from me; the end result is worth overcoming the initial fear!

*If you are performing stand-up comedy or have a fear of performing stand-up comedy in the privacy of your own home, you may have a disorder not discussed above. You should seek professional assistance immediately.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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