

Successful treatment of a novel case of behavioral addiction in a young woman

Abstract

Background: Behavioral addictions have recently witnessed a surge in their prevalence, and are more widely being recognized across classificatory systems. Many reports and studies of behavioral addictions such as gambling, internet, sex, exercise, work addiction etc. exist. However, the range and subtypes of addictions that are possible are still being explored. One such subtype that is potentially being considered in this case. **Method:** We present a case of a 19-year-old presented with spending most of her time reading fantasy books, reduced social interaction, decline in academic performance and irritability. **Result:** Conceptualization and management are discussed in detail. Psychological assessment was also conducted to get a more detailed understanding of her personality, schemas and coping. **Conclusion:** Therapy progress and a detailed management plan with a focus mainly on cognitive behavioral interventions are presented here.

Keywords: Behavioral addiction, maladaptive daydreaming, reading addiction

Abbreviations: Maladaptive Daydreaming (MD)

Introduction

Behavioral addictions have recently witnessed a surge and are more widely being recognized across classificatory systems. Many reports and studies of behavioral addictions such as gambling, internet, sex, exercise, work addiction, etc. exist (Rosenberg, & Feder, 2014). The range and subtypes of such addictions are still being explored. Behavioral Addictions mainly refer to a pattern of behavior characterized by the salience of the behavior in daily life, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict,

and relapse (Griffiths, 2005). "Normal drives" are considered addictions when they reach a degree of excess & harm (Rosenberg, & Feder, 2014).

In this paper, we present a unique case of reading addiction co-morbid with Maladaptive Daydreaming (MD), phenomena characterized by engaging in vivid fanciful daydreaming with story-like features for hours on end, neglecting real-life relationships & responsibilities (Soffer-Dudek, & Somer, 2018). MD has been associated with OCD, dissociative disorders, ADHD, behavioral addi-

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ctions, personality disorders, etc. responsibilities (Soffer-Dudek, & Somer, 2018). Previous research has proposed MD as a new form of behavioral addiction, since the rewarding experience associated with MD may become habit-forming, while also meeting certain other criteria for behavioral addictions (Pietkiewicz, N cki, Ba bura, & Tomalski, 2018). In past researches a phenomenon called fantasy proneness characterized by having imaginary friends in childhood, having an actual fantasy identity, experiencing imagined sensations as real, having vivid sensory perceptions and claiming other parapsychological experiences (Wilson, & Barber, 1981) has found to be closely related to Schizotypal Personality. However, there is a lack of evidence relating constructs of Maladaptive daydreaming specifically to Schizotypal Personality Disorder. In this case, excessive reading of a particular genre closely related to the phenomena of maladaptive daydreaming is discussed in relation to its management.

Case Report

A 19-year-old female, pursuing her graduation came to Psychiatry OPD presented with complaints of spending most of her time reading fantasy books, reduced social interaction, a decline in academic performance and irritability; increased since the past one year.

Upon exploration it was revealed that the client had difficulty adjusting to her social environment and interacted less with her peers since early childhood. She spent most of her time alone or with her parents. When she was 11 years of age, she started reading fantasy books like Harry Potter. Over the next few years, her frequency of reading fantasy books increased to one book per week. She also re-read the previous books every day for two-three hours. She liked fantasizing about the fictitious world of the book for three-four hours daily even during the time that she was not reading. She gradually started to download similar books online, and posted on fanfiction pages of those books, spending five-six

hours a day. Attempts to cut down were unsuccessful. Even in the absence of the internet, she secretly read pre-downloaded books. She would also start to hide or lie about the same, and often get irritable if not allowed to read. Her academic performance declined gradually. When she entered college and started living in a hostel, the reading progressively became excessive (12-14 hours a day) and she stopped attending classes eventually. She interacted less with her peers since she believed that they were discussing her and judging her habit of reading. She re-read same books, watched YouTube videos related to the books, and indulged in daydreaming about the stories/themes. This affected her social and academic functioning, and she skipped her exams. No family H/o psychiatric illness was present. As per details of past history that were provided, in her early years, she was diagnosed with Langer Giedion syndrome, an uncommon autosomal dominant genetic disorder characterized by short stature, unique facial features, small head and skeletal abnormalities (Devidayal & Marwaha, 2006) due to which she felt less confident interacting with people, and other children made fun of her. She was referred to Clinical Psychology OPD where detailed psychological assessment and management were planned.

Baseline assessment suggested the presence of anxiety as a syndrome, and clinically significant schizotypal and negativistic personality traits on the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory. On Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ), entitlement, social isolation, and insufficient self-control/discipline were more meaningful for her. She felt having special rights and privileges irrespective of what is realistic or its costs, she felt isolated & cut off from the rest of the world, as well as refused to exercise sufficient self-control, poor frustration tolerance, and avoided discomfort. On Schizotypal Personality Questionnaire (Brief), she scored 17 (cut off > or = 17). On Structured Clinical Interview for Maladaptive Daydreaming (SCID-MD), she was positive for Maladaptive Daydreaming with moderate severity,

and on the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), she obtained a score of 72 (cut off > 50).

Some of the MD functions and themes observed in this case including wish-fulfillment fantasies, disengagement from stress, improving mood, and seeking distraction are in line with previously researched associations with MD (Pietkiewicz, N cki, Ba bura, & Tomalski, 2018; Somer, 2002).

A diagnosis of behavioral addiction comorbid with schizotypal personality traits and maladaptive daydreaming was made.

Therapeutic Modalities adapted from evidence-based approaches for addictions (Marlatt, & Donovan, 2005) used were Psychoeducation, cognitive behavior therapy to address behavioral excesses and deficits and maladaptive cognitions, social skills training to improve coping, interpersonal, and independent living skills.

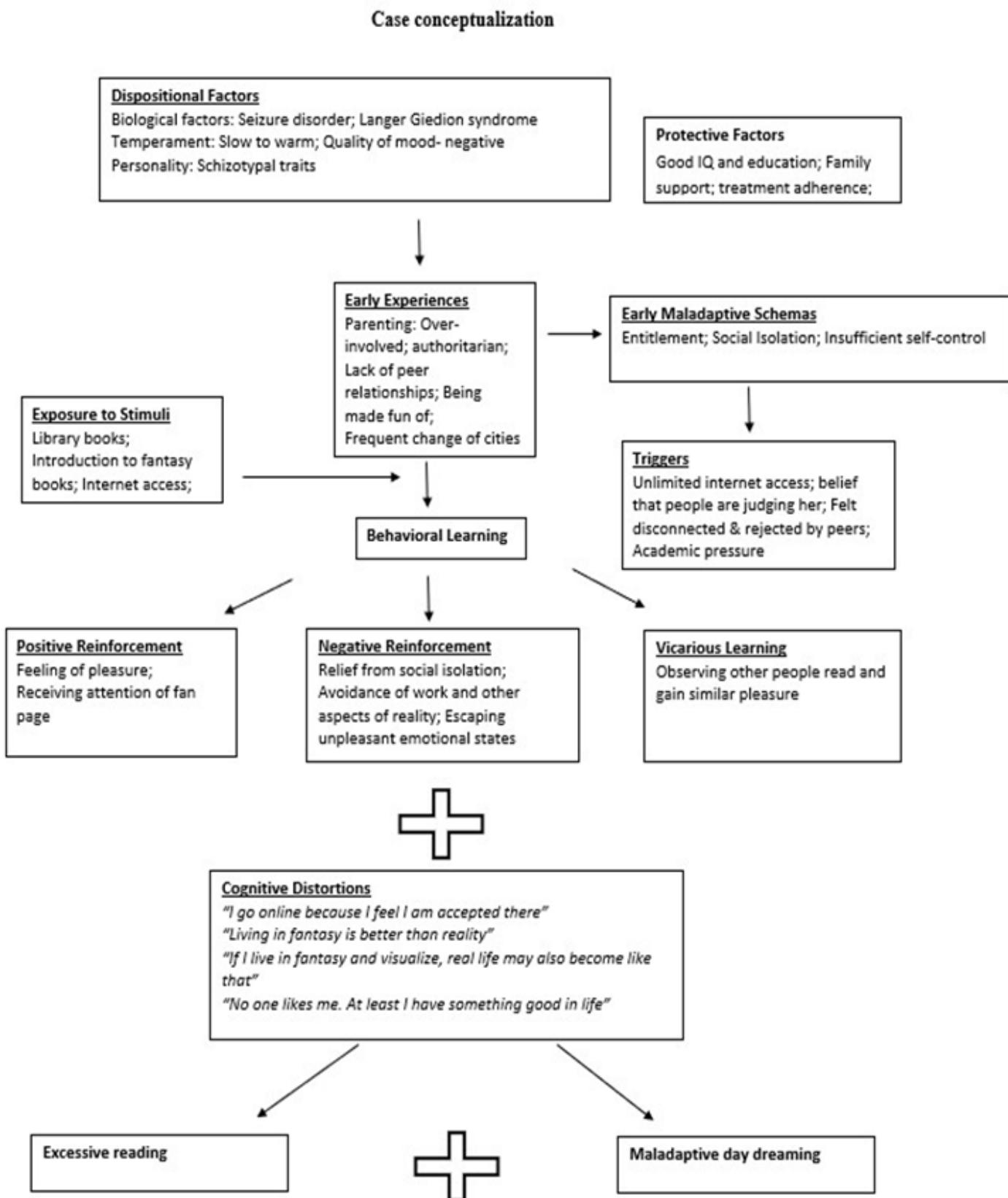
The initial phase of therapy (sessions 1-5) was focused on developing a therapeutic alliance using empathy, collaborative goal setting, and shared decision making. Psycho-education involved providing knowledge about the condition, management, and compliance with a psychological regimen. The immediate goals were to reduce the behavioral excesses of reading fantasy books, internet usage, and maladaptive daydreaming. Daily MD time was monitored. Contingency management was done using the reading of fantasy novel as a tangible reward for the desired behaviors like attending classes, completing college assignments, and studying. Reminder cards and alarms were encouraged regularly to encourage self-control. "Daydream time" as a method for stimulus control was set at fixed time intervals for 15 minutes every day. Alternative pleasurable activities were identified. By the end of this phase, the client was able to identify and accept her maladaptive patterns. Her mother became her co-therapist who stayed with her in her hostel room to motivate her, curtail the

reading which was challenging to do by herself initially. She started to focus on academics, attended classes regularly, and sat for exams. Her frequency of daydreaming also reduced and she was able to focus on more adaptive aspects in life. Her reading on phone reduced and she started prioritizing her academics over fantasy novels.

The middle phase (sessions 6-12) involved targeting the behavioral deficit of reduced social interaction using social skills training. Role-plays and behavioral rehearsal were used as techniques. Cognitive distortions and irrational beliefs were identified by introducing the dysfunctional thought record and were challenged during therapy. She was able to correct some of her maladaptive beliefs which she found extremely challenging and distressing initially. Good therapeutic relationship overtime helped her a lot. Her social adjustment improved, and peer interaction became better.

The termination phase (sessions 13-16) focused on addressing newer challenges in interpersonal relationships and social interaction during her internship. She would often misinterpret instructions given to her, and misinterpret the tone and expressions which resulted in arguments with colleagues and supervisors. Emphasis on developing social and problem-solving skills at her workplace was made in therapeutic goals by the final session. Occasional urges to engage in fantasy reading and fan page activity were addressed by making realistic goals for reading without hampering her functioning. Though changes were noticed more at a behavioral level, some personality difficulties continued to exist. Insights were developed to understand the nature of inflexibility in certain thoughts. Her socio-occupational functioning improved and realistic cognitive and behavioral goals were met relating to reading addiction and daydreaming. By this time, her MDS-16 score reduced to 38. Booster sessions were held for the next few months to reinforce behavioral learning to prevent relapse.

Table. 1. Case Conceptualization



Discussion

This case report attempts to add to the limited literature on MD, its manifestation, and its relationship with behavioral addictions and personality. Though there are pilot case reports, to the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first case studies to document successful psychotherapy on treatment of MD primarily using CBT, while also making an attempt to understand and categorize manifestation of excessive reading as a behavioral addiction, since the criteria is met. Despite certain challenges like co-morbid schizotypal personality traits and irritability on part of the client, most symptoms of MD and excessive reading were successfully addressed. Previous qualitative studies have also proposed considering MD as a new form of behavioral addiction (Pietkiewicz, N cki, Ba bura, & Tomalski, 2018). Here, the interplay of the concept of reading addiction of a particular genre and daydreaming made the case more challenging since each one is contributing to the other, which also raises the question of whether MD is a separate entity or inter-related with characteristics of behavioral addictions and other psychopathologies in terms of manifestation (Pietkiewicz, N cki, Ba bura, & Tomalski, 2018). It is important to understand, classify, explore comorbidities and personality with various manifestations of maladaptive daydreaming including reading addiction as a phenomenon for effective research on the management of newer behavioral addictions are needed as well.

In general, behavioral addictions have been related to addictions, habit and impulse control disorders, OCD as well as affective disorders (Grant, Potenza, Weinstein, & Gorelick, 2010). Furthermore, behavioral addictions are closely related to substance addiction (Grant, Potenza, Weinstein, & Gorelick, 2010) and substance addictions are related to schizotypal, borderline, and anti-social personality disorders (Hasin, Fenton, & Skodol, et al., 2011). Though in previous research, fantasy proneness has been found to be related to Schizotypal Personality

(Wilson, & Barber, 1981), there has been a lack of evidence relating constructs of Maladaptive daydreaming specifically to Schizotypal Personality Disorder. Keeping this in mind, in the present case case, her addiction as well as MD have been found to be related to schizotypal personality traits, suggesting evidence in favor of the same. Moreover, it is important to consider excessive reading as a phenomenon to be associated with Maladaptive Daydreaming in addition to listening to music, watching films, gaming etc.

Acknowledgment of MD in a clinical set-up is needed, as many clients may end up misdiagnosed, resulting further in erroneous treatment. Currently there are no clear guidelines currently exist for the treatment of MD, a tailored CBT approach, with an additional understanding of early childhood schemas and personality may further be researched along with further qualitative studies on experiences of maladaptive daydreamers to understand the phenomenology and adapt treatment accordingly. It warrants a thorough conceptualization so that in future this phenomenon is studied and subsequently would have a better chance of being identified and treated adequately.

Contribution

Case was assessed by UR and PS both. UR contributed in terms of conception, and drafting the initial manuscript PS revised the draft critically.

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None

Compliance with ethical standards

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained the appropriate patient consent form.

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Competing interests

None

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